



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 7, 2022

Day 4

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 7, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, as is our custom, let us pay tribute to former members who have recently passed.

Mr. Graham Lisle Harle

December 9, 1931, to February 9, 2022

The Speaker: Graham L. Harle served for four terms as a Progressive Conservative Member for Stettler from 1972 to 1986. He was the minister of consumer and corporate affairs from 1975 to '79 and the Solicitor General from '79 to 1983.

Mr. Harle was born in England, and his family moved to Edmonton when he was a teenager. He completed his bachelor of science in agriculture and then a law degree at the University of Alberta. Called to the bar in 1960, Mr. Harle practised law for a short time in Edmonton before establishing his own practice in Stettler in 1961.

Mr. Harle reflected on his accomplishments in the Assembly with pride and appreciation. He noted the challenge of balancing the needs of the whole province against those of your constituency.

Graham Harle passed away February 9, 2022, at the age of 91.

Mr. Dennis M. Barton

September 14, 1939, to February 27, 2022

The Speaker: Dennis M. Barton served one term as the Alberta Social Credit Member for Lesser Slave Lake from 1971 to 1975.

Raised in Barrhead, Mr. Barton moved to Slave Lake in 1965 to open the town's first pharmacy with his wife. There he became involved in local organizations, including the chamber of commerce, the Lesser Slave Lake development corporation, the Native Friendship Centre, and the Slave Lake developments.

Mr. Barton devoted his time and efforts to projects that built schools, roads, housing, and even hospitals. He was deeply committed to his community and to development. Dedicated to his work through public service, he was fondly referred to by many as Mr. Slave Lake.

Mr. Barton passed away on February 27, 2022, at the age of 82.

In a moment of silent prayer and reflection I ask you to each remember Mr. Harle and Mr. Barton as each may have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Please remain standing for the singing of *O Canada*, led by Ms Brooklyn Elhard.

Hon. Members:

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

We stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land glorious and free!

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's with our admiration and respect that there is gratitude to the members of families who have shared the burden of public office and public service. Today I'd like to welcome members of the Barton family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing until I have introduced you all: Dennis Barton; his wife, Wendy Barton; his daughter Laura Barton and granddaughter Emma Jean Rideout; sister-in-law Dr. Sandra Hobbs and brother-in-law Dr. Brian Hobbs.

Please welcome these members to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today is Martine Carifelle, constituency assistant for Lesser Slave Lake and a good friend of the Barton family.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you, my great pleasure, my nephew David. He brought along his friends from school today, the Rimbe Christian School, located in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Along with David are his teachers: Paul Payson, Wendy Dolman, my brother Jeremy Cooper. They are all seated in the members' gallery. If they would please rise.

Also, guests joining us who participated in the CNIB lunch at the Legislature: Alexandra Halloran; Zachary Michael Abdalla and his dog, Elsy; Gabriel Pigeon with his buddy dog, Maggie; Ariono Arturo Frattin.

I would also like to welcome a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Aurora Ramsamy.

As well, last but not least, Pamela Rath, the Calgary Catholic trustee, a guest of the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to welcome our friends from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, CNIB, to the Legislature today. They have met with many MLAs today to discuss educational outcomes for students with sight loss. I wanted to be able to touch on a very important topic, and that is that education is a key predictor of future employment and quality of life for the blind and partially sighted community. Put another way, we need to increase the supports available for students with sight loss now to save the province money in the future but also help ensure a better quality of life for these folks.

We have a parent of a student with sight loss visiting us here today, Krista Lee Frattin, who said that in her eight years of experience with a child in the education system she has yet to meet an educator that has experience teaching a visually impaired child. We also have a young student here today who I had a chance to talk with, Gabriel Pigeon, who said he wants to know why his parents must supply the things that he needs to have a basic education.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, sending your child to school every day knowing that their educators are ill equipped and ill prepared to teach your child? Can you imagine having to provide the tools that your child needs just to have an equal chance at an education with their sighted peers? As a government we need to allocate funds specifically to provide resources, training, and technological services for the blind and partially sighted in the K through 12 school system. This is an issue that is important to our government, and I look forward to talking to the Minister of Education about the need for this funding.

1:40

Once again I want to thank our friends from CNIB, who are in the gallery, of course, here today, for all their hard work, for their advocacy. It has not gone unnoticed. Together we can work to ensure all students, including those with impaired vision, can have a strong education in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, 234 pages is the length of the UCP's budget. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and not a single aid for Alberta families. No natural gas rebate despite promises from the Premier; instead, we got a fake program that is unfunded and one that the vast majority of Albertans will never qualify for. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and not a single program or benefit to help off-set school fees, property taxes, tuition, and student loan interest, all of which have gone up under this government. There's nothing for car insurance, which has increased by 30 per cent or more for some drivers. There's nothing in there for small businesses hammered during repeated incompetent decisions by this UCP government during COVID-19. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and there's little hope, mostly just boasting a balanced budget, but is a budget really balanced if most of the needs people aren't getting enough for? If this budget is passed and there is nothing added to help them, is it really worth boasting about? No is the answer.

Mr. Speaker, financial help for these families cannot wait any longer. Less money in the pocket of Albertans is less money that goes back into the local economy. Not a single family in Alberta should be forced to choose between paying their bills or putting food on the table. This is a complete mess, and I demand that the UCP acknowledge their mistake and start to help the very Albertans that elected them. It's the right thing to do, and it's what they were elected to do. Have they forgotten about all that as they've been too busy with infighting and using government resources to save their Premier's jobs? Have they forgotten that it's their job to serve all Albertans, to help them in their times of need? On this side of the House our Official Opposition cares about Alberta families, and we're going to show up every day to do our actual jobs, to help Alberta families in their times of need.

Thank you.

Ken Albrecht

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, in a recent group meeting in my constituency I was able to spend some time with Ken Albrecht. I was saddened to learn that on February 24 he passed away at the age of 80. Ken was a well-respected pillar in his community and spent his life serving government in different roles. He was a councillor for improvement district No. 14, now known as Yellowhead county, from 1983 to 1989 and the district's chairman from 1989 to 1994. Ken also served as a board member of the

Alberta Workers' Compensation Board and the tire recycle management board of Alberta. After improvement district 14 was incorporated into the municipal district of Yellowhead in 1994, Ken was elected as the first reeve and held the position through 2001.

In addition to his work in government, Ken was always actively involved in the community. His dedications include his involvement with the Yellowhead county Jerry Vanderwell Memorial Park, facilitating the creation of McLeod Valley recreation area, establishing the annual Gold Dust Daze, which is a point of pride in Peers, Alberta, and serving on numerous boards and committees for the betterment of Yellowhead county residents. Steadfast on improving his community economically, he was also involved in many entrepreneurial pursuits such as logging and heavy equipment hauling.

Ken Albrecht was a selfless and devoted man who was committed to a life of service: service to his family, his community, and province. Ken's contributions improved the lives and communities he worked faithfully for and served throughout his lifetime. I want to express my heartfelt condolences to his friends, his family, and his community. May he rest in peace.

Budget 2022 and Rural Alberta

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, this budget should have been an opportunity for this government to show that they support rural Albertans. Instead, once again we see this government ignoring and abandoning the people and the communities of rural Alberta. Instead of supporting rural communities to grow, diversify, and build on the already existing economic drivers they possess, this government plans to punish rural communities by making it more expensive to build needed infrastructure, at the same time hiking property taxes of the residents. This is a time to work with rural communities to build this critical infrastructure, and instead this government is actively adding barriers and blockades. It's a shameful abandonment of who should be their rural partners.

The UCP's reannouncement of rural broadband still hasn't even been costed to where it needs to be costed, which means that rural Albertans once again will have to wait for this much-needed and essential service because, again, this UCP stalled for three years, ignoring the concerns of rural Albertans and, again, taking their voices and their votes for granted. While rural communities are preparing and concerned to deal with another flood or drought in the future, the UCP is refusing to show the leadership expected of a provincial government and is actually committed to providing less support than they should be when it comes to natural disasters. While the Finance minister and the Premier travel, celebrating a balanced budget, rural Albertans are left struggling to make ends meet under the weight of crushing utility bills. This budget was an opportunity to support those dealing with skyrocketing bills. For too many, even turning the lights on is an expensive choice.

Instead, this UCP continues the UCP track record of raising and hiking every fee, every tax, increasing costs, and doing the most to make life more and more expensive. Rural Alberta deserves better than a government that views them only as a cash cow and not the economic driver and vibrant communities that they are. They deserve a government that focuses on them year-round and is committed to forming a real partnership with them, and in 2023 they're going to get just that when we're elected into government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a statement to make.

Utility Costs

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans have noticed the prices in their utility bills skyrocketing, as we are still feeling some of the effects of the NDP government today. This is because when the NDP were in power, they did not care about the long-term effects their decisions would cause. They just wanted a quick fix that would mask the problem at hand. The NDP's electricity rate cap was just that – it was a mask – and in under two years it cost taxpayers over \$108 million. The NDP created long-term problems that will cost Albertans for years.

During 2015-2019, the years that the NDP were in power, \$7.5 billion were spent on building out their transmission system, and where does that \$7.5 billion come from, Mr. Speaker? Well, it has to be paid by ratepayers; it has to be paid by Albertans.

Today Alberta is making tremendous progress in making its energy system more affordable. Since 2020 only \$100 million was spent on new transmission, and in the past year zero dollars were spent. Compare this to the 7 and a half billion that were spent when the NDP was in government. Because of the way the NDP handled Alberta's electricity system, it led to an additional \$1.3 billion loss that Albertans will be repaying on their utility bills until at least 2030, Mr. Speaker. These high utility prices are taking a toll on many Albertans. Citizens need basic utilities in their day-to-day lives. They need to be able to heat their homes in the winter, they need to be able to turn on the oven, and they need electricity to survive and to run their households. They have to pay these utilities, and these prices are placing a financial pressure on many Albertans.

This spring new legislation will be tabled that will increase competition in our energy system and improve available market supply. We are making changes and progress to bring these prices down and to make these bills more affordable for Albertans.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Standing Order Amendments

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to Oral Question Period, I would like to point out to members that copies of the amendments to the standing orders that were approved by the Assembly on February 23, 2022, have been printed on green paper and placed on the members' desks for ease of reference. I encourage you to – I'm sure you'll be reading them intently.

Oral Question Period

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

Budget 2022

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Booming oil prices are usually good news for Albertans, but instead this UCP budget was a huge bust for Alberta families: no real plan for economic diversification, 1,000 fewer teachers, more private health care, less community infrastructure, and more debt for students. Right now Alberta families are asking for more help with out-of-control costs, and businesses need support to recover from COVID. The Premier used to blame the low price of oil for his failure to support Albertans. What's his excuse this time?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right in one respect, that Albertans need help with the rising cost of living. The question, then, is: why does the NDP support Justin Trudeau's

planned April Fool's Day joke on this whole country with another carbon tax hike? Why does the NDP cheer on the federal Liberal plan to triple the carbon tax? This is the government that scrapped the NDP carbon tax, and this is the government that is leading today by eliminating the Alberta gas tax on fuel and providing a rebate for electricity prices, real action for Albertans.

1:50

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier wants to spend his time asking the NDP questions, he can stop musing about it in the media and he can actually call an election, and we'll see which side of the House everyone is sitting on.

Sneaky tax increase: that's what the Premier was told by his former employer, the CTF, about the budget increases and the hikes to personal income tax. Let's talk about that. The Premier had a chance to put back the \$400 he's taking from families. He didn't. He could have put back the \$350 he's taking from seniors. He didn't. He could have put back the \$1,000 he's taking from people on AISH. He didn't. What does the Premier have for his excuse now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government inherited the fiscal and economic catastrophe of four years of NDP. This government inherited an \$8 billion NDP structural deficit, four years of economic decline and stagnation, hundreds of thousands of unemployed Albertans, and this is the government that, working through multiple crises, has balanced the budget for the first time in eight years, that is presiding over the strongest economic and job growth in Canada. Why? Because we had our eye on the ball, attracting job-creating investment, showing that Alberta is open for business, and getting our finances back in order.

Ms Hoffman: Let's have a little recap here. Under this Premier Albertans are paying higher income tax, higher property tax, higher school fees, higher tuition, higher car insurance, higher power bills. When Albertans need help paying the power bill, why is the only power that the Premier is concerned about the power he holds in his office?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, imagine the NDP talking about higher taxes when they imposed the single biggest tax hike in the province's history, the carbon tax. Now, we repealed that as Bill 1. Promise made, promise kept. Unfortunately, their ally Justin Trudeau then imposed his carbon tax on us. Today we have announced effectively the reverse carbon tax by eliminating the gas tax on Alberta consumers, just when the NDP wants to increase gas and fuel prices on April 1. We won't let them. We're going to cut those taxes instead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for her second set of questions.

School Construction and Modernization

Ms Hoffman: Alberta students deserve good schools and good teachers close to home. Alberta is growing, and so are our communities. We need more schools to keep up with demand. That's why our NDP government started catching up from years of neglect under former Conservative governments. We funded about 60 projects every year; the UCP, less than a quarter of that. Why is the UCP failing kids in need of new schools and modernizations right across this province?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy that as a result of our fiscal discipline, getting our finances back in order, we can invest in more

public services. We can invest in 15 new schools and school refurbishments. We can increase the support for our schools in the operational budget. We can increase the Health budget by \$600 million, on top of \$900 million last year. We can build the new Red Deer hospital and the new cancer clinic in Calgary, the cancer care centre. Record investments in public services: why? Because the economy is growing, and our finances are back on track.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the list of school capital has some massive holes in it: nothing for Edmonton public, no new schools for Lethbridge or St. Albert, and after two years of nothing for public or Catholic kids in Calgary, they're getting a whopping two schools. The UCP believes that classrooms with 40-plus kids, with desks in the hallway is a feature, not a bug. For the first time ever the government presented a budget that refused to tell Albertans how many students they expect to be going to school next year. To the Premier: how many more new students will be going to school in Alberta schools next year? It's the first time they've never told us or that any government hasn't told us.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the member is that with the new schools and the revamped schools already under way as part of Alberta's economic recovery plan, in addition to the 15 additional schools that we announced last week, that's 65 new schools and refurbished schools under this government, more than the 60 done under the NDP.

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier doesn't know or if he doesn't care how many kids are actually going to be going to school in Alberta, he could let the Assembly know, and if he would actually put a little effort in, he could find that number and bring it back to this place, because there are going to be thousands more kids going to school next year, Mr. Speaker. At a time when more kids than ever will need help, the UCP's plan is to have bigger class sizes and fewer teachers. Edmonton public students need Delton school replaced, a junior high in McConachie, a junior-senior in Glenriding Heights; Fort McMurray needs a francophone school; Calgary Diefenbaker needs a renovation; and we need a Catholic high school in the west end, just to name a few of these projects. Why do the UCP . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows perfectly well that schools are prioritized in terms of capital investments based on complex metrics. In the case of the Edmonton public school board, they submitted as their top two priorities schools that are below 70 per cent current utilization. The minister is committed to working with that board to bring forward new school projects in this city where there is dynamic population growth and that are being underserved, but . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: I apologize for the NDP, Mr. Speaker. For some reason, they're angry. They're angry that Alberta is opening up, they're angry that the economy is strong, they're angry that we're dropping the provincial gas tax, but I think Albertans are pretty happy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Utility Rebate Program

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans who can't afford to pay for their heating bill in January were encouraged when this Premier told

them that he was going to offer a rebate, but as usual with the UCP you have to check the terms and conditions. His natural gas rebate doesn't apply this winter, and even if it did, the prices are set too high, so most Albertans wouldn't qualify. In other words, the rebate is fake. I've spoken to Alberta families who feel misled by this Premier's promise. Why didn't he follow through?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, psychologists have a term called "cognitive dissonance." It means: when you hold two completely contradictory ideas in your head at the same time. It perfectly explains NDP policy, because on the one hand they want higher gas prices, they want higher fuel prices, and they want higher electricity prices. That's their goal. They want to punish people for heating their homes. This government doesn't. That's why we put in place a natural gas rebate and have eliminated the excise tax for fuel and are providing a rebate to electricity consumers.

Ms Ganley: First, the carbon tax came with a real rebate, not a UCP fake out. Second, this Premier has raised the cost of living in every single one of his budgets. Third, Albertans are struggling right now, today. The UCP could help them and is choosing not to. Is this Premier too busy fighting for his own political career to listen to Albertans? Where are his priorities?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP carbon tax came with higher gas prices, higher home heating prices, higher prices for groceries, higher prices for everything, and, by the way, four years of economic devastation. They sucked \$1.3 billion out of the pockets of Albertans on a tax they never ran on. Today we have delivered, on an annualized basis, \$1.7 billion of relief to Alberta families.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Celina Thibault is a mother of two. She lives in Calgary on a fixed income and must regularly travel for medical care. Quote: I feel the choice some days is whether I can pay my utility bills or go to Edmonton for my treatments. I know a lot of people who thought the UCP saw this as a problem and were prepared to act. Instead, Albertans got nothing and no help. What does this Premier have to say to this Albertan, who feels betrayed by his budget? Does he think she deserves an apology?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have this to say, that the NDP forced up these electricity prices through billions of dollars of unnecessary costs in infrastructure, by their fiasco on the PPA that cost us \$1.3 billion, by shutting down in a rush the coal plants, through their carbon tax. Those are the folks responsible for high electricity prices, but the problem that they created is a problem that this government is solving. Now, will they stand and admit that they are cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax on April 1? I know that Albertans certainly aren't doing that.

2:00 Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, in the UCP's budget all they could muster for Calgary's struggling downtown was a paltry \$5 million. The reviews are in, and they're not good. The CEO of the Calgary Chamber called it, quote, absolutely inadequate, and the mayor said that it was a pittance amounting to only 2 per cent of what was requested by the city. Meanwhile even allies of the Premier said that it was, quote, not enough; it's symbolic rather than an investment. Calgary doesn't need symbolic noninvestments. It needs real action. How could this government come up so short of what's needed and fail Calgarians?

Mr. Kenney: What classic socialist economics. They think that you revive an entire civic economy – by the way, hammered by the

NDP. They think that you revive that with a few million dollars in grants, Mr. Speaker. They miss the point. The entire central point of this government is to bring back job-creating investment so that we can revive the downtown core of Calgary and our entire provincial economy. They derided the job-creation tax cut. They said that it was going to cost us \$4.6 billion, but in fact we are raising \$400 million more at an 8-point rate than they did at a 12-point rate because of new investment in Calgary and elsewhere.

Member Ceci: Let's talk about that corporate handout. In the last election the Premier promised that his corporate tax handout would fill the office towers in downtown Calgary. He even accelerated his giveaway and said that companies would be irresponsible for not relocating in Calgary. Since then the number of head offices went from 117 to 102, Mr. Premier. In contrast, our leader released some of the key planks of our platform in her speech to the Calgary Chamber. We promised to match a hundred million dollars in city funding for office conversions as well as support small businesses to move downtown and revitalize their storefronts. How can the Premier tell us that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: NDP economics: tax people more. When they stop moving, regulate them more. Mr. Speaker, what they did was wreck this province's economy, especially the economy of Calgary. Tens of thousands of energy workers put out of work while – what? – they were cheering on Justin Trudeau killing Northern Gateway and Energy East, bringing in their carbon taxes. Calgary is benefiting from the largest boom in diversification and high-tech, digital jobs in its history. The largest tech investment in the history of Canada: \$4.3 billion from Amazon Web Services. That's in Calgary.

Member Ceci: Let's talk about what is actually going on in Calgary. It has the highest unemployment rate amongst major cities in Canada, Mr. Premier. The latest investment figures show that Calgary is falling further and further behind our other cities but for attracting capital in the tech sector. We need to make diversification a priority, not a luxury. That's why our plan for downtown will focus on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district through the relocation of postsecondary institutions in the downtown core. Can the Premier please tell Albertans how far \$5 million will go in bringing down that office vacancy rate not seen since the Great Depression?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Calgary's downtown office vacancy rate has finally started to come down after a four-year climb because of the NDP. Calgary has the fastest growing high-tech sector in North America. The NDP devastated investor confidence. Tens of billions of dollars of investment fled this province. That is turning around now in the greatest economic recovery this province has ever seen, leading Canada in economic growth, leading Canada in job growth. I know that the NDP thinks the solution is to give a mayor tens of millions of dollars to hand out in grants. We know the solution is to get investment back in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we can all clearly see that budgets don't simply balance themselves, nor does taxing and spending your way to prosperity. Fiscal conservatism, disciplined spending, reduction of taxes, and, quite frankly, a strong demand

globally for energy as we break free of the COVID pandemic: Alberta is literally just beginning to take off, and we're finally getting a tailwind. However, with the high inflation, poor federal fiscal policies that are causing inflation to rise, unseen in generations, Albertans are really feeling the strain of increasing utility and fuel prices. To the Minister of Finance: please advise any plans that can help Albertans off-set these costs of energy.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In Budget 2022 we announced the natural gas rebate program, that protects Alberta consumers from rising natural gas prices such as we're seeing in Europe. Moreover, to deal with energy price increases, increases of gasoline and diesel, unlike the members opposite, we're not raising taxes; we're cutting taxes by 13 cents a litre effective April 1, which will provide more protection for Alberta consumers and trade-exposed industries.

Mr. Getson: Amen, Mr. Speaker. That's all I got to say to that, Minister. Thank you.

Given that the previous NDP policies and regulatory uncertainty led to the premature shutdown of coal-fired power plants, raised the cost, a \$1.5 billion boondoggle building out of the breaking of contracts, the overbuild of the transmission infrastructure, what specifically is going to be done, to the Minister of Finance, by the current government to combat the high electricity prices? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The Minister of Finance is the one with the call.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta consumers are certainly dealing with bad policy choices by the previous government, and they're dealing with that on their electricity bills today. The members opposite overbuilt the transmission system. The members opposite prematurely moved from coal to gas, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion. On top of that, they brought in a job-killing carbon tax that added costs to every Alberta family and household and every Alberta senior. We're bringing relief on utilities and energy costs today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister: thanks again for the history lesson of what the NDP did in my area.

Mr. Speaker, given the rising overall cost of goods and services, what other measures can be or has the government taken to reduce the cost of living for Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I know the member likes me to correct other members when they use a preamble in this Assembly. Perhaps that was a good example of one as well.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In fact, Budget 2022 included a number of affordability measures for Albertans. In Budget '22 we're providing relief for low-income students in high-demand programs with \$15 million in nonrepayable supports, relief for parents of young children with \$666 million this year to bring child care costs down, and relief for Albertans in rural or remote locations by making affordable, accessible broadband a reality in rural Alberta.

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

Labour and Immigration Minister

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year we learned that the minister of labour attempted to interfere in the administration of justice when he called the Edmonton police chief about a ticket he received. That is in black and white on page 15 of Justice Kent's report; there's no other context required. It is clear that the minister of labour has no business sitting around the cabinet table in any capacity after so brazenly trying to break the rule of law in Alberta. Can the Premier explain why he is ignoring the findings of the Kent report and rewarding the former Justice minister with a new cabinet post?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member actually is not accurately quoting the report. The report made it clear that the minister of the day did not interfere with the administration of justice. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is the only one with the call.

Mr. McIver: The report clearly says that the minister did not interfere with the administration of justice. The report did have other complaints about the minister. The hon. member knows that and should stop trying to say things that are not in the report.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the minister has not read the report and, like the Premier, is ignoring two out of three findings of Justice Kent's report when justifying why the labour minister should remain in cabinet after attempting but failing to interfere in the administration of justice and given that the labour minister should have been shown the door and fired from the cabinet instead of being rewarded with another new portfolio, what message does this send for law-abiding Albertans who watch a minister that tried to interfere in the administration of justice get a new job in the cabinet?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows what was in the report and what wasn't. The hon. minister is in a different portfolio. [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the folks across are pretty bold talking this way when they haven't revealed what they knew about their member from south Edmonton, that was potentially criminal charges. They're pretty quiet about that, yet what's public and everybody knows they're complaining about. All the while they hide what they knew, which is potentially criminal.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Given that Alberta should not have a single cabinet minister found to have attempted to interfere with the administration of justice or investigated by the RCMP and given that the Premier stated that if it was found that the minister interfered with the administration of justice, he would have immediately removed the labour minister from cabinet and since Justice Kent found clearly that the labour minister attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, one last time, will the Premier honour his words and Justice Kent's report and immediately remove the labour minister from cabinet?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be very clear, the report concluded that the minister did not interfere with the

administration of justice, and it is rich for that hon. member to even raise RCMP investigations in this . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You may not like the answer, but the Speaker needs the ability to be able to hear the answer.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it is rich for that member to raise RCMP investigations in this place when an NDP member of this Chamber has had a search warrant served on his place. What did that member know about the Member for Edmonton-South? Did the Leader of the Official Opposition know what was taking place? Yes or no? The NDP need to explain the actions now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: You can always count on me to restore calm and order in this place, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think the best thing for decorum at this point in time would be the hon. member to continue immediately to the question that he's prepared.

Mr. Schmidt: As always, great advice, Mr. Speaker.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: On yet another Friday afternoon the UCP released their latest report. This time it was their coal report on the so-called path forward on coal mining in the Rockies. In it they recommended a ministerial order banning certain coal mining activities and the reinstatement of the 1976 coal policy. However, it was this government that rescinded the coal policy, on the Friday afternoon of a long weekend, that led to the widespread backlash from Albertans. What assurances can this government give to Albertans that they won't try this once again, to rescind the policy when they think that Albertans aren't watching?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I can say on behalf of the Minister of Energy that this government is very happy to have been able to fix the mess that the NDP made with the 1976 coal policy, when they sent out a letter paving the way for coal mines to be built on some of the most sensitive landscapes inside our province. The Minister of Energy has been able to move forward to be able to fix that with the reinstatement of the 1976 coal policy, and I'm happy to report to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the entire Chamber, that the department of environment will be working forward to be able to make sure that that is enshrined in land-use planning to finally fix the NDP's mistake when it comes to coal.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given that no one trusts this government, not when it comes to our mountains, our provincial parks, or really anything for that matter, given that a ministerial order gives the minister full discretion to rescind it at any moment with the stroke of a pen and given that the UCP already did this once, when they removed the coal policy in the first place, and given that this government has shown that they are more willing to listen to the coal lobby than to Albertans whose drinking water and jobs are threatened by coal mining in the Rockies, will the government promise to never remove this ministerial order?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Energy has already said, my department, the department of environment, will be moving forward with putting the 1976 coal policy into the eastern slopes policy of our province, where it will stay until each land-use plan is completed, and then it will move over into each land-use plan across the eastern slopes going forward. Again I want to reassure the House that the problems that have been created on coal in the eastern slopes by the NDP have been fixed. That hon. member was part of a government that made four coal mines in the eastern slopes while he was in power, one for each year, but we have been able to provide clarity for investors as well as for Albertans, and we're going to make sure that our precious eastern slopes are protected from the NDP when it comes to coal.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that it's been three years and we've seen no action on any land-use plans and given that the UCP has already rescinded the coal policy once without consulting Albertans and given that a legislative ban would require any changes to be debated in this House in front of Albertans and not negotiated behind closed doors with coal lobbyists and given that it stops short of what's really needed, a legislated ban on coal mining in the eastern slopes, will the government support our bill, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, this session to enshrine a coal mining ban in legislation and protect our mountains from the UCP?

Mr. Jason Nixon: The NDP continues their anti-industry stance, Mr. Speaker, trying to block all industrial activity. The hon. member is completely incorrect about no land-use planning being completed underneath this government. This government is proud to move forward with subregional planning when it comes to caribou, that saved 75,000 jobs. Emergency protection orders that would have seen the destruction of the entire forestry industry inside northern Alberta, which that hon. member and his party tried to do – but we've been able to use an effective land-use process to protect one of our largest industries and, again, to stop the NDP from sterilizing our landscapes.

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

Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member of this Assembly understands the need for keeping party business and government business separate. Taxpayer resources must not be used for party business, and even the appearance of government members offering favours for political support is a crime under the Criminal Code. The Premier's chief of staff oversees all of the operations of the Premier's office and is currently on a leave of absence to shore up votes for the Premier's leadership review. With this in mind, would the Premier tell Albertans what steps are being taken to avoid the mixing of party and government business?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's office has been clear on this. Staff that are working on his campaign full-time have moved out of government business for the time, have taken a leave of absence to work on the campaign, which is a normal process as you head into political activities along those lines. Again, I think this is rich coming from the hon. member who has been travelling around the province with staff, not defending or sticking up for his constituents and instead spending his time playing junior high games, which is the ineffectiveness of his ability to be able to represent the people of Central Peace-Notley. He has a lot to explain, I think, going forth.

Mr. Loewen: Given that prior to the UCP's AGM last fall, the public learned that senior officials within the Premier's office were in fact calling corporate leaders, seeking assistance in stacking the convention with attendees who support the Premier and given that at least one corporate leader jumped at the opportunity, stating that they could, quote, leverage that into further meaningful dialogues with cabinet, unquote, and given that I have written to the RCMP seeking further investigation of this matter and that we know that the Premier's chief of staff, that oversees all operations in the Premier's office, is currently on leave, campaigning for the Premier for the leadership review, why is the Premier so comfortable with the appearance of influence peddling?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite would like to distract Albertans from the good things that are taking place in this province. I was privileged to rise in this House approximately 10 days ago and deliver a budget that was a balanced budget, the first balanced budget in eight years. But it was much more than that. It was a budget that ultimately revealed the fiscal progress this province has made and revealed the incredible investment attraction policies that are leading to jobs, job creation, additional opportunities for small businesses, and increased government revenues.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that's deflection right there and given that, of all of the possible campaign managers, the Premier has chosen his chief of staff to take a leave of absence and given that the Premier has stated on multiple occasions that his priority is governing – and there is a lot of governing to do right now, and the government has numerous pieces of legislation to present to the Assembly, not to mention a budget to pass – and that if government business is truly the top priority of this Premier, why is the Premier's most senior official taking time off to campaign for his leadership at this time?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's kind of shameful to see the member across trying to besmirch the reputation of a citizen of this province, one that has done things properly, according to the rules. If you want to do political activity, you have to take time off from your job and not get paid. That's exactly what's happening. I wonder if the hon. member is meeting that standard. I wonder if he's put in expense accounts for the last few weeks that he's been travelling across Alberta to campaign against the Premier. I'll tell you that there are some people that should be careful when they throw stones.

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

2:20 COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that vaccines have been a vital, important tool in our fight against COVID-19 and remain so. While hospitalizations from COVID are still at the highest point they have been in recent waves, I was disappointed to see the Premier say that he wants to remove this vital, important tool from the staff at Alberta Health Services. Those people who are ill in hospitals, especially vulnerable populations, should have the assurance that the front-line staff caring for them have all of the tools available to them to help fight against this virus. Why is this Health minister ending vaccine requirements for staff at Alberta Health Services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The hon. member is quite correct. Our focus is actually on protecting Albertans and protecting our health care system. We have supported the widespread use of vaccines across the province. I'm very pleased that over 90 per cent of people are vaccinated. Now, in regard to the policy of AHS – the Premier said this last week – we have asked AHS to review the policy by March 31, and this was a directive that was provided by our government and by myself. We are waiting for the input to come back to us, and we'll be making a decision in the near future in that regard.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the facts are that this government has continuously spread misinformation about COVID-19 and the efficacy of vaccines, which has led people to have more questions and confusion, and given that this misinformation has caused the Premier himself to flip-flop within his own caucus on vaccine messaging, leading us to believe that these decisions are being based more on politics than science, and given that Albertans rightfully expect a unified message on vaccination from the leaders in their province and to answer their questions and set a good example, can the Health minister explain where these recommendations have come from, what data he has to support them, and if AHS supports this decision?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that vaccines are the best tool for us to be able to combat COVID-19. I announced last week in terms of measures to be able to get more vaccines out to kids ages five to 11 so that parents could have better access to clinics after school, and we've also provided kids' vaccines to family physicians. We're looking at additional measures to be able to roll out in terms of supporting vaccines. Let me be clear. In this government we are very supportive of vaccines, and we know that is the path forward to be able to not only protect against omicron but to protect against severe outcomes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister waited weeks, months to take those steps when he could have taken them far earlier to protect children and given that Alberta has one of the lowest rates of third-dose boosters compared to the rest of the country, doses that are proven to help with adverse effects from the virus, and given that continuing to use tools such as boosters will help insulate our already stressed and overburdened health care system from being overwhelmed again and given that public health experts from across the country have advocated for the effectiveness of mandates to ensure the safety of our vulnerable populations and our health care capacity, what message is this Health minister trying to send to Albertans by removing that line of defence for health care workers?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I've already said, we support vaccines, and vaccines are an incredibly important tool. As mentioned by the Premier, you know, vaccines have protected significantly not only through the delta wave but through the omicron wave against severe outcomes. Now, admittedly, two doses of vaccines have not been as effective against omicron in terms of transmission but incredibly effective against severe outcomes. It's very important that we support vaccines to be able to protect against severe outcomes, and we'll continue to do so. In

regard to the AHS policy decision we'll be making that in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood has a question to ask. Oh, wrong Sigurdson. Of course, the use of any name in the Chamber for any reason would be wildly unacceptable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is next.

Affordable Housing and Budget 2022

Ms Sigurdson: The need for affordable housing is increasing as more Albertans struggle through these tough economic times. Municipal leaders, housing providers, and business communities all want to see investment in housing. While the UCP receives revenues of high oil prices, they made no significant investment in the affordable housing budget. The UCP is leaving hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government on the table untouched. Can the Minister of Seniors and Housing please explain why she is yet again neglecting substantial investment in much-needed affordable housing?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was so proud to introduce our Stronger Foundations 10-year affordable housing strategy back in November of last year. This strategy will increase households by an additional 25,000 to serve our Albertans. We are continuing to support our Albertans. We have a plan, we have a vision, and we are executing it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the mayor of Edmonton called this budget a slap in the face and said that it is being balanced on the backs of vulnerable Albertans and given that the city has yet again not received help in operating their permanent supportive housing and given that much of this concern was also shared by the mayor of Calgary, highlighting the devastating impact on low-income households by reducing funding by 23 per cent – at press conferences the minister has no problem standing with municipalities, saying that housing is important. Why is she so comfortable ignoring their requests once she leaves the podium?

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

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition member should well know that the whole affordable housing system wasn't working for tens of thousands of Albertans: wait-lists, a 65 per cent increase in their four years; and no growth, no matter what the investments were from the government. That's why our government is working closely with all levels of government, including the federal government, with local leader experts so we can build new affordable housing, including helping the homeless. We will support all of the homeless.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP claimed to have a plan to support new units of affordable housing, yet the budget shows that the UCP will build fewer than 4,000 units within the next three years, nowhere near their claim of 25,000 units, and given that at this pace the UCP would only create half of what their intended goal is and given that the federal government has available funding and that municipalities are ready to act – the only people we're waiting for are the UCP – why is the minister not investing to ensure that all Albertans are part of the economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, our plan of Stronger Foundations includes an additional 25,000 households by the end of 10 years, and we will continue to do that. I'm so proud to continue to work with the stakeholders, municipalities, and the federal minister. As I mentioned, that particular rental supplement: we are so proud to say that we are working with the federal government and cost matching for \$222 million for the rent supplement, a benefit to all Albertans who are in need.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Deputy Government House Leader at 2:28.

The hon. Member for Camrose has a question to ask.

School Construction and Modernization

(continued)

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP seems to think that Alberta's government is not taking school infrastructure seriously, yet it's my understanding that the minister has released a very exciting capital plan as part of Budget 2022 that includes 15 priority projects, including a new Catholic school in the Camrose constituency. Given that the NDP only wants to talk about projects that were not prioritized this time, could the minister please share with us what kinds of projects are receiving funding and how much the government is spending on these projects?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud that Budget 2022 and our capital plan include \$2 billion over the next three years to support new projects, modulars, maintaining existing schools, charter school infrastructure, including collegiate programs. This \$2 billion investment includes more than \$251 million over three years for 15 much-needed new school projects on top of the over 50 school projects that are currently under construction. The new construction funding includes new schools in Calgary, Edmonton, Camrose, and Manning, school modernizations in Acme, Cochrane, Evansburg, and Milk River, design funding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister. We've heard from some school divisions who feel they were left out of this budget. Given that there are 63 public and separate school divisions in the province and given that our government has committed to keep spending under control to balance the budget, can the minister explain to the House how the ministry selects priority capital projects?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. We have a very robust gated process used to select school capital projects. This process was actually brought in in 2018 on the recommendation of the Auditor General, who felt the process could be improved to greater transparency. Each year school boards are required to submit their three-year education plan to Alberta Education that outlines their capital needs. They are then evaluated, and priority projects are selected based on health and safety, enrolment pressure, building condition, functionality in programming, and legal requirements. Mr. Speaker, we are investing in school infrastructure for our students under a balanced budget. Promise made, promise kept.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister. Given that many schools around the province still have aging school infrastructure and some require upgrades but may not have been prioritized for a project this year based on needs around the province, could the minister please tell us what other resources are available to schools who need to upgrade, maintain, or replace the infrastructure in their schools?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. The capital plan also includes \$209 million over three years to support the maintenance and renewal of existing schools, building through the capital maintenance and renewal program. It also includes \$300 million over three years in school authorities' self-directed capital projects. If a school authority is experiencing enrolment pressures, there is also \$118 million over the next three years to support the continued implementation of the modular program. As well, Mr. Speaker, there's over \$249 million sitting in capital reserves by school authorities to address emerging issues.

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last year the federal government made a record investment in Alberta's economy by investing in affordable quality child care. However, this UCP government seems intent on making sure that that investment fails Albertans. In their budget there isn't a single additional provincial dollar invested in child care. Why does that matter? Because without it the UCP will not reach the goal of \$10-per-day child care for all families across this province, and the UCP knows it. Why isn't the Minister of Children's Services investing any additional money into child care to ensure that all Alberta families will have access to this life-changing support?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The agreement that we signed with the federal government is great news for Alberta parents and Alberta kids right across this province. Unlike the members opposite, who had a system where they picked and chose winners and losers when it came to parents and centres, we did not do that. We learned from their failed pilot and took that feedback from Alberta parents and child care operators to make sure that every single licensed space in all day homes and licensed centres and preschools was included in this plan. A billion dollars being invested to support working parents this year is good news.

Ms Pancholi: And almost none of that is provincial funding. Given that Alberta lost 20 per cent of our early childhood educators from the workforce, leaving the sector extremely short-staffed and unable to offer families spaces, and given that the UCP was one of the last to sign a deal with the federal government, leaving \$268 million on the table in Ottawa last year which could have been used to recruit and train staff that are desperately needed to open new spaces for families, and given that no matter how many new spaces this government claims it will create, they're no good to parents if operators don't have staff to open them, to the minister: why is she refusing to increase wages for educators to attract more workers when Albertans need that so badly right now?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said a number of times in this House, we're not. This agreement with the federal government does in fact commit to looking at the wage top-

ups that we provide early childhood educators. Why? Because we know that quality staff drives quality programming, and we need to keep early childhood educators in this system. I'm happy to say that our educator workforce is nearly back up to prepandemic levels. This is good news. There's \$300 million in this agreement to support the workforce, and we're going to continue to take feedback from operators and educators on how best to roll that out.

Ms Pancholi: Given that Tracey Manuel, a new mom in Fort McMurray, put her family on a waiting list while she was pregnant and still doesn't have a child care space as she heads back to work in two months and given that Matt Beauchamp in Calgary has been searching for months to find spaces for his two kids but is facing wait-lists of up to 50 families and given that the continued ambivalence of this government to affordable, accessible, quality child care is costing these families money, causing them stress, and threatening their participation in the workforce, why is this minister refusing to invest a single new dollar into child care to make sure Albertans like Tracey and Matt and thousands of others can access quality child care now?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, if the members want to talk about families not being able to access affordable high-quality spaces, they don't have to look back further than three years ago, under their pilot program, to see what type of disruption that created for parents who absolutely could not access those spaces. We did . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services is the only one with the call.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we learned from their pilot program. That is why we fought for a made-in-Alberta deal that included all licensed spaces, so that if parents need access, they can access a space of their choosing and still have affordable child care in their community.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government continues to gut postsecondary education here in Alberta. Since they took office, there's been a system-wide cut of more than \$690 million. Funding is unstable, forcing postsecondaries to increase tuition and cut programs and faculties. Under the UCP everyone is paying more and getting less for postsecondary education. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why has this UCP government allowed record tuition increases and forced higher interest rates for students to repay their loans?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a good opportunity to inform the House that as we stand here today, tuition levels in Alberta are comparable to other jurisdictions. They actually continued to remain below the national average despite what the members opposite like to scream and yell about. Further, I encourage the members opposite to take a very close look at the budget. There's \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions and \$15 million to create new bursaries for low-income students. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, in 2019 students owed a total of about \$2.5 billion in debt. Given that this year the UCP's budget said that that number will pass \$3.7 billion, by 2025 we expect that Alberta students will owe more than \$5.3 billion, more than double what it

had been in the past. How does this government expect Albertans to seek further training to grow our economy if they can barely afford to go to school, much less start a business after or plan for the future, without the looming spectre of unmanageable debt?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite needs to take a close look at the budget. He'll see there a \$249 million increase to student loan funding, which equates to \$1,000 more per semester and an increase of \$10,000 per student to their lifetime limit. Again, as I mentioned earlier, there's \$15 million over three years to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to support our scholarships that continue to exist. If the member is so concerned about prices, why is he working with Trudeau to jack up the fees?

Mr. Eggen: It only gets worse, Mr. Speaker. Given that the UCP is imposing billions of dollars in additional debt on Albertans pursuing a postsecondary education, given that they have forced postsecondary schools to hike up tuition, given that they themselves have increased the interest rate on student debt to above the already increasing prime rate, given that this means that the UCP is actually making money off students and their debts, how can this Minister of Advanced Education stomach the fact that this government is turning a profit on the backs of struggling Alberta students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, if he's so concerned with the cost of living and affordability, why is he siding with his ally Trudeau to jack up the carbon tax on April 1? That's what I want to know. Where's the answer to that? I haven't heard that at all from the members opposite.

As I said, Budget 2022 contains \$15 million in new funding to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to expand our scholarships that already exist; as well, as I mentioned, \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces so that families and students right here in Alberta can find the spaces that they need in our incredible postsecondary institutions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

La Francophonie Albertaine

Ms Renaud: Je suis née au Québec, mais ma famille a beaucoup déménagé quand j'étais jeune. Afin de bien m'assimiler dans ma nouvelle communauté, j'ai perdu beaucoup de ma culture francophone. C'est devenu plus important pour moi de renouer avec la riche et belle culture francophone et de renouer mes racines.

Je suis extrêmement reconnaissante envers les organismes francophones qui travaillent si fort pour assurer que la langue et la culture françaises soient préservées et protégées. Les organisations comme l'ACFA travaillent à unir les forces vives et les sociétés afin de protéger les acquis, faire progresser les droits, la vitalité de la communauté francophone en Alberta.

L'Alberta possède un riche patrimoine francophone. Un bon nombre des premiers colons étaient des Canadiens français. Aujourd'hui nous avons plus de 30 communautés francophones à travers la province : Falher, Grande Prairie, Legal, Plamondon, Lac La Biche, Miette, Beaumont et St. Albert, la communauté que je suis chanceuse et fière de représenter. Un Albertain sur 10 est d'origine française ou canadienne française. Les nouveaux arrivés

de l'Europe, de l'Afrique, et d'ailleurs ont la possibilité d'intégrer aux communautés françaises florissantes. En 2018 Alberta a déclaré le mois de mars le Mois de la Francophonie Albertaine. C'est une occasion chaque année de souligner l'énergie que la francophonie apporte à l'Alberta. Je vous souhaite à tous un excellent Mois de la Francophonie Albertaine 2022.

Merci, M. le Président.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Economic Recovery Plan and Budget 2022

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over this last year Albertans have ridden this roller coaster of good and bad news. I'm happy to say that we can finally exit that ride and enter an amazing new year. With all the record investments Alberta has seen just this past year, employment numbers have returned to pre-COVID levels while we see an increase in the diversification of our economy. This shows that the Alberta recovery plan is working and is working for all Albertans.

I've also had the pleasure of seeing investments made by our government throughout Lesser Slave Lake through the municipal sustainability initiative into the rehabilitation of gravel roads and the replacement of a roof on an administrative building. Just over the past couple of weeks our government released their budget, where all of us have not only worked hard together over this past year to get it balanced but succeeded, as we have a surplus of \$500 million, the first balanced budget in seven years. It is packed full of great announcements for Albertans and constituents of Lesser Slave Lake. Broadband investments will increase accessibility to services with more stability to individuals in Lesser Slave Lake. There are many in Lesser Slave Lake whose livelihoods depend on the reliable service of this connection. I'm also happy to see that our government is putting a focus on recruiting 50 new Crown prosecutors. This is great news as this will increase the efficiency in dealing with crime and our legal system. It is also great to see that \$90 million has been provided towards programs for family physicians to practise across rural Alberta.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to offer my sympathies and support to the Ukrainian people. They're facing an unprecedented attack by Russia. The rest of the world should not give up. We need to continue to be there for the Ukrainian people as they continue to show an overwhelming amount of courage and tenacity in their fight for freedom. I will continue to advocate for the rights of their . . .

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

Social Workers

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Each day Alberta's 9,000 social workers show up for work. Their service is essential. They may be serving people experiencing homelessness by connecting them with permanent supportive housing. They may be offering mental health services to youth at school. They may be meeting with community members regarding concerns in their neighbourhood. They may be presenting workshops on diversity or supporting seniors to navigate the challenges created by COVID. Or, like me, they may be elected officials advocating for social justice in government policy.

Sadly, Albertans are experiencing tremendous challenges due to the decisions of this UCP government. Despite significant revenues the UCP continues to prioritize profitable corporations over Albertans, keeping taxes low for them and increasing taxes for the rest of us. In addition, each one of us is paying more out of pocket

for essential goods such as utilities, insurance, and groceries. In tandem the UCP is depleting public programs.

Seniors' programs received no funding increases. The Alberta seniors' benefit was deindexed when the UCP became government in 2019. With revenue flowing into the province and the escalating cost of inflation, now is the exact time to index the Alberta seniors' benefit to inflation. Tragically, the UCP looks the other way, choosing to take care of their elite corporate interests at the expense of seniors on fixed incomes. Instead of seeing the real need for support due to circumstances beyond the control of any individual, the UCP celebrates, patting themselves on the back as if their wise policies put Alberta in the black. This is ridiculous.

Despite all this, social workers show up for work each day. They work to mitigate the negative consequences of uncaring UCP policies. They do this because they stand for fairness and justice. They do this because it is the right thing to do. They do this at a cost to their own well-being.

Thank you to each one of Alberta's 9,000 social workers. Happy Social Work Week.

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

Utility Costs

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government and others have said that the best way to support our seniors is to help them stay in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, and I couldn't agree more. Unfortunately, more and more seniors are telling me that they are worried about being able to stay in their own homes on fixed incomes because of the drastic increases to utility costs. They're not alone. Many of my constituents have reached out to me, worried about increases in utilities, some doubling and even tripling over the last few years. My own power bill doubled over last year. They aren't complaining about the cost of the electricity or the natural gas they consumed. No. What they can't accept is the extra cost due to the carbon tax and transmission and distribution charges. These are the majority of their bills. I have one bill that was \$118 for gas, but the total was \$332. I understand their anger.

My understanding is that other provinces, like Quebec, use the profits from selling energy, like our royalties, to reduce the burden on their residents' and businesses' utility bills. At the same time they reduce their provincial revenue to the point that they qualify for – guess what? – equalization payments funded by provinces like Alberta. I have suggested to our government that we do the same. We should use a small part of our significantly increased oil and gas royalties – you know, the oil and gas resources that actually belong to Albertans and not governments – to reduce the massive burden being experienced by Albertans and their businesses.

These very high transmission and distribution charges came about because of poor decisions by previous governments, both the NDP for their meddling in the power purchase agreements and early closure of our cheap and clean coal power plants and the PCs for their transmission overbuild. Our residents and businesses are not responsible for poor decisions by previous governments and should not be expected to pay the price. It's time for us to step up and use Alberta's royalties to reduce the burden that previous governments have stuck them with. If we do it right, we might even reduce the equalization payments from Alberta that get sent to other provinces that block the development of our natural resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of the following bills: Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance; Bill 3, the Special Days Act, sponsored by the Minister of Culture; Bill 4, the Municipal Government Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

2:50

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

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge the following: (a) Albertans are facing rising gasoline prices in excess of \$1.55 per litre; (b) electricity rates per kilowatt hour are more than double the rate cap put in place by the previous government, with the current government failing to provide relief to Albertans in respect of these rising costs; (c) the government promised to provide relief to Albertans in respect of skyrocketing natural gas prices through its 2022-23 budget but failed to do so by introducing an unfunded program that only comes into effect in October, for which the vast majority of Albertans will not qualify. Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call on the government to consider immediately providing each of the following types of emergency relief to Albertans: (a) in respect of rising gasoline prices, a suspension of the 13 cents per litre provincial tax, to be reassessed on a reoccurring three-month basis; (b) in respect of rising electricity rates, either a rebate program to take effect immediately to off-set the rising costs or a re-establishment of the rate cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, that was put in place by the previous government; (c) in respect of rising natural gas prices, a rebate program that takes effect immediately and for which eligibility threshold is lower than the \$6.50 per gigajoule threshold proposed by the government's current program.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has a tabling.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually have three tablings today. The first is a copy of a Quebec hydro bill for power and heating, where they have just the cost of power plus their harmonized sales tax. It's all they get charged.

The second tabling is a copy of an Alberta power and gas bill, where in addition to the cost of the fees for power and gas we pay an administration fee, transmission charge, distribution charge, Balancing Pool rider, deferral rider, transmission trace up rider, municipal franchise fee, interim shortfall rider, rider B property tax, and transmission service charge. I can't even explain what some of those are.

Of course, being that we're in a new session, I would like to table five copies of the Leap Manifesto, the favourite document of the NDP.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? The hon. Member for Highwood is on his feet.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table, as provided to me by the reeve, Delilah Miller, on behalf of the Foothills county and residents, a petition conducted online in which 1,127 residents are requesting that Foothills county be removed as a member from the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a tabling.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a February 14 comment I made on Facebook, that the opposition had gone after me nonstop for making comments for people to remember their oaths when they evoked the emergency measures act. I would like very much for everyone to read that at home, as well as the opposition, to get the full content of that.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2020; pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board annual report 2021, for the year ended December 31, 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to advise the Assembly that the point of order from 2:28 has been withdrawn.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: At the appropriate time the Member for Calgary-Mountain View gave the Assembly notice of Standing Order 42. The member now has five minutes in which to make their argument for why unanimous consent should be granted.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Fuel and Utility Costs

Ms Ganley:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge the following: (a) Albertans are facing rising gasoline prices in excess of \$1.55 per litre; (b) electricity rates per kilowatt hour are more than double the rate cap put in place by the previous government, with the current government failing to provide relief to Albertans in respect of these rising costs; (c) the government promised to provide relief to Albertans in respect of skyrocketing natural gas prices through its 2022-23 budget but failed to do so by introducing an unfunded program that only comes into effect in October, for which the vast majority of Albertans will not qualify. Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call on the government to consider immediately providing each of the following types of emergency relief to Albertans: (a) in respect of rising gasoline prices, a suspension of the 13 cents per litre provincial tax, to be reassessed on a reoccurring three-month basis; (b) in respect of rising electricity rates, either a rebate program to take effect immediately to off-set the rising costs or a re-establishment of the rate cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, that was put in place by the previous government; (c) in respect of rising natural gas prices, a rebate program that takes effect immediately and for which

eligibility threshold is lower than the \$6.50 per gigajoule threshold proposed by the government's current program.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to unanimous consent to proceed with this SO 42. I'll begin by addressing urgency.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is incredibly urgent. It is urgent to all the families out there right now choosing between buying groceries and heating their homes in the middle of an Alberta winter. We're hearing from more and more Albertans who cannot afford skyrocketing energy bills.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Last week gasoline prices spiked to over \$1.55 per litre. The current government promised action on natural gas prices but then presented a budget with a fake program. The rebate would not come into effect until October, it's currently unfunded, and it sets a threshold that few, if any, Albertans will ever qualify for. In fact, their plan depends on things getting considerably worse.

Meanwhile Albertans have been sending us copies of utility bills in excess of \$700, and that's in addition to the other decisions the UCP government has made that have hammered household budgets. They've increased income taxes, property taxes, tuition, student debt interest, car insurance – and the car insurance, Mr. Speaker, I might add, without even requiring the documentation that we asked for proving that those costs were increasing at greater than 5 per cent a year. Even camping fees are all rising as a direct result of the decisions of this government.

This is completely unsustainable for many families. It will force many to park their vehicles or to pile debt on to their credit cards. Mr. Speaker, this cannot go on. We have heard the Premier announce some measure of supports, but Albertans need a complete set of measures, as set out in our motion, in order to support them. This government needs to take responsibility for the impact that it is causing on household budgets.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We heard the government today: Albertans will need to wait 24 days to see relief at the pumps. This is obviously an important step, but it's insufficient. We're hearing as well about massive increases in bills and many with outstanding bills. Mr. Speaker, the government certainly announced that they would be providing families with a rebate of \$150, but many families are facing arrears of hundreds or even thousands of dollars. These are forcing them to make incredibly difficult choices between basic necessities like food and rent and heat. Many are at risk of being disconnected. In 2021 the average Alberta family had to pay an additional \$250. That's \$100 more than the government is offering without the increased cost of transmission or distribution.

Mr. Speaker, I think the actions that we saw today from this government are inadequate to address the concerns of Albertans, and I would urge the House that this matter is urgent. I can only imagine that members on all sides are getting the same e-mails that we are getting on our side, of Albertans struggling, reaching out to us, saying that they can't afford the cost of their utilities at the same time that they pay for their medication or for their food. These are decisions that no Albertan should ever have to make. These Albertans need action immediately.

We know the government's actions are insufficient to support Albertans, so I think, Mr. Speaker, that every member of this House owes it to their constituents to engage today in a real debate about how we can help these Albertans struggling with costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the hon. member that something needs to be done about the unfortunate mistakes that the Official Opposition made when they were in government when it comes to both our electricity system as well as their catastrophic policies like the carbon tax impact on fuel prices. That's why today the government has already announced, in fact, some of the stuff that is asked for in the hon. member's motion. It includes more than 13 cents per litre of the gasoline tax being removed and \$150 in electricity rebates for Albertans that are experiencing high prices right now from this winter. That's in addition to this government that removed \$1.3 billion from the NDP carbon tax, which was on our economy.

These are very serious issues which the government is taking seriously, which is why they took action today, and we need to continue to take action in the days to come to help Albertans. But here are the biggest things that we could also do right now. We can continue to fight against the federal government's carbon tax when it comes to the impact on fuel costs. That member and her party, the Official Opposition and the NDP party, continue to support Justin Trudeau and his job-killing carbon tax. In fact, they support the increase in gas taxes that will come from the federal carbon tax in just a few days, on April 1.

If we are going to debate this issue in the Chamber, I think, Mr. Speaker, we should start with that member and her party standing up and apologizing to Albertans for bringing in a carbon tax that they never told them about when they were in government and for the catastrophic impacts of that tax on the people of this province. They should stand up and apologize for continuing to support Justin Trudeau with his job-killing carbon tax and join this side of the House right now in calling on the federal government to remove the job-killing carbon tax on our economy inside our province.

3:00

Second, they should stand up inside this House and apologize to Albertans for their boondoggle that they made when they were in charge of our electricity system, Mr. Speaker, that is impacting the very Albertans that she spoke about today, that is impacting Albertans who are struggling to pay for their bills because of the Official Opposition and the NDP's mistakes. That's what that member should do, stand up and apologize for that today.

That said, Mr. Speaker, the government is taking action today. We're going to continue to take action, and they can rest assured that we will continue to be here to defend them against the NDP and their Justin Trudeau allies, who are doing everything they can to continue to cost Albertans money. Our side of the House is going to lower taxes, make things easier for Albertans going forward. Their side of the House, if they ever get to this side of the House again, will continue to do everything that they can to tax Albertans, kill jobs, and make investment flee this province. As such, because clear action has been taken today, I'd ask everybody in this Chamber not to support this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 requires unanimous consent of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the opposition deputy – the Deputy Government House Leader.

Drug Abuse Prevention

501. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta and urge the government of Canada to make all efforts in conjunction with its allies to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including but not limited to fentanyl and carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries, including the People's Republic of China and Mexico.

Mr. Schow: We got there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Thank you for that.

It is my honour to rise this afternoon and speak on Motion 501, my motion, a private member's motion. Now, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion regarding the ongoing opioid crisis in Alberta. The import of dangerous and illegal drugs must end, Mr. Speaker. These drugs continue to affect thousands of Albertans every year, resulting in the destruction of lives and livelihoods, and in some instances – in fact, in many instances – causing death.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful and honoured to work with my government colleagues as we strive to assist in the recovery of these addictions. It is important to recognize that those who sit on this side of the House are opposed to the methods that the opposition would take to combat this. We may not see eye to eye on these issues regarding drug abuse in Alberta, but I think that this motion is a good motion and a step in the right direction, and I would hope that all members would support it. That being said, I deem it very unlikely that members opposite wouldn't support a motion that urges both the provincial and federal governments to stop the export of illegal drugs from countries across the world.

The United Conservative government is committed to finding the best treatment options to help free people from the cycle of addiction. Unfortunately, the NDP members continue with their tunnel vision in claiming that if we as the government were to supply the drugs, there would be fewer fatalities. Recently organized was the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply. Mr. Speaker, in this committee each member had the opportunity to hear from experts in the addiction field as well as some first-hand experiences regarding addiction in the province of Alberta. The organization of the safe supply committee was further to the work that the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has already done, my good friend.

Just a couple of months ago the United Conservative government doubled up on the original 2019 commitment of 4,000 addiction treatment spaces and announced an additional 4,000, giving Alberta 8,000 addiction treatment spaces. Our government has also eliminated user fees for Albertans who need access to these treatment spaces. Mr. Speaker, with thousands of people who are trapped in addiction, I think that we can do better than simply handing them the very substance that has controlled their lives to the point that they see no future for themselves. Recovery is possible, and our government is committed to putting forward the

necessary resources. Individuals who are trapped in addiction are worth more to their friends and families and to society than the cost of the drugs they're addicted to.

Our economy is on the verge of – it is booming, Mr. Speaker. Our economy is booming, and though members opposite may suggest otherwise, I don't know what their definition of booming is – it certainly isn't what we believe on this side – simply giving money away. We have a labour shortage across Alberta. When those that are suffering from addiction receive help, they will have the opportunity to get a job and create a much better life for themselves. Albertans have never asked for a handout; they've only asked for a hand up.

There is hope for these people, but our government as well as the federal government must work together to first stop the import of dangerous drugs into our communities. Each year thousands of 911 calls are made in Alberta to respond to drug overdoses. In Edmonton and Calgary alone roughly 200 overdose calls are made each week. Mr. Speaker, continuing to give dangerous substances to those who suffer from addiction is irresponsible. There must be more done. For that reason, there must be strong attention given by governments at all levels to ensure that these substances do not make their way into communities, cities, and even our homes.

Representing the constituency of Cardston-Siksika, I would like to share with the House some of the things that I have concluded when it comes to drug abuse. It is important to recognize that this is not just a city problem. This is a problem that affects all Albertans, and it is very likely that we each know a few if not many individuals that suffer from dangerous addiction. Even the south, the place I love so dearly, is not immune to addiction. I see it regularly, and it is very unfortunate, and those people who are struggling and caught in the cycle of addiction are asking for help. I believe that we are doing the right thing in expanding treatment spaces for those individuals because I believe that we have a great opportunity in this province for everyone to become meaningful contributors, and that's what people want. There is dignity in that, Mr. Speaker. There is dignity there.

In my riding there are two of the largest First Nation reserves in Canada, namely Blood Tribe and Siksika. Thus, last summer it was brought to light, the horrific tragedies that took place at residential schools. These residential schools caused severe trauma for thousands upon thousands of individuals, and the trauma is present today and largely contributes to substance abuse that takes place on reserves. Mr. Speaker, I have hope for these individuals. I have hope that they will take the opportunity and accept the help and overcome their addictions as well as those who are not on-reserve, because we're all Albertans and children of God. Our government is committed to reconciliation. Although there have been many ceremonies and memorials that have taken place following the tragic discoveries of the unmarked graves, there is more work to be done to reconcile and build a positive relationship between the government and Indigenous communities.

As part of this, the Legislative Assembly must recognize the damage that is caused by countries allowing the export of dangerous drugs such as fentanyl and carfentanil as that is the first opportunity to stop them from making their way into Alberta. For that reason, we must be urging the government of Canada to make all efforts preventing countries such as the People's Republic of China and Mexico from exporting these opioids. Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my gratitude to law enforcement across Alberta, that has worked together with the government of Alberta to bring safety to Albertans and responsibly enforce the law upon those who have brought drugs into our country. It is crucial that our government and all Legislature members in this House support the prosecution of those who are responsible for supplying Alberta with

dangerous drugs that have caused death and destruction to families and communities. The act of supplying these drugs should have no tolerance in our province as the consequences are made clear by the sheer number of addictions that they are fuelling.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to sponsor a motion that will move Alberta even closer to overcoming the opioid crisis that we face. There is certainly action that must be taken if this motion should pass, and I look forward to contributing to that work on behalf of my constituents and all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on this very serious issue here in Alberta. We know we are in a crisis situation regarding the opioid crisis. It is so sad to say that four to five people die each day in our province from an opioid poisoning, and certainly I want to extend my condolences to all of the families who have lost loved ones due to this very difficult situation.

I, certainly, want to say that, you know, this caucus, the NDP caucus, is extremely concerned about this issue, and when we were in government, we did significant work to expand harm reduction services across the province that we know are evidence based and support people where they're at, which is really crucial to addressing this issue. Sadly, the UCP have a different view, and a lot of those services are being closed, not expanded, not supported, and what we're seeing is that more and more Albertans are dying from this. We're on record in 2021, although we don't have the statistics for the last two months of that year, to have the most deaths from drug poisoning ever since they've been recorded. Obviously, the policies of the UCP aren't helping. The crisis is out of control. So many vulnerable Albertans' lives are being taken from this.

I would like to present an amendment, Mr. Speaker. I do have the original here and copies for other members.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Should any member wish to receive – are we handing them to everybody? Everybody will receive a copy of the amendment. Look at that; it's like the good old days.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview could please read the amendment in for the purposes of all those at home and for the benefit of *Hansard*. As well, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm putting forward that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 be amended by striking out “to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including but not limited to fentanyl and carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries, including the People's Republic of China and Mexico” and substituting “to prevent the illegal importation of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including fentanyl, carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries.”

May I speak to the amendment?

The Acting Speaker: You can absolutely continue, and there's about seven minutes and 20 seconds remaining.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying before I presented the amendment, the UCP government has dramatically

stopped the funding supporting harm reduction services across the province, and that's a key service, a key support for vulnerable Albertans, because what it does is that they support people where they're at, which is fundamental because this is a very vulnerable population. A lot of times they may have distrust certainly for, you know, any kind of law enforcement service. They may distrust health care. I mean, they're involved in an activity that could put them in jail, but they're not criminals. They are people who have trouble with substance use.

But what's happened over the last few years is that that substance on the street has become more and more lethal, so people are dying. They don't want to die. Yes, they use drugs, but using drugs shouldn't be a death sentence for people.

It's really important for us as legislators to look at that from “How can we fix this problem?”, not what we think, you know, righteously, these people should do. It shouldn't be sort of an ideological decision that, well, they just need to quit drugs, then. These are vulnerable people who are sometimes under the control of these very powerful drugs. In order to support them, we must start where they're at. We must be there for them in their communities.

One of the significant evidence-based services is supervised consumption services across our province, and those we expanded when we were government. That was making a difference. We had seen a reduction in opiate poisoning deaths just before the election, and the UCP came in and they reversed those decisions. They closed the busiest supervised consumption site in the province when they closed ARCHES in Lethbridge, and they did it with a red herring. They made up some financial concerns about the organization and said: this is why we're closing it down; they're not using funds correctly. Then it came to light that that actually was false. That wasn't even an honest fact that the UCP was using to make the decision.

Over and over we must know that we need evidence-based solutions. Certainly, if you talk to physicians, if you talk to experts in this area, if you talk to front-line workers, we know – the front-line workers, these experts, medical professionals know that harm reduction services make a key difference.

Now, I'm not saying that we don't need a plethora of services. We do. There is no panacea. It's not just one thing. There is no panacea. It's a complex problem, and we need support right from harm reduction services all the way to having treatment and recovery beds, which is where the UCP is focusing most of their attention. That's a good thing. We want them to expand treatment beds – that's great – but not at the expense of harm reduction services.

In the summer of last year, to address this significant issue, we called for an emergency action plan and said that we need the expansion of supervised consumption sites, drug checking, and safe supply. Safe supply is pharmaceutical alternatives to highly toxic drugs. This is a sad piece of rhetoric that the UCP uses as they say, “Oh, these are NDP drug sites” or that we're going to go give free drugs to everybody. That's just to confuse citizens. That's not what it is at all. This is very carefully done, and we want to make sure that people are supported.

Oftentimes with safe supply, you know, these are prescriptions that people get, and it's oftentimes for people who have had repeated difficulty being able to stabilize. Nothing else has worked for them, and it helps them. It keeps them on the planet. It keeps them safe, and it helps them function. Certainly, I've heard many stories from people whose lives have been able to turn around because they had safe supply, and it made such a significant difference for them. Please, let's have this on the record very clearly

that we know there is no panacea and that there is a broad range of services, and recovery beds only will not help.

3:20

We must actually understand that there are many things that are needed. Certainly, the social determinants of health are also a key piece. Again, this UCP government isn't really looking at that at all. Affordable housing: we know that we have about 2.6 per cent of affordable housing in our province available, and the national average is more like 4.9 per cent. So many people who are vulnerable: they need a house, they need a place to live and a place to stabilize and be supported to do that, but instead, you know, the UCP is not investing in those kinds of fundamental services to help vulnerable people. You can't just fix this very complex problem by only one solution, so it's very important that we have an array, a continuum of services, and the big, key issue that the UCP is neglecting is the harm reduction model.

This amendment is certainly important. We need to have law enforcement. We need to make sure there are government policies that are making sure that toxic drugs aren't coming to our country. But I guess one of the egregious things about this motion, that the amendment addresses, is that the United States and many other countries – here in Canada toxic drugs are being created. Why are China and Mexico being singled out? This should not be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we are on amendment A1, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to amendment A1 to Motion 501 from the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. I appreciate both this motion and this amendment. Any time we have a chance to speak about the opioid crisis that we are experiencing here, not just in the province of Alberta but right across the country and indeed in many parts of the world, I think it's very important for us to not just remind the public about the severity of this epidemic but to remind ourselves about what our responsibility is in regard to trying to mitigate this crisis, which is killing and destroying the lives of so many people here in the province. As we've heard many times – I'll say it again – we have between four and five people dying here in the province of Alberta every single day from opioid overdoses.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, this is a crisis that, if we equate it to any other number of activities by human beings, we would, you know, call an emergency and swoop in to turn it around using all means necessary. Four or five people dying every day, not to mention how many people's lives have been ruined. Their health has been ruined by addiction to opioids, and I think we cannot just ignore this. We have to take decisive action using as many of all means which we can throw at this crisis to reduce death rates, reduce addiction rates, and to try to save lives and get people back on track to living a more productive and healthy life.

As the previous speaker from Edmonton-Riverview said very appropriately, we have to use a plethora – I just wanted to see if I could say that, and I did – of different ways to approach this crisis. Certainly, not one particular approach would be a panacea – I did it again; got it – that would solve this issue but, rather, a combination thereof.

I know from my own personal experience with members of my own family that work in addictions centres around the province, safe consumption sites and treatment centres as well, that, one and two, they will often work hand in hand with each other in order to, first, make a connection with an individual perhaps through

the safe consumption site and then moving that person to the treatment that they need over a number of weeks or months or, you know, perhaps for a good deal of their life afterwards. Those things can work together. In fact, they must work together because in between is where you have those deaths occurring every single day.

One of the misconceptions, of course, of this epidemic is that, you know, people are dying on the streets, that they're homeless and they're dying in bus shelters and so forth. That is true – I mean, there are people certainly living a very difficult life and circumstance as houseless individuals – but the vast majority of overdoses and deaths are occurring in homes where people live, in fact, because they are not with somebody and taking the drugs which are unstable and not regulated and often very crudely mixed. If you're doing that alone, then the chances of overdosing and then not getting any emergency treatment through naloxone and so forth – that's where the majority of the deaths are occurring across the province and across North America today.

So we need to kind of aim at all of those things, and the first thing that I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we all need to do is to get onboard, on the same page and not use this crisis as a political wedge issue, suggesting that, you know, we're just trying to foist and give drugs to people and whatever, right? I mean, that's all just peripheral to dealing with the actual problem.

What we do need to do, as we, you know, try to do with other emergencies, is to focus as a single unit and work with health professionals and members from across the aisle to find out what the best thing is, the best place to go is, and so forth. That's why I said from the beginning of my remarks that I appreciate both this motion, because it brings attention to something we need to deal with right here, right now in this House, and the amendment, which I think would help to clarify the language that the hon. member brought forward in this motion in regard to the source of opioid drugs and particularly synthetic opioid drugs.

I mean, although I'm not an expert, certainly, I know that it is a home-grown product, right? You can make fentanyl and carfentanyl and all of the different versions of that right here in Alberta, and they are made right here in Alberta. If they're not just from that source here in this province, then they will be coming from different provinces in Canada, and if they're not coming from different provinces, they'll be coming from the United States of America, a very large country to the south of us that has a similar opioid crisis taking place in their country. I think just removing and changing the motion in regard to talking about foreign countries, including China and Mexico – I mean, singling that out, I think, is just a bit of a reductive element to this motion that takes away from the laser focus that we should try to work with to talk about the opioid crisis here in Alberta.

One of the things I know that I've learned besides targeting the product itself – because it's very porous, right? It's like trying to hold water back with your hands. If you do perhaps find a source and shut down a source of synthetic opioids, then it will come from other places. So while you'll need to do that, for sure, chasing down dealers and sources of the drug, you're not going to stop the crisis just by doing that. You need to have addiction treatment centres that are available and that are in easy proximity to where people are using the drug. As I said, people are using it in their homes, and this is all over the city, all over the province, but being able to have easy access for treatment, addiction treatment centres, I think, is absolutely necessary.

The reason I bring this up is that I'm very concerned about the movement of a treatment centre downtown, just a few blocks from here.

3:30

In April they will be moving it up to Alberta Hospital, and while, you know, we need to use space and have access to treatment for all people in all parts of the city, I just am wondering why we would move a treatment centre from downtown, where there's easy access with buses and affordable housing and so forth and more people, quite frankly, that are using synthetic opioids, up to the far north part of our city. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but is there a bus that goes to the actual Alberta Hospital? Maybe, kind of, sort of, probably not, right?

Ms Sweet: No.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly.

You have to kind of work with what you have, but then you always have to assess: what is the best for the people you're trying to serve? Again, I'm just speaking out on this issue of Alberta Health Services' choice to move an addiction centre out of the downtown and many, many kilometres away in the far north, to Alberta Hospital.

Yeah, you know, if we're looking for ways by which we can reach over the different approaches and views towards this issue around addictions and the opioid crisis that we are experiencing here, here is a small way by which we can do it. I'm saying here now that this motion shows some promise. I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is saying the same thing because she took the time and the effort to help clarify the language around this same motion to make sure that if we are aiming at the sources of production – right? – the places where these drugs come from, then we have to make sure that we are acknowledging that they come from all over the place, including right here in our own province, manufactured illegally, across the country, across North America, and indeed around the world, not just China and Mexico.

Thank you.

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

Just prior to seeing anyone else with regard to discussions on A1, I would just draw to the attention of all those here that sometimes it can be difficult to have amendments go through during private member motions like this. However, just for the benefit of everybody here, this amendment was approved by Parliamentary Counsel, and as well the sponsor did see it in time and was provided notice. Therefore, it is in order.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary . . .

Mr. Jones: South East. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification. I agree with the member opposite that the motion has promise. I'm not sure I see the need for this amendment.

The overprescription of medication was a popular topic of conversation in the early 2000s, and unfortunately over the last two decades this trend has not only increased but has also turned into an epidemic. The opioid epidemic has gotten out of hand so rapidly that Canada is facing a national opioid overdose crisis. This crisis has devastated communities and families as their loved ones are harmed and lost to opioid use. While we can't know the exact mortality rate from chronic high doses, in 2015 the Canadian Medical Association admitted that our available numbers may have severely underestimated the fatalities. Unfortunately, this remains true to this day.

What we are faced with today is more than the undisciplined, unstructured, and arbitrary use of opioid prescriptions. Instead, it is the replacement of drugs such as OxyContin with more potent opioids such as fentanyl and hydromorphone. We are also seeing a boom in street heroin and street fentanyl. As a result, Canada is now

the second-highest per capita user of prescription opioids globally, second only to the United States. In Alberta we have witnessed and continue to see the overwhelming effects of drug abuse in our communities. We continue to hear about it on the news, and increasingly Albertans know someone who has been negatively affected by opioids.

We also have data from the Public Health Agency of Canada on opioid-related harms. The most recent data, from January to June 2021, is disturbing. According to this report 90 per cent of all apparent opioid toxicity deaths during that timeline occurred in B.C., Alberta, and Ontario. Between April and June 2021, 1,720 apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred. That is approximately 19 lives lost to the opioid crisis per day, and to better put the severity of the issue in perspective, this is a 66 per cent increase compared to April to June 2019. Sadly, our young and middle-aged people, primarily males, are disproportionately impacted, with most deaths occurring among individuals age 20 to 49; 30- to 39-year-olds alone represented 31 per cent of accidental opioid toxicity deaths by fentanyl between January and June 2021, and males accounted for an astounding 75 per cent of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in that period. Now, "fentanyl" is a name we've all heard and are familiar with, but what many may not know is that 87 per cent of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2021 involved fentanyl.

To combat drug use in Alberta, including fentanyl, the government has introduced three different pathways to healing, focusing on prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery. This approach allows Albertans and their loved ones to choose a path that makes sense to them. Alberta Health Services also has resources available for harm reduction under the DrugSafe initiative. This initiative focuses on saving lives in the event of an overdose by teaching individuals how to spot an overdose, what to do when it's spotted, and how to respond to opioid poisoning with a naloxone kit. Naloxone kits, introduced in Alberta in 2015, can be a temporary antidote, acting to reverse an overdose until help arrives. These kits are free of charge at pharmacies, and individuals do not need to present a health care card, ID, or prescription to receive them.

Aside from overdose prevention, Alberta also has a range of treatment housing, including recovery housing for both pre- and posttreatment, intensive residential treatment, opioid agonist therapy, and support for families. In each of these pathways dedicated, licensed professionals provide treatment services focusing on providing safe and effective treatment options for addiction.

In addition to these services, those struggling with opioid addiction now have access to Sublocade and Suboxone to treat opioid addiction. These medications stay in a person's system for 30 days, providing stabilization, reducing cravings, significantly enhancing protection against overdose, and helping with maintaining treatment in an outpatient setting. The benefit of this medication is that when properly prescribed and dispensed, a person on either medication can function more normally, with reduced drowsiness and withdrawal symptoms. Both of these medications are safe and can be utilized long term once prescribed.

With voluntary and confidential services such as these available, more than ever before it is vital for the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta. Although Alberta has been tirelessly battling the harmful effects of opioids and other drugs, this is not a battle that we can win alone. Furthermore, it's not an Alberta-specific issue, which is why I also want to call on national and other provincial governments to work together to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids from foreign countries.

Currently fentanyl and cocaine are the most used illegal drugs in Alberta. Fentanyl, which can be a hundred times more potent than morphine, is often transited into Canada from China and Hong Kong through the U.S. while most of the world's cocaine is produced in just three countries: Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. However, its main entry points into Canada are also the Caribbean islands, the U.S.A., and Mexico.

Since January 2020 Canada and the United States have been involved in a bilateral initiative to find solutions to the opioid crisis affecting both nations. Currently the focus of their action plan is combatting opioid trafficking. This includes fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Additionally, they are seeking to address the health consequences of problematic opioid use through the means of institutional co-operation through public health, law enforcement, and border security as well as through information-sharing and best practices.

This collaboration is a great first step. However, given the severity of the issue, it is paramount for Canada to continue to build partnerships and work with domestic and international partners to not only stop the flood of fentanyl, cocaine, and other highly addictive drugs but also to ban the chemicals that make up these substances.

We've experienced two very difficult years. Based on recent data from the National Health Services and further research conducted by Alberta Health Services, the University of Alberta, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, we know that several factors contribute to the worsening of the overdose crisis. These include an increasingly toxic drug supply, increased feelings of isolation, stress, and anxiety, and limited accessibility to services for people who use drugs.

Aside from the negative societal impact of these highly addictive drugs, the opioid crisis has resulted in significant economic losses. Canada lost an estimated \$4.7 billion in labour productivity as a result of this crisis between 2016 and 2019. Between 2007 and 2014 Alberta's estimated economic costs of substance use sat at roughly \$1,300 per capita compared to \$1,100, roughly, for Canada. However, in 2017 alone that number rose in Alberta to nearly \$1,600 per capita compared to Canada's \$1,250.

We know that this growing issue requires immediate intervention, which is why the 2021-2022 operating budget for Mental Health and Addictions has been increased and is focused on recovery-based services. I support these investments and the focus on recovery, and I would like to thank the government, the Minister of Health, and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions for their work to address the opioid crisis.

I encourage all members of this House to support the motion, and I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen on amendment A1.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment, which has been a little bit forgotten here. But I do want to say that I actually appreciate the speech that we just heard from the Member for Calgary-South East. I appreciate the inclusion of significant amounts of quite reasonable arguments and good information. Nothing in what he was saying, you know, raised my concern, and I really appreciate that, because that's not the case with the member who actually moved the motion in this case, who presented a number of facts which I think are demonstrably arguable.

You know, this is too important to be using it as an opportunity for dog whistles and, well, really, mildly racist comments. I'm very concerned that we have a crisis in this province, but of course what we do know is that we have a crisis in the western world. It isn't just in the province of Alberta that we have high rates. Alberta is just one of the worst examples, and of course it seems to fit into a number of other areas of concern we have around things like domestic violence and so on. We seem to have a culture in Alberta that somehow supports some of these negative behaviours, and I'm very concerned about it, and I certainly would love to be able to stand up and support this government in taking a number of steps to address those issues that are causing the underlying structural drivers that lead to these kinds of negative outcomes in the province.

I guess I want to say that I support this motion, because, of course, I do, but I really think it is very important that we approve the amendment. The primary thing that is being changed in the amendment is the reference to two particular countries who have people with brown skin, to the neglect of all the other countries with people that are producing these kinds of drugs. To single out two countries is simply a racist dog whistle, and I don't understand why it's in this particular motion. The concern that we have here is one that is quite substantial and is one that I actually believe everybody in this House is very concerned about. Nobody wants to see this number of deaths in society. You know, to undermine the good work of trying to address an important crisis like this with these kinds of dog whistles is very disconcerting.

I also just want to point out that we are in this position for many complex reasons, but one of the things I want to point out to the House and that the House should remember is that it was actually under the Conservative Prime Minister Harper that the Canadian border services were reduced in April 2012. In fact, the government at the time said that there were about 1,000 members of the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, that received letters with potential job reductions and that about 250 people actually lost their jobs. At the time the president, John Pierre Fortin, the national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, said, quote: these proposed budget cuts would have a direct and real impact on Canadians and our communities across the country; more child pornography entering the country, more weapons, illegal drugs will pass through our borders, not to mention terrorists and sexual predators and hardened criminals. Close quote. I just want to remind the House that our current Premier was a member of the government that actually made those reductions.

I guess I just want to make sure that people in the House understand that there are a number of things that need to be done here. A complex response to the crisis is very important, and, you know, doing these anti-union busts, the dog whistles like were done under the government that our Premier was a part of, making comments about particular countries because the colour of the skin of those people is different than ours – whereas we know that these kinds of drugs are produced significantly in both Canada and the United States and need to be stopped.

So I guess I would like to return to the essence of the actual motion itself, which is that we need to actually take responsibility as a society to look at what the structural drivers are that have moved people toward drug use and have resulted in that drug use having such a devastating effect on them. When we do look at those kinds of drivers, we see that they are largely people who are disenfranchised from the successful aspects of life: people who have been struggling because of unemployment, people who have been victims of violence and other forms of trauma like residential schools, those kinds of things.

We know that if we really want to stop drug use, we have to address all of those kinds of things. That includes a complex array of responses that deal with them in primary and secondary and tertiary ways; that is, that prevent people from moving in that direction, that identify people who are involved in drug abuse and get them out of the system, and, finally, a system that looks at the ways in which we can ensure that anybody who has been involved in drug abuse is able to recover and return to society in a good way. That includes a number of responses. Of course, it includes things like mental health services, addiction services. It clearly, if anybody reads the research at all coming in from around the world, includes supervised consumption sites. It's one of the most studied mental health interventions that we've seen in the last 10 years, and the research is absolutely clear that they have an important role.

I'm always discouraged to hear members on the opposite side somehow reframe that as if what they're about is giving drugs to people who are using them illegally just in order to yet again blow another dog whistle when that is not at all what the research says and not at all what has ever been proposed in this House. We know that they're bringing up these items in order to mislead the public and put that kind of information in *Hansard* juxtaposed in such a way that would make people think that somehow that was proposed or that that's ever happened in the province of Alberta, and it has not. And if they suggest that it has happened, I can tell you that they are engaging in intentional misdirection of the people of the province of Alberta.

Now, what we do know is that supervised consumption sites are absolutely not enough to resolve this kind of a problem, and they never were proposed as such. What they intend to do is that they intend to keep people alive so that the other aspects of intervention can be brought into place.

Now, there are likely to have been some complications with the supervised injection sites that we have in this province because it is new, comparatively, only in the last 20 years. But that doesn't mean that we should get rid of them. That means that we should actually have a government that spends some time trying to understand what the complexities are, what the problems are, and to resolve those problems. It's very discouraging when we see the government, instead of taking a responsible position around trying to make things right, take this irresponsible position and say that we should get rid of them.

Anybody who took cancer treatment in the 1970s will tell you that often the treatment received for cancer was dramatically worse than the cancer itself in terms of its effect on your body and so on. But we didn't say: let's get rid of cancer treatment. We went on, and we said: we must be able to do these kinds of things better. This government has been taking the ridiculous position that somehow, because there are problems with something that has been demonstrated by research to be effective, we should throw out the baby with the bathwater, and I think it's because they just want to, you know, blow that dog whistle that works with people who have not had the opportunity to be informed about the information that comes out from the research. It's really unacceptable that we find ourselves in this place.

I certainly hope that they will support this amendment, because the racist undertones here are completely unnecessary.

3:50

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 23(h). For the third time in the speech the member opposite has now implied that either members generally or particularly, as his first reference, the Member for Cardston-Siksika, his, quote, mildly racist comments – I find this absolutely inappropriate. It is below the member opposite. He understands that this good debate ought to be continued without drawing into question and disrepute the member's credibility and his care for all people no matter who they are or where they come from. It is unparliamentary. It is causing disruption, and the member ought to apologize.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen to respond on the point of order.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. It's certainly not a point of order. The member's words may have hurt members' feelings, but what the member said is that this motion has undertones which are racist. As a person of colour, as a person of Asian descent I understand when things were used such as Wuhan virus, China virus, how that has impacted communities, in particular Chinese communities and others from Asian countries. What the member said, that's factual. I understand that you don't experience it that way, but the member specifically referred to the motion having undertones which are racist, not to any member of the House.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Thank you very much for those arguments, hon. members.

At this stage I am going to err on the side of believing that this was a matter of debate. Now, with that stated, I think that it is clearly obvious that the words that the hon. member has been choosing during the course of this debate have, if anything, directed this Assembly towards perhaps a bit of disorder. I would use this opportunity to recommend that the hon. member choose perhaps some less controversial language for the last 30 seconds of his time allotted.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: My point has been made, and that is that the inclusion of these two countries has caused disorder in this House, and therefore if you actually believe that we should not cause disorder in the House, you should vote for the amendment in order to be consistent.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak to Motion 501, opioid crisis, introduced by my colleague the Member for Cardston-Siksika – thank you – and address the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Now, in regard to the amendment we as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta can only speak to those things within our jurisdiction, which is why I believe the Member for Cardston-Siksika put forward the language that he did in his original motion to prevent the “export.” Those are within the realms of our government and our jurisdiction to do, and that's why I do support his motion.

When the opposition member changes that to “import,” that moves into a different jurisdiction. The government of Alberta does not have control over the national borders. That is a federal government jurisdiction and/or including international governments and their jurisdiction, which is why I will not be supporting this amendment, though I do understand what they are trying to do and would love to support the removal of that kind of trafficking of illegal drugs around the world. But we do have to stay within the jurisdiction that we have governance over. That’s why I fully support what the Member for Cardston-Siksika brought forward. Just to repeat it for my speech and to readdress the debate today:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta and urge the government of Canada to make all efforts in conjunction with its allies to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids.

This addiction crisis continues to have a devastating effect on many communities within Alberta, particularly Lethbridge. That’s why I believe that this is such an important topic. It continues to affect individuals all across our province and throughout all of Canada. Last year, in July, I had the honour of touring recovery and support homes in and around Lethbridge with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. I wanted to take a moment to recognize these programs and organizations and talk about their remarkable impact on the community in Lethbridge. For one, counter to what may have been stated by the members opposite within the NDP caucus, Lethbridge’s mobile safe consumption site is a temporary and ongoing solution that is part of the continuum of care. We did indeed as a government close down the ARCHES-run supervised consumption site for many reasons, including a lot of inappropriate financial transactions, which I don’t think I’ll get into here, but I will acknowledge that . . .

Mr. Feehan: Because they were disproven.

Mr. Neudorf: No. They were absolutely proven, including many personal trips to Spain and Las Vegas and Denver and all kinds of things, raising their personal wages from \$80,000 a year to \$300,000 a year, all kinds of things that were proven even if not, quote, unquote, illegal.

An Hon. Member: It’s the NDP way.

Mr. Neudorf: Exactly.

It directly resulted in a huge increase in illegal trafficking of drugs, a huge increase in crime. And, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said, one part of the solution isn’t everything. There are multiparts needed, but that government only did one part and left Lethbridge in a huge mess. So I’m very proud to be part of a government that brought additional funding for treatment, for recovery, to continue that care and not just abandon them to a life lost in addiction. Whether they can go somewhere inside or outside to consume those drugs is not the point. The point is that we didn’t abandon those people. Our government sought treatment to make sure that they could get out of that cycle of addiction, and I’m very proud of the investments that we have made to continue that, which is why I’m proud to stand with the Member for Cardston-Siksika in his motion so that we can continue urging the government to continue those kinds of treatments.

Back to my other comments. Southern Alcare Manor is a 25-bed residential recovery treatment facility for individuals who have a sincere desire to abstain from alcohol, drugs, gambling, or any other addiction and get the stable living environment that they need during their recovery. Streets Alive offers recovery-focused programs for men and women in separate housing, including

emotional counselling and postaddiction support while being Christ centred. Lethbridge Housing Authority strives to provide safe, secure, and affordable housing for many people who need it in the community.

Fresh Start Recovery, originally named Napi Lodge and established in 1976: they are still operating, Mr. Speaker, and after a name change to South Country then in 2020 combined with Fresh Start Recovery Centre in Calgary. The friendly acquisition sought to combine Fresh Start’s programming and leadership with South Country’s history and facilities, making for a recipe for successful long-term addiction recovery in Lethbridge. Some of our government’s funding will increase that bed count up to 100, with an additional 75 beds within Lethbridge. Their treatment program follows the disease concept. We see addiction as a progressive illness and often fatal if untreated. This illness is a chronic brain disorder with many contributing factors. The good news is that with treatment and a recovery program you can live a healthy, happy, and productive life. Recovery is real, attainable, and sustainable.

The Blood Tribe spirit home detox centre. The director of Bringing the Spirit Home, Jacen Abrey, said: it was last year, which was 2018, in November when we began seeing a real spike in overdoses; it was a revolving door, and we need to change that. One of the elders explains that we need to put a stick in the spokes, which is to stop the wheel from turning. They have done an incredible job bringing their culture and their heritage into the treatment for individuals of First Nations, Métis, and other backgrounds as well, including sweats in their traditional sweat lodge.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to explain a little bit about one experience I had to go through, their cultural experience that they use to help those who are caught in addiction get back to their roots. I joined it with a number of First Nations individuals and did a sweat, and it was quite an incredible experience. They took the time to explain how they build their lodge. They took the time to talk about the significance of the wood that they used, the willow branches and other branches from other trees that are sacred to them, how they cover it with hides. Then you go inside. It’s completely dark inside, and they bring in rocks approximately the size of your head, a number of them in the middle of the pit, and those rocks are extremely hot.

They did a very mild sweat, but it was pretty hot to me, Mr. Speaker. They would put that in there. We would come in. Basically, you’re just in a swimsuit kind of idea because it gets pretty warm. Then they do a little bit of their knowledge sharing and their wisdom from their elders. They talk about their stories of creation. They talk about their stories of healing. They talk about being in touch with nature and their surroundings. They close the doorway, that’s hide covered, and it’s completely dark and completely silent. They add water, sprinkle water on top of those rocks, and you can actually hear the water sizzling. Sometimes you can hear the rocks expanding and contracting. But that’s it. Silence can last from 30 minutes to 90 minutes or something like that, and they take that time to meditate and contemplate what they’re there to do, what they’re there trying to achieve, and to connect to the spiritual source of their religion. It’s a very powerful time, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to have taken the time to join with First Nations on that journey.

4:00

Each of these organizations and programs makes a tremendous impact on the lives of so many people who live in Lethbridge. These programs meet people who are often at the lowest points of their lives, and they help to provide hope and opportunities. I’m so proud of the work they continue to do to support the recovery of these

individuals throughout the community of Lethbridge. I look forward to further conversations on improving our collaboration and efforts across the province and in partnership with other provinces in our fine country to support individuals suffering from addiction.

I also want to talk about our Alberta government's steps to support individuals who suffer from addictions. Alberta's government has committed to an investment of \$140 million over four years to implement these new addiction and mental health strategies that will improve access, as I said before, to the continuum of health care services, including \$40 million specifically committed to addressing the opioid crisis. [A timer sounded]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That does mean that this motion has received 55 minutes of debate. Therefore, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika to rise to close.

An Hon. Member: What about the amendment?

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. Just for clarity we've looked into that. The process is that there'll be a close of debate, and then we'll vote on the amendment, and then we'll vote on the motion other than a government motion after that.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments brief. I will start by saying that I will not be supporting the amendment moved by the members opposite. I believe that they have failed to make a compelling argument as to why we should support it, and frankly I disagree very much with the arguments they have made and the way they've made them. Taking their level of decorum down to simply throwing insults across the aisle, like calling members on this side of the House, myself included, racist, is simply not an appropriate way to make an argument in favour of your amendment. While that member, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, is looking to use inflammatory language so he can clip that and put it on his Twitter for his 30 Twitter followers . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: . . . we're in here actually taking concrete steps to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. A point of order has been called by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. The hon. member.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) I will explain what the member said. That's part of the *Hansard*. The member was clearly imputing false motives, that he wants to clip it or something. For many of us it's an important issue. [interjections] It's not a matter of laughing at all. Not at all. We are debating a serious issue: 1,000-plus Albertans have died because of drug overdose. I personally know people who have died of drug overdose. We do want to help this government. We do want to participate in this debate. Accusing other members, especially their intentions: that's false. That's offside these rules and should be ruled out of order.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen, I believe, in response on this point of order.

Mr. Schow: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. It's not a point of order. I'm not imputing false motives. It's a matter of debate. If that member takes offence to me suggesting that he's clipping something for 30 Twitter followers or more, then that's certainly his prerogative. But throwing insults across the aisle and calling us racist I would find to be far more offensive and creates significantly more disruption within this Chamber, yet that point of order was certainly ruled down by yourself and understandably so. So I would say: not a point of order, a matter of debate, and let me finish my closing arguments.

The Acting Speaker: I'm actually surprised at the turn that this point of order took. It was argued slightly differently than I anticipated. What I will say, though, just to wrap it up: I believe that this is not a point of order at this stage. What I would say, though, is that previously I had said a warning with regard to the language used. I would say that if that language – we all know what we're talking about right now – has the ability to create disorder, well, then that doesn't really lead us to effective debate. What I would do is that I would give the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika the rest of his time, 4:13, and ask him, like I did with the previous member, Edmonton-Rutherford, to potentially choose some words that may not lead towards disorder in this House.

The hon. member to please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, I will be brief. In closing, I just want to say that things like fentanyl, carfentanil, and the chemicals used to make these kinds of drugs are not dangerous because they're illegal; they're illegal because they are dangerous. It is on us as members of this Legislature, those who are making laws on behalf of this province, to support any effort necessary to stop the import and distribution of these chemicals and these drugs.

I support this motion; I do not support the amendment. I believe that the spirit of this motion is to better the lives of all Albertans, and as someone who lives in the south in and near communities that are being devastated by opioid addiction, it is incumbent upon us to take action. I believe that this is one of many steps that we can do to take that action, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to vote against the amendment and in favour of the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That concludes the debate.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 23: Ms Lovely]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any members wishing to join on consideration? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: I guess I will. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne, the speech that shared the vision that this government has for the province of Alberta. Now, I will say that it was definitely long on words but very short on details, full of rhetoric to speak to the government's base and ignoring the majority of the needs of Albertans. There was not a single program or offer to help Alberta families struggling to pay their monthly bills, put food on their tables, and fill their vehicles with gas so that they can go to work. The vision that this government has presented to the people of Alberta has not inspired confidence and is so far from the reality that Alberta families are facing.

The people of Edmonton-Manning expected more. The Premier may be celebrating that his latest budget is back on track, but Albertans are not because they're not seeing the benefits of this budget. My constituents are not running surpluses, their children aren't running surpluses, and in fact, based on the decisions made by this government, they're falling farther and farther behind.

Our health care heroes, who've been working throughout COVID to keep our communities safe, are not seeing their work conditions improving. They are not seeing more doctors or nurses entering into our health care system to help out with the overburdened workload. As more and more first responders are burning out, taking a leave of absence, or leaving the profession altogether, we are not seeing replacements to come and help those working around the clock.

Parents who have children attending schools that are over capacity and are not able to have space to learn are afraid that their children are falling behind. This Premier's throne speech and his budget do nothing to address any of those concerns. In fact, we will see over 1,000 fewer teachers compared to the previous government. While students and teachers have been facing huge uncertainty in K to 12 education, switching between in-person and online learning, growing class sizes, and reduced supports for students with disabilities, our schools need more teachers and more supports rather than less. This, of course, is on top of the increased school fees that just came out, increased educational property taxes, and asking schools to find revenue in other places.

[The Speaker in the chair]

These are real concerns that the government likes to label as divisive politics when, in fact, it is the direction that this government has taken that has created those very concerns. It's not politics to care about our neighbours and our children. It is not politics to want to take care of our communities and realize the responsibilities that communities have to take care of each other. The fact that the government does not recognize these concerns speaks to the disconnect that this government has to the people of this province.

4:10

My constituents still want to see a strong public health care system that is properly funded, with access to health care professionals that have the support that they need when they need it. The lack of doctors in rural Alberta, to the point where many Albertans do not have family doctors, should be concerning for this government. To know that ambulance services are not available to provide emergent care should be a concern to this government, yet we didn't see that discussed in the throne speech. Well, Mr. Speaker, if making sure that rural Albertans have access to doctors and to ambulance services is something that this government wants to continue to ignore, then I'm proud to be on this side of the House.

This government needs to take our public health care seriously. To ensure that Albertans have access to public health care should be this government's priority. However, we don't see it.

We see a government that likes to continue to go back to their old conservative talking points. They've forgotten about the needs to diversify the economy, to get off the royalty roller coaster, and to properly support our emerging industries. Albertans are tired of waiting for this government to wake up and realize that there is so much more economic opportunity. This could include properly funding our postsecondary institutions so that we know that they are the engine of our province's economic future and the economic lifeline of our communities. We may have seen seats increase in the recent budget, but we see none for our agriculture postsecondary, our technologies related to agriculture, and anything that would help support rural Albertans staying, learning in postsecondary institutions, and then continuing to live in their local communities.

There is no money to restore postsecondary for the first time, and in fact more than half of the funding for universities, colleges, and polytechs is coming out of tuition, so out of students' pockets, one more downloading of costs onto Albertans at a time when this government continues – I'm sure they're going to do it right now – to talk about the fact that they have a surplus. Edmonton-Manning constituents are tired of their tax dollars being wasted on useless war rooms, bogus inquiries, and on long-lost court cases instead of being used to help get well-paying jobs and to grow our economy. Alberta families are tired of dealing with the mountains of debt and record utility bills while this UCP government continues to ignore them.

The throne speech and this budget were a farce, Mr. Speaker. A balanced budget is not balanced when Albertans are paying more everywhere else. It is like asking Albertans to give money to a friend from their savings to pay their expenses while their friend puts that money into their own savings account and hopes that maybe their friend will come over and help them shovel their driveway, similar to hoping that we should trust this government that if they pay their taxes, they'll actually get the services that they deserve when, in fact, we know that they keep cutting them. It is a consistent theme with this government to download costs onto Albertans and continue to ignore the economic potential of this province.

It is time to acknowledge that talking about diversification and supporting all industries should be the priority. We know that our world is changing, that technology drives all economies, from oil and gas to agriculture to education. We need people who have the expertise to move forward in our changing economy. That is why it is important that we attract companies that are set up for the technological economy that is coming, and we also need to make sure we're educating our future leaders to take on those roles in diversifying our economy. This can only be done when there is a commitment to understand the needs of those technologies, encouraging companies to set up, be job creators, and promoting students to be educated and then stay and work in Alberta.

That is why we called for the reinstatement of the Alberta investor tax credit. That program was a huge success, and without it businesses have and continue to state that they're looking at moving elsewhere, meaning that the jobs and investments will leave with them. That's a disappointment. It should be a disappointment to this government, it should be a disappointment to Albertans, and I know it's a disappointment to an emerging and growing industry.

This industry will help increase office capacity in Calgary, but instead we see again this government leaving Calgary behind. Calgary has already hit a grim new high under this government of 33 per cent for office vacancies. Mr. Speaker, there is so much potential in Alberta to build a diverse and vibrant economy, an

economy that Albertans want to be a part of. I was hoping that during this throne speech we would see that vision, yet once again we didn't.

In closing, I ask the government to stop increasing costs onto Albertans while inflation is at a record high, stop undermining our public service and protect our public health care, and stop ignoring our economic potential, our economic future. Not one of my constituents has brought up the fact that the UCP has balanced the budget, but countless have sent me their utility bills to show me how much more they're paying. Not one rural Albertan has pointed out to me that we have a surplus, but they have shared with me their experiences travelling hundreds of kilometres to get a routine treatment that is no longer offered in their community or the struggles they're having about getting a family doctor. Not one farmer has told me that not running a provincial deficit is good for their business, but I regularly hear them talk about the supply chain issues that haven't been addressed and the inflation that is driving up their operational costs.

Albertans are struggling, Mr. Speaker, and the throne speech and the budget that was tabled by this government fail to acknowledge any of it. Albertans want to see their communities invested in. They want to see support in growing new economies. They want to see real help with their utility bills and their insurance costs. They want to see solutions to the issues facing our health care system. We needed solutions today, but once again we are looking back and asking ourselves: why didn't this government do more?

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in response to the throne speech. Let me begin by saying that last year has been very difficult for many Albertans. We have seen the fourth and fifth waves of COVID-19 hit Alberta and ongoing hardship because of its impacts on our economy. Many small businesses, including a few in my riding, were shut for good, and far too many families have lost their loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tens of thousands of surgeries were cancelled or delayed, and far too many Albertans, losing their family physicians, were not getting the care they needed because of the pointless battle with doctors and health professionals started by this government.

Now we are seeing record inflation and a steep increase in the cost of living and the same inaction from this government. Albertans are facing rising costs on pretty much everything, from car insurance to energy bills to tuition, postsecondary fees. In fact, electricity and natural gas prices have doubled, and for so many Albertans they're becoming unaffordable.

4:20

Over the last few weeks I have heard from a number of Albertans, a number of my constituents about those rising costs. Many people in my riding are on fixed incomes, and their budgets are really hit hard. Just picking up groceries, even the basics, is more expensive. The cost of everything, from milk to rent, is at a record high. Certainly, we can agree that Albertans need help, and they deserve a government focused on making life affordable for them.

This government and the Premier could have used this as an opportunity to take tangible steps to help Albertans and Alberta families. They could have helped by reinstating the cap to insurance rates, reindexing income tax brackets so Albertans will have more money in their pockets on payday, and they could have reindexed the assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH,

benefit. They could have reindexed seniors' benefits, and they could have taken meaningful steps to alleviate the pressures on Albertans' utility costs.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't see any of that. Instead, we saw a budget that increases park fees, increases school fees, increases property tax, increases income tax, and has a phony gas rebate that will never help a single Alberta family with their utility bills. Instead of helping Albertans who are coming out of this two-year-long pandemic, this government is forcing Alberta families and businesses to go further into debt.

I constantly hear that the changes to the fleet insurance and the removal of the insurance cap are affecting northeast Calgary really hard. Many cab drivers who have been hit hard from COVID are now paying thousands more in insurance because of changes the UCP government brought in.

If you go to northeast Calgary – Mr. Speaker, it's the most beautiful part of the city – you will see that there are still many homes that are waiting for repairs from that hailstorm that hit northeast Calgary. You will see people driving hail-damaged vehicles from that hailstorm. We didn't see anything to help those in northeast Calgary. At least they expected that there may be a school in the budget for the growing communities in northeast Calgary. We didn't see that in the last budget. We didn't see that in this budget.

People expected that the government would present a real plan to create jobs, diversify the economy, and set our province on a long-term and sustainable recovery path and not just double down on their failed economic policies. As we all know, our economy is tied to the price of oil, and the increase in revenue that we are seeing now is because of that increase in global oil prices. We are seeing prices north of \$100, \$112, \$113, that were last seen in 2008 or '09, and on these prices a traffic cone could have balanced the budget. Instead of helping Albertans with their budgets, instead on building, hiring, and growing our local economies, most companies are now passing the money directly in dividends to the shareholders, many of whom live outside of this province.

When we talk to small-business owners and Alberta families, it is clear that they are not feeling the prosperity and the boom this government is claiming are in Alberta. The truth is that many families, many Albertans are telling me and telling my colleagues that they're falling further behind. Inflation is driving up the cost of everything, from ground beef to gasoline to their groceries, and the policies of this government are driving up many more costs, are adding costs to already struggling Albertans. We are paying more in income tax, the bracket creep thing, property tax, school fees, tuition, more interest on student loans, more camping fees, and vastly more for car insurance and utilities, all thanks to the UCP.

Meanwhile the cash boom is doing wonders for the provincial treasury. As expected, we see a significant surplus, which will grow with the price of oil. But let me say this again. Balancing the budget with 100-plus dollars a barrel of oil is easy, but it's tough to do when putting Albertan families' budgets first. The government fails when they put the province's budget in the black by making Albertans' household budgets go into the red, and that is exactly what this Premier is doing, what this government is doing.

Instead of reattaching the personal income tax bracket to inflation, the Premier chose to take more money out of Albertans' pockets, 800-plus million dollars. That's a significant sum of money. This Premier used to rage against the federal Liberals for their policy of bracket creep. The Premier called these policies enormous, insidious, vicious, and God knows what else. These are the ways to hike income tax in a sneaky way, but now it's a perfectly good policy when balancing his own budget.

Also, I mentioned earlier that there is a range of benefits that Albertans rely on that the UCP has made cuts to. The UCP has disconnected them from inflation, which means that for some Albertans, the most vulnerable ones, their real buying power will shrink with the rising cost of living. The child and family tax benefit, the seniors' benefit, income support benefit, assured income for the severely handicapped benefit: they are all deindexed by this government and devalued by inflation, again, thanks to this UCP government's policies.

4:30

So Albertans who receive AISH are surviving below the poverty line, and the UCP policy will take about \$1,000 worth of yearly buying power away from them by 2023. Again, this could have been reversed, but instead the UCP chose to balance the budget and pat themselves on the back while they were balancing it on the backs of the most vulnerable in this province. I think that these are the kinds of policies, these are the reasons that Albertans can no longer trust this government to govern this province, to manage our health care, to manage our education system, or to manage the services that are so critically important and that Albertans rely on every single day.

They are making students fall further behind. COVID-19 was the largest disruption to our K to 12 education system ever seen, and we needed investments to make sure that students have safe schools to go to and that they have resources to catch up and are prepared for the future, and we are not seeing that from this government. We will instead see 1,000 fewer teachers now than under the previous NDP government. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the UCP is also driving up school fees, education property tax, and asking schools to find other sources of revenue. This means that \$117 million more are being downloaded on Alberta families.

In short, this government's direction is not . . .

The Speaker: On consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's throne speech are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Her Majesty has devoted the past 70 years to leading her people and the Commonwealth of nations. Her example has inspired countless Albertans and, quite frankly, people around the world to devote their time to building a better province and a better world. Their leadership, their volunteerism, community spirit has made Alberta the greatest place to live, work, invest, and raise a family in Canada, truly a unique and incredible place and people.

Twenty twenty-two marks Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee, the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. What an achievement, to serve in a public role for 70 years. Now think about this. The average MLA serves eight years. Very, very few

would make it past 20, and Her Majesty has served 70. Truly, we must congratulate her and hold her up with respect.

Her Majesty has said that she wants her platinum jubilee celebrations to inspire a sense of togetherness and to help us look to the future with confidence, so that is part of what we want to try to accomplish here. This milestone gives us the opportunity to celebrate all of the ways that Albertans have exemplified the leadership that Her Majesty has modelled. It gives us the opportunity to tell the stories of Albertans who are a part of that story. I'd like to share one of those stories with you now, a connection that an Albertan has had with Her Majesty and the Royal Family and part of the Commonwealth.

I tell you the story of one Bill Collins. He's actually been inducted into the Ponoka-based Canadian cowboy hall of fame. Bill Collins was inducted on May 9, 1996. He's played a major role in the preservation of western Canada's ranching history and the tradition as a cutting horse and rodeo judge, a trainer, and a prize-winning competitor. One of those naturals who are born to the saddle, he has been an unofficial ambassador for Canada, sharing his rodeo skills and enthusiasm with equestrians around the world, particularly young people. He demonstrated cutting horse practice to Prince Philip in 1962, and this encounter led to an ongoing relationship with Prince Philip and ultimately to a three-month royal cutting horse tour and demonstration across Great Britain in 1964 with Prince Philip as the event's patron. Alberta has many such connections. That's just one small story, part of our relationship as Albertans to Her Majesty and to her service and to the good that she's done in our province and our world.

Supporting young people is the key to building this province's future. It's some of what Bill Collins has done, some of what Her Majesty has contributed to, and by establishing awards and scholarships in honour of the Queen's platinum jubilee, we would celebrate students' contributions and help them pursue further education and other opportunities. These awards and scholarships will replace the awards and scholarships that were created in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee, 50 years. We're just updating those existing awards to reflect that it's now 70 years of Her Majesty's service. The monetary value of the medallion and scholarships will be increased to \$7,000 in honour of Her Majesty's 70 years of service from the previous \$5,000 at the 50-year celebration.

In addition to the new awards for students and young people, a one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medal will be awarded to 7,000 deserving Albertans in 2022. The medallion will recognize a broad range of achievements – I should say “medal,” actually – from volunteerism to reconciliation efforts and other noteworthy contributions. We are expecting that the first set of medals will be presented to the Queen's platinum jubilee weekend on June 2 to 5, and the medals will continue to be awarded to nominees throughout the rest of this year.

Finally, this act would also designate all past, present, and future members of Alberta's Executive Council as honorary members upon their retirement. Generations of dedicated public servants have helped shape the course of this province's history. Allowing them to continue using the honorific of the position is just a small gesture in appreciation for their devotion to Alberta, and in the spirit of togetherness it's completely nonpartisan. It applies to all parties now and in the future and is something that I think is just a small recognition of the service that members of council do contribute. I should say that there is no monetary benefit to this, that there are no executive powers attributed to it; it's purely a recognition as we recognize all regular Albertans for their service.

Looking to the past 70 years of the Queen's reign and our province's history helps us to appreciate the progress we've made,

how far we've come in 70 years as a people here in Alberta. It also helps us reflect on the future that we want to build. We need to do that by recognizing that the strength of this province has always and will in the future lie in the people who live here. This legislation will help inspire all of us and support the next generation in reaching new heights and creating a new future. So, Mr. Speaker, I am asking all members of this House for their support of Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act of 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 1. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the Member for Camrose should time allow.

4:40

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. I would like to start by saying that I think it's wonderful any time we have the ability to honour young people in the province. Being able to give them credit and acknowledgement is so important.

I do have some concerns with this. I would start by saying that this bill is clearly – clearly – another example of how out of touch this UCP government is with Albertans. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I'm talking to people in Edmonton-Castle Downs and all across the province, no one was asking for Bill 1 to be a piece of legislation that gave the honorary title to members of this Legislature. This does nothing to focus on jobs or our economy. It's just confusing why their number one priority is using this Assembly to honour their friends and their supporters leading up to the election and then giving themselves access to a fancy title.

I think that the fact that this piece of the legislation is included in something that is intended to honour Her Majesty and to honour children and youth in this province – why it's being coupled with this honorary title doesn't make sense. It absolutely does not make sense. It takes away from the young people of this province who should be receiving recognition, not your friends that need to have these letters after their name and the honorific title.

I find it pretty rich that the Premier believes that his scandal-ridden cabinet is deserving of being called honourable. In everything that's happening currently, that this was brought forward . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically: uses language which is abusive, insulting, creates disorder. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs just suggested that the Premier's cabinet is not honourable at all and that, in fact, they are quote, unquote, scandal ridden. This is not language that in any way benefits Albertans and, frankly, causes disorder within this Chamber. To suggest that the Premier's cabinet is scandal ridden and not worthy of the title "honourable" is in itself dishonourable to say. This is language that creates disorder within this Chamber, and I would ask that member to apologize and retract.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, (h), (i), and (j) do not apply to this, as the Speaker can be in this room and see that it's the very opposite of anything resembling disorder. In fact, it's a matter of debate and definition in regard to language that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs chose to use.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. What I would say is that this isn't a point of order. It's a matter of debate. The only thing that moves close to a point of order is implying that a minister of cabinet is not honourable, because, of course, that is their title here inside the Assembly. But having some discussion around what cabinet is or isn't of course is a matter of debate. I don't know the exact words that the member used with respect to referring to members of cabinet as being not honourable. If she did that, then that is a point of order. However, the remaining portions of the comments are definitely a matter of debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Debate Continued

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess this is a touchy subject when it comes to the title "honourable" for life. This piece of legislation is doing just that. It's providing a space to have the title for life alongside building up students and recognizing their contributions to the province. It just seems ridiculous that the two of these things are going together. I have some concerns about why this would be slipped into something that is clearly easy to support. When we want to acknowledge young people in this province doing some incredible things, that is something that I think Alberta should continue, and we should be able to acknowledge and hand out recognition in ways of scholarship, in ways of medals, in ways of medallions. But to link that portion of the Queen's jubilee in with the title "honourable" for life just doesn't make sense.

I think it takes away from the young people of our province, from the individuals that are doing great work in this province and deserve recognition. To lump former members of cabinet into this is confusing, and it doesn't make sense. I think there are quite a few questions that I have when we get into further debate, specifically around Committee of the Whole, regarding the medal specifically, some of the questions I have around that, but at this time I will take my seat and listen to the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose if she still would like to speak to the matter at present.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour as an MLA to serve the people of Alberta and to have taken my oath to the Queen. I find it quite astonishing that our Queen is the first British monarch to mark a 70th anniversary, 70 years of service, and Her Majesty is still determined to get up every day and serve. She makes one amazing role model for all Canadians.

This is a very welcome update to a similar bill, that was passed over 20 years ago, that recognized Her Majesty's 50 years of service. This update is also a great example as to why old bills or motions need to be amended or removed. Times change, and we need to stay committed to ensuring that we are reflecting what is current and reflects best what Albertans are experiencing in current or future life.

During the 70 years of tenure Queen Elizabeth has done a lot for Canada and the people of Alberta, and this bill is a perfect way to honour her loyalty and continued service to Alberta and the rest of the Commonwealth. During these years Her Majesty has been with us through it all as we have faced uncertain times and hardships like

recessions, world threats, pandemics, and so much more. Just like many of us have had to manage and navigate the ever-changing landscapes of time with a bright and exciting future in store, I can't wait to be there to experience newer and more exciting milestones ahead. By recognizing this historic milestone as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her historic 70 years of reign, it's amazing to see that the government anticipates that \$70,000 in funding will be provided through this program to recipients.

These recipients are normal, everyday Albertans going above and beyond the call to action. These Albertans are hard-working individuals who have helped change this province for the betterment of all current and future Albertans through volunteerism, public service, and community leadership. Every day I hear about young leaders making a difference within our various communities, and this bill is just another way we can pay them back and recognize all of their hard work that they have done for their communities. These awards and scholarships will go towards helping these young individuals further their goals, aspirations, and will give them a form of accomplishment they can be proud of and use as support to further their goals of making Canada and Alberta a better place for everyone.

I remember that when I was a girl at the age of six, I wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth as I was enamoured with her at that tender age. The lady-in-waiting wrote me . . . [interjection]

Mr. Williams: I'm remiss to interrupt the hon. member. I have two purposes for the intervention. Number one, truth be told, I really just wanted to use the prop of Her Majesty behind me, and I'm positioned perfectly with the lens for the viewers at home to see her radiant beauty many years ago. Now, the second purpose and the question: as you were about to explain about when you were a young lady – perhaps this ties in well – could you talk a bit about some of the virtues that you see Her Majesty the Queen having that would be good as a role model for young Albertans today? Thank you to both of you.

4:50

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Member. I do appreciate you pointing out the fact that this beautiful portrait is here of Her Majesty. It's one of my favourites. I mean, we have two, but they're both equally favourites, and we're very fortunate to have this portrait here. Some traits that Queen Elizabeth possesses: I mean, there are so many great things about her. She is steadfast; she is constantly steadfast under pressure. We can always count on the Queen because she has such a great sense of responsibility, as comes with her role as Queen. For me, I think that's the most important one, and I do look forward to a further dialogue with you because I know you, too, have great admiration for the Queen. Thank you, Member.

As I was saying, when I was a girl at the age of six, I wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth as I was enamoured with her at that tender age, and the lady-in-waiting wrote me back. I'll never forget that moment when I opened the letter. I encourage those who have been hesitant to write letters to their leader to do so because you just may get the same excitement and surprise that I still hold dear to this day.

It is also encouraging to see that Bill 1 will designate all former, current, and future Alberta cabinet ministers as honorary members of the Executive Council. As ministers serve in a higher capacity, it's welcoming to know that their years of past, current, and future work for this great province and its people will be honoured.

As we continue to honour our future leaders, I hope and share the same sentiments as all my other colleagues when I say that it has been a great honour to serve under the Queen for what is now the 30th Legislature, and I will continue to show pride and honour as

Her great Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, continues to reign, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 1, are there others? I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has risen.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I humbly recognize that I stand here today within the capacity of an elected leader. However, I couldn't be more ordinary than any other Albertan with the desire and hope to witness positive outcomes within their community. That's why I entered the world of politics in the first place, to effect meaningful, positive change.

Effective leaders are not as popular culture would have it: standing up on a pedestal, pointing fingers, and telling people what to do. Through my life's experiences I can tell you that the most effective leaders are not the ones who impose their will on people. This stems from an offshoot of entitlement, one which, unfortunately, we witness so often today. We certainly see that with our current Prime Minister here in Canada, someone who doesn't demonstrate the qualities of leadership that so many people truly want to see. He represents a level of populism, popularity, someone who just goes with the wind and supports whatever he thinks is popular. But as we go through life, we're going to understand that what's popular is not always right and that what's right is not always popular.

In the United States we saw that with their previous President, who was popular because he was a TV personality and because he had a lot of money and was very outrageous. It's unfortunate, because the Republican Party in the United States had a lot of good candidates out there, and it's disappointing that we didn't quite get that quality shining through. In this House we see across the way a group that attempts to get into government, a group that supports socialism, and a group that probably secretly idolizes what is going on in Europe right now and supports these atrocities that are happening . . .

The Speaker: I would just provide caution about implying members of the Assembly . . . [interjection] Order. If the hon. Member for Peace River wants to call a point of order, he can rise to his feet and do that, but if he wants to try to chastise the Speaker from his chair, there will be consequences.

I think that we should be cautious when implying that members of the Assembly may be sympathizers with those who are creating and committing massive atrocities in other parts of the world at present light.

The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: I didn't call this while you were standing, of course, because I respect the Speaker standing.

Before you stood, a member opposite said, "Take your medication, man" while the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was speaking. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had said that. That, of course, would be language that would create disorder, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I suspect you may have heard it, but if it is in fact true, I would think that that is a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, I would agree that if the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did say “take your medicine,” that would be a point of order. I will be the first to admit that I didn’t hear that comment, and it’s impossible for the Speaker to rule on comments made off the record. If he did, he should withdraw and apologize. If he didn’t, we’ll proceed back to the member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. No. The Deputy Government House Leader is mistaken. It was not the Edmonton-Rutherford MLA; it was me, and I said “change your medication,” not “take your medication.” I do apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I accept the apology, and we will consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Debate Continued

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I probably digress – I do probably mix up their support for regimes in Venezuela with the support for what is happening in Europe – but I guess my point is that real leaders listen. They spend most of their time engaging with the population that they represent. They foster a culture of openness, transparency. They allocate resources to areas where they are rightfully needed, and, mostly importantly, they serve. That is why I encourage members of this House to back Bill 1, because not only does this bill celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s platinum jubilee; it also seeks to put our money where our mouth is by supporting and recognizing the various upcoming leaders in this province effecting positive change, a quality that all members of this House know that I hold in high esteem.

Acts of community leadership, volunteerism, public service must not go unnoticed, and, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, the Queen has been by far and wide the most successful leader of the modern day. She’s demonstrated for decades her quality in leading western democracies to the success that they hold today, and we see that fight continue on now in Europe. We need to recognize and acknowledge her for her success. The Queen’s platinum jubilee medal recognizes and awards up to 7,000 individuals that serve Alberta, making it a better place to live. Various scholarships such as the jubilee citizenship medallion and the Premier’s citizenship award reward younger generations of Albertans, encouraging and inspiring their continued service in our communities. So despite some of the members across the way saying that this does not impact or affect Albertans, I dare say that it does, because we are recognizing Albertans in her name.

Such recognition goes a long way in fostering an environment of individuals filled with appreciation, camaraderie, togetherness, and selflessness, qualities that are essential in forming top-tier leaders, qualities that we as current leaders of today hope to instill in our children, sculpting them to become the most ambitious, successful, and enduring leaders of tomorrow. On top of that enduring leadership, Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for all in this House by saying that we can all draw inspiration from the resilience of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; 70 years of selfless service to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the rest of the world is by no means a simple feat.

Her Majesty has been no stranger to challenging and adversarial times, serving the Auxiliary Territorial Service, back then a women’s branch of the British army. Her Majesty valiantly contributed to the efforts resulting in the Allies winning the Second World War. Not only that, but Her Majesty served through and witnessed several

global events of gravity, from the Great Depression to the Cold War, from the United Kingdom joining the European Union to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the devolution of the United Kingdom, various financial crises, to the European migrant crisis, Brexit, a global pandemic. Recently she’s dealt with the loss of her beloved husband, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and now a Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Through it all our Queen has stood tall and mighty. Her Majesty has diligently led the Commonwealth of Nations, remained the head of state of some of the strongest global democracies, upholding tenets of free speech, equality, representative governance, and freedom of thought and expression.

5:00

Her Majesty has also demonstrated dedication beyond measure, service above self, and a commitment to upholding Canadian values. Before Her Majesty’s silver jubilee in ’77, in ’73 during a Canadian tour, Her Majesty nobly stated, “I want the Crown in Canada to represent everything that is best and most admired in the Canadian ideal. I will continue to do my best to make it so during my lifetime.” Her Majesty has lived up to these words, and we couldn’t be more honoured by Her Majesty’s service to our country.

I sure hope that my fellow House members can join me in supporting this bill and celebrating the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty’s reign. It is an achievement that is unparalleled by any other, and today we must honour Her Majesty’s service above self, unwavering dedication, and commitment to both Canadians and the people of the world. These depict a rare type of quality that we as a province aim to emulate in ourselves and instill in our children now and for generations to come. God save the Queen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

The hon. Minister of Culture to close debate.

Mr. Orr: I’ll waive. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m., March 8, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1.1) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly momentarily, after we vote, will stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

Legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. Tonight the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children’s Services in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and the Ministry of Finance in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:03 p.m.]

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