



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 8, 2022

Day 5

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Frey
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Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 8, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

It sounded to me a lot like during the prayer there was a member that received a text message. Unless that was from God Himself, I'm sure you'll be paying a fine to the charity of your choice and owning up to it, like all hon. members would be.

Statements by the Speaker

International Women's Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, today marks International Women's Day, a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Given that we are here in this impressive Chamber, it is perhaps most suitable that we focus on the latter, the political achievements of women in Alberta. During the Assembly's first meeting here in the Chamber, in 1911, there were 41 members of this Assembly, and none of them were women. Today 25 women sitting in the Chamber make a difference every day while representing hundreds of thousands of people who trust them as their elected representative.

Irene Parlby, who became the first female cabinet minister in 1921, said:

If politics mean . . . the effort to secure through legislative action better conditions of life for the people, greater opportunities for our children and other people's children . . . then it most assuredly is a woman's job as much as it is a man's job.

International Women's Day serves as both a celebration and a reminder that it takes collective action and shared ownership to achieve full equality. Today we honour the achievements of those who came before us with the aim to inspire collective action to address the many challenges that women continue to face both here in Alberta and around the world. I'm sure all members will join me in celebrating International Women's Day.

50th Anniversary of Alberta Hansard

The Speaker: If the Assembly will permit, I would like to make a note of another special day, in particular for your Speaker. Hon. members, in 2020-2021 more than 6 million words were spoken here in the Assembly and/or its committees; 6,453,127 words, to be exact. I know this because that's how many words were transcribed by our amazing *Hansard* staff.

Today marks a very special anniversary for *Hansard*. It is today that marks the 50th anniversary since *Hansard* was first published, following a motion on March 8, 1972, to establish

a printed record of the deliberations and proceedings of the sittings of the Assembly to be known as the "Alberta *Hansard*" which shall be compiled, edited, printed, distributed and administered under the direction and the authority of the Speaker, in accordance with this rule.

More than 30,000 words will be spoken on an average afternoon sitting like today. *Hansard* staff, including input editors, copy editors, proofreaders, and other professionals, work together to create a largely verbatim record of what is being discussed in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Prior to 1972 a collection of historical newspaper clippings, known as scrapbook *Hansard*, provides a glimpse of the proceedings between 1906 and 1971. The introduction of *Hansard* marked a new era of transparency in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. All transcripts from 1972 to now as well as the scrapbook *Hansard* collection are available on assembly.ab.ca, providing an in-depth resource of the discussions that have shaped this province since its inception.

A happy 50th anniversary to *Hansard*.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the galleries today is Marisa Maslink, a guest of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Also joining us today, please welcome Aurore Ramsamy, a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Aurore is a social work student joining us in recognition of Social Work Week.

I ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

International Women's Day

Member Irwin: A government's budget says a lot about their priorities. Let me tell you that this government's priority is certainly not women. Last year the UCP didn't mention women once in their budget address. This year they threw in a few fleeting references just so they could check the women box. What an incredible opportunity this government was presented with. Skyrocketing oil prices meant that they could have taken visionary actions that would have had tangible positive impacts on the lives of women. Instead, they boasted about balancing a budget on the backs of Albertans, and at every opportunity when they've had the chance to invest in and support women, they've chosen not to.

On International Women's Day I can't help but reflect on just how much this UCP government has failed women. I talk to women a lot. I love talking to women. I ask them: what issues are top of mind? What keeps you up at night? Let me tell you what they say: paying their bills, securing good employment, well-funded schools, strong public health care, a healthy planet, to name just a few issues.

These aren't earth-shattering revelations. They're not radical ideas. International Women's Day should compel us to act, should compel us to do better as legislators. It's not good enough to sit back like this government is doing and dismiss the lived experiences of women. They've failed to act, and they've failed women. But enough about them.

There is hope. We can elect a government that makes women a priority; that acknowledges that women are key to a strong economy, that if women thrive, society thrives; that supports all workers, including low-wage women workers, who this government has repeatedly left behind; that invests in health and knows that mental health care is health care; that ensures child care is universal, accessible, and affordable for all; that tackles misogyny, racism, and gender-based violence; and that protects, not attacks, reproductive rights.

None of these things are out of reach, and with so many unapologetic, unrelenting, fierce-as-heck women in Alberta speaking out and stepping up, I'm more hopeful about what we can accomplish together.

Happy International Women's Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement.

International Women's Day

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 8 marks International Women's Day around the globe. Today is a time to celebrate the women in our lives and all they do to build our communities. Alberta women have always been rugged pioneers, committed to making life better for future generations.

Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby, the Famous Five, fought for women's suffrage and for the right of women to run for the Canadian Senate and to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada. Violet King Henry was the first Black woman lawyer in Canada and the first Black person to be admitted to the Alberta Bar. She was also a champion for civil rights. Bertha Clark-Jones, a Cree-Métis woman, who joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940, became a fierce advocate for Indigenous veterans in Canada.

Those are only a few of the women who have helped create a vibrant and diverse Alberta. Alberta's government continues to support women's economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today we announced \$1 million to support women pursuing postsecondary education in science, technology, engineering, and math. This is in addition to the STEM scholarship for women that is already in place.

1:40

Women in Alberta are second in the nation with a 60.6 per cent employment rate, while unemployment across the province has dropped to its lowest rate since before the pandemic. Alberta's government has also successfully negotiated a plan that will see licensed daycare fees drop by an average of 50 per cent for Alberta families.

There's more work to be done, but with so many driven and talented women in Alberta, I'm confident we'll reach our goals together. Happy International Women's Day.

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

Utility and Fuel Costs

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past couple of weeks gasoline prices have gone higher than ever in Alberta. At the same time, many of my constituents are reaching out to me about their unusually high utility bills. Both Joginder and Balraj have said that their natural gas and electricity bills are so high that they're struggling to afford them.

Our government has instituted a natural gas rebate program and offered a \$150 electricity rebate. Not only that, but we also dropped the 13 cents per litre provincial tax on fuel. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Premier and all of the cabinet for putting forward a plan to help Albertans. Of course, I can't say the same for Justin Trudeau and his allies.

At the same time our government is dropping taxes, the left-wing Liberals have committed to hiking their carbon tax even higher come April 1, all with the support of the NDP. When the members opposite were in the government, they misled Albertans. They worked with Trudeau to tax Canadians for simply heating their homes and driving their cars. A deceitful plan to tax families at \$20 per tonne of CO₂ is turning into \$50 on April 1, and by 2030 Canadians will be paying \$170 per tonne. That means 40 cents per litre just for the federal carbon tax.

As the UCP offered relief for the cost of utilities and fuel, Justin Trudeau increased the carbon tax. The NDP stays silent in defending Albertans from Justin Trudeau. In fact, they cheer for

him. They defend his policies. They claim that carbon tax has little to do with our current situation, but, Mr. Speaker, every little bit helps. Thank you to the Premier for easing the burden for Albertans. With any sensitivity, Justin Trudeau and his allies should be trying to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: This government is completely out of touch with Albertans. As I knock on doors and talk to my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods, I hear it loud and clear. A week after introducing their budget, this government is celebrating, completely unaware of the struggling Albertans they've left behind.

Utility bills are outrageous. We're hearing daily from Albertans who are facing bills in excess of \$700 – some owe thousands – Albertans who feel they have to choose between paying their utility bills or buying food for their family. Instead of hearing these concerns and responding with compassion, this government offers them \$50 for electricity in a fake natural gas rebate that will never support Albertans, because it's for next year and the rates that the government's own budget suggests will never be hit.

Property taxes are up and likely to keep going up because this government would rather download costs to towns and cities instead of invest in them. Insurance bills are up because the Premier's insurance lobby friends are more important to his team than the Alberta families who can no longer afford to drive their cars. Income taxes are up because this Premier says one thing but does another, and he has reintroduced the very bracket creep that he once railed against.

This budget uses increasing inflation as an opportunity for the government to pick the pockets of Albertans during a pandemic. Tuition is up because the government views students as cash cows rather than the future leaders of Alberta, and this government even anticipates making billions more in student debt, in part because they raised the interest rates on that debt.

This budget provides no relief for struggling Albertans. Instead, it takes advantage of them, raising fees wherever they can, secretly hiking taxes, lifting caps in place to protect Albertans, and then shrugging away the concerns that they hear from families. It's shameful, but it's what Albertans have come to expect from this UCP government.

Mr. Speaker, my message to those Albertans is: hang on; keep your eyes forward. Alberta's NDP is on your side. We care about you, and we will come to work every day fighting for your family.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ukrainian Refugees

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. As I stand here surrounded by safety on Treaty 6 territory, Métis region 4, women and children in Ukraine are being sent to other countries to protect them from attacks on their sovereign nation. The displacement of these peaceful people will most definitely see Canada and Alberta stepping up to support Ukrainians as they seek safety and perhaps permanency. Ukrainian pride is exemplary, and former Canadian journalist Nathan VanderKlippe of the *Globe and Mail* reported that as people in Odessa bagged sand to protect them from attack, opera singers sang an anthem, and it translates to: "Ukraine is not yet dead, nor its glory and freedom."

To those fleeing from war in hopes to return to their homes when it's safe: we can be your safe haven, and if you choose to stay, we would be all the richer to have you. Mr. Speaker, by Sunday

morning more than 1.5 million Ukrainians had fled their sovereign nation, and we must be ready to find them homes, provide speedy integration into our communities, expedite resources of necessity, and surround them with compassion and support. This will be instrumental in welcoming and accommodating all those who've experienced trauma and loss and tremendous upheaval. Our government will have to prepare our health care system, expand our education system, and offer safe shelter to relatives who need to stay together.

Nonprofit and nongovernment organizations catch everything that public policy doesn't catch such as settlement needs, health and mental health supports, self-care, and accessibility. Nongovernment organizations in Alberta that are part of the NGO council, like the Red Cross, are getting constant updates on these needs, and this is the type of expert intel that we need as Alberta opens her arms wide to all those who need her. We must fund those NFPs and NGOs that go beyond the basics of food and shelter. Everyday Albertans are also ready to help. Alberta-based volunteerconnector.org is a nation-wide digital portal that matches volunteers and organizations.

Together, through our government working with these compassionate and experienced Albertans, Alberta will show the world once again what the power of community and kindness and generosity can accomplish, where Ukrainians can call this their home away from home.

United Conservative Party

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans got to witness the most confusing sight: UCP staff in the Premier's office were attacking the UCP's Fort McMurray by-election candidate for the extreme views of his supporters. Albertans aren't surprised to hear that the Premier's office is more focused on saving the Premier's job than addressing the many policy failures this government has delivered. His chief of staff, his most senior political adviser, has already taken a leave to go to Red Deer and organize against the UCP's own members.

While Albertans are not surprised to hear that a UCP candidate has extreme views or is supported by those with extreme views, they are surprised to hear that the UCP suddenly cares about this. The UCP didn't care when their MLA for Taber-Warner chose to visit an illegal blockade where present was a group plotting the murder of RCMP officers. The Premier even said that he was doing his job. The UCP didn't care when the Premier's speech writer was found to have written sexist, racist, and homophobic remarks. The Premier failed to care when the former Justice minister was found by a judge of attempting to interfere in the administration of justice, and it goes on and on.

All of what I've just gone through is why Albertans from far and wide no longer trust this Premier. They don't believe he genuinely cares about them, but I know that the Leader of Alberta's Official Opposition is ready. She will work to bring Albertans together, not drive them apart. She will hold her fellow caucus members accountable. She will call out hate and corruption. She will show that, yes, she truly cares about Alberta's families. Our leader is fighting off COVID right now, and I wish her well. I know that she's still working to serve Albertans from home, and, Mr. Speaker, I can't wait to serve in her government again come 2023 or sooner if it comes to that.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by wishing the House a happy International Women's Day and to let you know that all of our questions today will be coming from the women in our caucus.

School Fees and Property Tax Education Levy

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, this budget is barely two weeks old, and the Premier is already rewriting it. Yesterday he said that if global oil prices stay high, Alberta may stumble upon billions of dollars in additional revenue, so today I'm asking the Premier and the UCP to sincerely help Alberta families. Budget 2022 raises school fees and education property taxes by \$117 million. Will the Premier reverse those fee hikes today?

1:50

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to talk a little bit about Budget 2022. In Budget 2022 effectively we report our fiscal progress for three years. We've managed to keep operating expenses flat during three years at a time when we inherited cost increases from the previous government of 4 per cent per year. What that would have meant to Albertans had we stayed on that trajectory was inevitable tax increases for Albertans today and future generations. We've been responsible. We've avoided that.

Ms Hoffman: To any of the parents watching, I just asked about education property tax hikes executed by the UCP government. I asked them to stop those tax increases and the school fee increases, and the Minister of Finance said no. Mr. Speaker, these fees come out of the pockets of parents who are trying to pay their bills. They're trying to buy food and clothing to make sure that their kids get a great education. The Premier thinks they should pay more in school fees, but what will they get in return? Not more teachers, because in this budget there are 1,000 fewer teachers than there were under the NDP. Will the Premier rewrite the budget and put more teachers back into the classroom?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that it is school boards who charge school fees. In fact, they're doing it as they are putting more dollars into their reserves. We went from \$363 million to \$464 million as of August in operating reserves. The member opposite, when she was the board chair for the Edmonton public school division, raised school fees three years in a row: \$28 million in 2011-2012; \$29 million in school fees, 2012-2013; \$31 million in 2013-2014; oh, and \$37 million in 2014-15. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that under Conservative budgets that failed to increase funding for education, many boards were put in a position where they felt they had to do that. The member opposite also knows that she repealed a bill that capped school fees and refused to increase them. The member opposite also knows that she is responsible for the legislation that's hiking up school fees. If the members opposite want to ask questions of the NDP, they can call the election.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I don't think everybody heard me earlier, so I will repeat what I said. The member opposite as board chair raised fees three years in a row for the Edmonton public school division: over \$28 million in fees for 2011-2012, \$29 million in 2012-2013, \$31 million in 2013-14, and \$37 million in 2014-

2015. These fees are for extracurricular activities, field trips, facility rentals, and so much more. These are absolutely the purview of school boards.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Hoffman: Oh, Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at what the UCP has done with the family budget. John and Jane make an average Alberta income. They have two kids. They get by, but times are getting tougher. This year, because the Premier increased their income tax and reduced their benefits, they're going to lose \$400. That's \$400 not going towards groceries or bills or activities for the family. To the Finance minister or the Premier: why won't they rewrite the budget to actually put this money back in the family budget?

The Speaker: The hon. the Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely reject what the member opposite is asserting. We have not increased income taxes in this province. A person earning \$50,000 this year will pay exactly what they did last year. But had we stayed on the trajectory that the previous government left us, we would have had no choice but to raise taxes. In fact, a future government would have had no choice but to raise taxes, like the members opposite did when they brought in the carbon tax.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, they did raise taxes. The Premier is making life harder on families, and he has no plan to stop. It's clear that he doesn't care. Martin and Mary are seniors. They live on a fixed income, but costs keep going up, and their seniors' benefit does not. This year they will lose \$360 compared to what they would have received if the Premier simply recognized that inflation is hurting every Albertan in this province. Will the Premier rewrite the budget to support seniors living on a fixed income? Yes or no?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have the highest seniors' benefits of any province across the country. The top payment in this province is \$285 a month. The average of similar-sized provinces is \$60 a month. We have not reduced that amount. I reject the assertion in the member's question. But what we've done: we've brought in a utility rebate for January, February, March of this month, a \$150 rebate for all Albertans paying an electricity bill.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP wants to talk about running a rebate program. I don't think most Albertans would trust them to run a bath, let alone a rebate program. The question was about seniors' benefits, and if the government cared enough, they would pretend to answer it. Heather is living on AISH. She's severely disabled. She's been betrayed by a party that promised to inflation-proof her benefits, and then they shamefully broke that promise. If the UCP kept their promise, Heather would have \$1,000 more this year to help her make ends meet. Will the Premier rewrite his budget for her, apologize to Albertans on AISH, and finally keep his word and do the right thing?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have maintained AISH benefits, which are \$400 higher than the next-nearest province, and we've done it because we believe this government should support the most vulnerable. We believe Albertans have a priority of supporting the most vulnerable. Had we continued on the trajectory we inherited from the previous government, we would not have been able to

deliver programs for future generations. We brought fiscal responsibility to the province, which will ensure delivery of efficient programs in the future.

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

Ms Phillips: Albertans are having a hard time paying their bills. I'm hearing it from my constituents, and I know the Finance minister is hearing it, too, because at a recent town hall a woman was trying to ask him for help with her electricity bill: \$1,900, Mr. Speaker. The minister's response: he dismissed her concerns, claiming rebates only cause inflation and hurt the economy. Fast-forward to today, and it's quite the rewrite. Does the minister really think that \$50 on a \$1,900 bill is going to help that Albertan and that constituent of his?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I find it very rich coming from the members opposite when they talk about affordability. The members opposite, when they were in government, jacked taxes on personal income tax, increased corporate income taxes, introduced a carbon tax, which added costs for every Albertan. We're delivering efficient government, keeping taxes low. We've come out with a utility rebate, and effective April 1 we're eliminating the fuel tax for three months.

Ms Phillips: For the folks watching at home, some clear evidence that the minister doesn't want to talk about your electricity bills.

The minister then had the nerve to tell his constituents that he was in the same boat. He claimed that he couldn't pay his own power bill on his comfortable salary, but no one feels sorry for him. This morning he admitted that he's raising personal income taxes by a billion dollars without batting an eye. Why doesn't the minister reverse that change and actually help families with their bills?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are not raising income taxes. I completely reject the member's assertion. The only folks in this House who raised taxes were the members opposite. They raised taxes on individuals. They raised taxes on corporations, sending tens of billions of dollars out of this province. They introduced a carbon tax, one they did not even campaign on. We're delivering efficient government. We're ensuring Alberta will be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the nation.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59.

Ms Phillips: For the folks watching at home, the minister also doesn't want to talk about the billion dollars he's pickpocketing in personal income tax.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: So let me give the minister some free advice. Inflation-proof personal income tax to protect the family budget. Put back the billion dollars he's taking. Stop the hikes to school fees, tuition, and property tax. Put the cap back on insurance premiums and electricity rates. If the minister is truly struggling to pay his own bills, why doesn't he pick one of his own bad policies and reverse it?

2:00

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, again I find it very rich that the members opposite would look to give this government advice on financial matters. The trajectory they were on: by raising taxes on everything that moved in this province, by creating additional regulatory

burden, they chased out tens of billions of dollars of investment with the job opportunities. We're delivering efficient government so we can keep taxes low so we can make strategic reinvestments in health, in education, and to ensure that every Albertan has the ability to increase their skills.

Utility Rebate Program

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the government promised Albertans relief from sky-high natural gas rates. Then they produced a fake program. Now they're only giving \$50 back for electricity bills that have climbed into the hundreds. Robyn shared her bill with us and how it rose from \$350 last month to \$700 this month. What does the Premier have to say to Robyn? Does he really think that a \$50 cheque is real help with her \$700 bill?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only the NDP could be so unaware that they would actually be personally involved in driving up the electricity prices in the manner in which they did and then have the audacity to complain that the help that we're giving Albertans is not big enough. We're giving more support to Albertans than the NDP did, and we will continue to look at ways that we can modernize the electricity grid and also to NDP-proof the electricity grid so that we don't have to suffer these things in the future.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, real Albertans are choosing today between groceries and their electricity bill, and that minister thinks he deserves a pat on the back for a \$50 rebate.

Robyn is not alone. Kelsie also wrote to us. Her bill has doubled to over \$600. She is concerned about paying her other bills. All this government can offer is a rebate she likely won't qualify for and \$50 off hundreds of dollars in new costs. Is this really the best that the Premier has to offer to Albertans like Kelsie who are struggling as a result of his government's decisions?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we do have high electricity costs in this province, and that's why we've offered a rebate for the months January through March. But again I find it very rich that the members opposite would raise this issue because it was their failed policies that put us in this situation. They spent 7 and a half billion dollars on transmission costs that consumers are now paying for. They overbuilt the system. They prematurely paid out power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion, that Albertans are paying today. And they introduced a carbon tax that cost every Albertan and Alberta senior higher costs in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Ganley: These are real people, Mr. Speaker, real people who can't afford their medication, and all that minister has for them is bluster.

Deborah also wrote to us saying that her bill has increased over the past few months, and the most recent one was nearly \$1,000. She is worried about how she can continue to keep the lights on and keep her house warm. Is this Premier really satisfied with telling Albertans like Deborah that \$50 in a fake rebate is the only thing they're willing to provide? If they can't do better, can they at least apologize to Albertans for lying to them?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP were grossly negligent. By the way, when I say grossly negligent, I don't mean when the NDP

ethics critic was investigated by the RCMP cybercrimes unit; I mean when they overspent \$7.5 billion in transmission and then they hung those costs on the ratepayer. They also brought in additional policies that drove electricity prices up. Yes, we gave a rebate to Albertans, and we're going to continue to look at ways that we can modernize the system and protect Albertans from further NDP hangovers. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Women's Postsecondary Education Supports

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Women's Day. This is a special day to recognize the important role women play in the development and success of our province. Our government has taken a number of steps to improve the lives of women throughout the province. Can the Associate Minister of Status of Women tell the House what the government has done recently to help women thrive in our economic recovery?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the important role women play in the development and success of our province and focus on ways to support them in writing the next great chapter in our Alberta story. Just today Alberta's government is investing \$1 million in bursary programs at Bow Valley College, NorQuest College, and Yellowhead Tribal College. We also recently invested \$1.9 million to an Amazon Web Services pilot program that will assist up to 40 women with training and connections to the local IT and cloud-computing sectors because we know how important it is to support women in tech. Investment like this is making a real . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that we know education is a valuable tool which helps foster economic growth in our province and given that we see more women and girls interested in careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, STEM, to the associate minister: what is the government doing to help support women who want to study STEM?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, we just announced today a million dollars in bursary programs that will ensure women have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education in STEM at Bow Valley College, NorQuest College, and Yellowhead Tribal College here in Edmonton. Every little girl in Alberta today has the potential to do great things. That's also why we've offered scholarships for STEM of \$150,000, and we will be doing more on this. You know, these funds help more women every day pursue fulfilling and in-demand careers that will help them support themselves and their families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that women in Alberta work across many different sectors, including those who are looking at building rewarding careers in the skilled trades, and given that many tradeswomen are leading the way in everything from welding to hairstyling, to the associate minister: what is the government doing to help women build a rewarding career in the trades?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Skilled trades offer a rewarding career, and our government is proud to support organizations like Women Building Futures, for which there was a \$10 million investment, and we're proud to support these types of investments to help ensure women get the hands-on experience that they need to become seasoned professionals and hit the ground running. Skills work contributes so much to our economy. It is an investment in Alberta's future to support women entering these fields.

Support for Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, another day, another announcement from this UCP government to try to fix what they broke. This time it comes after causing years of anguish for young people aging out of government care, an age group where we've seen two and a half times the number of deaths since 10 years ago. Now, after announcing that she would cut young people age 22 off necessary emotional supports two years ago, the minister is saying that she will reinstate them. Will the minister finally admit that cutting these supports for these young people was wrong in the first place, and why is she still providing \$10 million less in supports for them?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the changes that we announced in Budget 2019 are still included in the budget today. [interjections] At that time, when we made changes to the age of eligibility for support and financial assistance agreements, we made those changes, and then we made it clear that changes needed to be made to that program to better support young adults that were transitioning out of care and into adulthood, and that is exactly what we did. We took some of the best parts of the advancing futures program, which are the social and emotional supports that young people need to succeed, and we brought those into one transition to adulthood program.

The Speaker: I'll just provide some caution that unparliamentary comments made off the record are still unparliamentary.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the opposition has been raising concerns about these changes to the SFAA program since it was first announced two years ago and given that these same concerns have been raised by youth, the Child and Youth Advocate, including members of the advocate's youth council, and given that this new transition program essentially puts back in place the dedicated caseworker that these young people already had and that the only reason the UCP is reversing course is because one young, brave woman came forward to take them to court about it, my question is: what will it possibly take to get this minister to admit that she was wrong and apologize to the young people in her care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, this program is exactly what we committed to. We had a program that basically was focused on monthly allowances, and we needed a program that really walked through the supports and skills that young people needed to transition out of care and successfully into adulthood, and that is exactly what we have now. We are taking the best of both programs, wrapping them together. We're increasing the monthly allowances that these young people will receive. We're focusing on positive transitions either into adult programming or adulthood. This is exactly what we committed to and exactly what we did.

2:10

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that today in budget estimates and again right now the minister is trying to pretend as though a dedicated caseworker for youth aging out of care is somehow new and given that the minister appears to be ill-informed about the supports these young people were receiving, which may explain why she had no problem cutting them in the first place, and given that people in the sector were e-mailing me today during estimates to fact-check the minister in real time, contradicting her, my question is: after all of this how does the minister expect Albertans, particularly the very young people she is responsible for, to trust her?

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:10.
The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do, in fact, very purposefully understand the changes that we made to this program, because they were exactly what we heard from caseworkers and young people who were transitioning into adulthood. They are changes that are being made in other provinces across this country, and they're exactly what we committed to. I'm happy to quote young people like Spencer, who said, quote: there's just so much to manage when you start out, like budgeting and taking care of yourself; I'm glad that young adults will have additional supports to help them through this challenging time. We've also had young people reach out to say: a program like this helped me out to become independent. That is the purpose of this program.

Budget 2022 and Vulnerable Albertans

Ms Renaud: While the UCP cheer on their hollow budget, those in the most vulnerable situations in this province see nothing to celebrate. The UCP will claim they're not making cuts, but a flat budget for those on income support and AISH is forcing them to stretch their limited income even more as the cost of living increases. The budget is most certainly not balanced for them. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services please explain: if the price of gas, utilities, the cost of groceries, rent, insurance, and the government's revenue are increasing from sky-high oil, why aren't supports for the most vulnerable going up, at least indexed...

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the opposition for raising a very good question. As the Minister of Finance has already addressed, we are having a rebate program. We are eliminating the fuel taxes as a way to mitigate the inflation issue. About the AISH program, let me tell you this. With Budget 2022 we have increased the AISH budget to \$1.37 billion, again, the highest in Alberta's history.

Ms Renaud: Given the increasing amount of poverty and homelessness across the province and given that even before costs for everything shot up, communities were pleading for additional homeless supports and given that the province has kept the funding for homeless supports the same this year as they have for the last two years, I'm frustrated that the UCP has not learned anything from mistakes. They're not providing enough, and communities are tired of the patchwork. It's just reactive. With costs of living pushing more people into poverty and making it more expensive to deliver services, why is the UCP making the same mistake and underfunding supports for homeless people?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, we're not taking advice from a one-term failed NDP government. Homelessness is a complex issue. We shared in the House that we established a homeless task force that is aiming at taking a structurally different approach to address this issue. We're focusing on housing first. We're also looking at a recovery-oriented continuum of care so that we provide a comprehensive, co-ordinated response to homelessness. We have a better solution for Albertans.

Ms Renaud: Given that the mayor of Edmonton said that this budget was balanced on the backs of vulnerable Albertans and given that rural communities outside of the large cities are seeing drastic increases in homelessness and poverty but are receiving no increased supports from the UCP government or are not even getting a listening ear and given that this government received more revenue from high oil prices and they continue to completely ignore the most vulnerable in Alberta – on this side of the House we want to live in an Alberta where everyone is supported, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. How can this minister sit by and do nothing? Explain to vulnerable Albertans why you don't give a damn.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member who just said that nobody talks to them, I can tell you that I spend largely many hours every day talking to municipal leaders and listening carefully to their concerns, passing them on to my colleagues, who react responsibly and in a timely way.

Mr. Speaker, we have our ear to the ground when it comes to municipalities, and we will continue to do so because they're a very important source of information for us, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been unrelenting in our focus on investment attraction, economic growth and diversification, and job creation. Alberta's business-friendly recovery plan has positioned Alberta to lead all provinces in economic growth. We're also seeing a surge in net interprovincial migration, further evidence that word is spreading that Alberta is the best place to be, and the Alberta affordability advantage greets workers when they arrive here. To the Minister of Finance: what are some of the affordability advantages these families can look forward to when they arrive in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true. Alberta does have an affordability advantage today, and part of that advantage is the lowest tax structure in the nation. We have the highest basic personal exemption of any province, allowing more Albertans to earn more before they pay a dollar in provincial income tax. In fact, 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax at all. If you have a family of four living in Alberta and if we moved them to Ontario, they would pay \$3,800 more in personal income tax with \$75,000 worth of income.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Albertans typically earn more, pay less in overall taxes, and generally enjoy lower food and

transportation costs and given that Budget 2022 makes Alberta an even more affordable place to call home, to the same minister: how does Budget 2022 help grow the Alberta affordability advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we do have an Alberta affordability advantage. This budget, Budget 2022, adds over \$600 million for child care to ensure that families can obtain accessible, affordable child care in this province. We're adding \$15 million to low-income students to support their education endeavours, and we're investing \$390 million over four years to ensure that everybody in rural Alberta has world-class digital connectivity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that global energy prices have increased significantly and given that Alberta families are now faced with rapidly increasing fuel and utility costs and given that Alberta consumers need reliable energy to survive the challenges of living in a northern climate, to the same minister: what is this government doing to help families reduce the financial pressures they are faced with due to these rising energy costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that energy costs are creating affordability issues for Albertans even though we have an affordability advantage, and to that end we are halting the collection of the fuel tax. That's 13 cents a litre for Albertans. This program will be in place all year, re-evaluated every quarter. On top of that, we are rebating every Albertan who has an electricity bill by \$150 for January through March of this year, and we have a natural gas consumer price protection measure in place as well.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, Alberta families are seeing their cost of living soar. Inflation is up, gas prices are up, utility bills are up, and even taxes are going up. Given that Albertans have been hit with an increase in insurance costs and inflation yet this government is doubling down on nickelling and diming Albertans through sneaky personal income tax hikes and increasing user fees, why is this government piling on instead of making life more affordable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working very, very hard as we bring forward a balanced budget, lowering the cost of taxes for Albertans, and bringing in rebate programs for both electricity and gas.

Again, Mr. Speaker, to this hon. member: he needs to explain to this House what was taking place at his home when the RCMP raided it recently and what the Official Opposition knew about the investigation that is being undertaken into him and them.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it seems like this government is ignoring the cost to families and given that Alberta families are still recovering from the effects of the pandemic and given that rising energy prices and rising food prices are driving up the cost of living for Albertans and my constituents, why is the government continuing to raise property taxes through increases to the mill rate?

2:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are working very, very hard to bring in rebate programs that can help Albertans as we go through these tough times. But this hon. member must address this issue with the House: what did the Official Opposition leader know about his actions, why has the RCMP served search warrants on his personal home, and why has the Official Opposition completely abandoned him? He should stand up in this House and explain what's gone on. Albertans deserve to know what is taking place, and they deserve to know what the NDP knew about it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems like this government is doing nothing about affordability. Given that Alberta's purchasing power has inarguably taken a hit and that this budget is balanced on the backs of hard-working Albertans, will they just admit that this is a terrible budget and that they have nothing good to say?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we brought Budget 2022 forward, a balanced budget. We brought fiscal sustainability and responsibility back to the province. That allows this government to make strategic reinvestments in health care, in education. The issues that the member opposite raises – the affordability issues, particularly in utilities – are a result of failed policies implemented by the members opposite. We're correcting the fundamentals that have led to those increased costs, and we're providing relief in the meantime.

Budget 2022 and Job Creation

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, Calgary's unemployment is the highest in the country. The cost of living is becoming unbearable for many, and this government has missed its job targets by 130,000. That's 130,000 Albertans who are making no money right now and are being faced with skyrocketing utility prices, gas prices, property taxes, school fees; you name it. My first question is simple: why would the minister of economic development stand in this House every day and celebrate when so many are struggling? Is he really that tone deaf?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, 130,000 jobs created last year; in the first month alone, 7,000 new jobs. When the rest of the country lost 200,000 jobs, Alberta gained jobs. The best thing that we can do to help people pay their bills is make sure they have employment. Under the former government, under the NDP, they told Albertans to leave this province to get employment. We're going to do everything we can to make sure Albertans have high-paying jobs.

Ms Goehring: Given that one bright spot for Alberta amid all of the incompetence from that side of the House is the film industry but given that this government promised stakeholders that it would reinstate the NDP's interactive digital media tax credit – that critical program was nowhere to be found in the budget – and given that that credit would create more jobs in the film industry in areas like animation and postproduction, can the minister explain why he once again failed stakeholders despite promising to do better in what turned out to be a bogus provincial budget?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud of the film and television industry. The NDP failed – failed – the film and television industry for four years. Right now we have the largest TV series in Canadian history right here in Alberta because of the steps this government took, and we have effectively zero per cent unemployment in the tech innovation space. We're more diversified

than ever. We're winning for Albertans and diversifying our economy.

Ms Goehring: Given that we need to provide proper education to be ready for jobs in film and digital media – if we don't train them, the jobs will go elsewhere, and our future leaders will leave, too – but given that the UCP is putting 1,000 fewer teachers in our K to 12 schools, has cut postsecondary funding by more than \$600 million, and is ramming in a curriculum that puts students out of step with film, digital, and tech industries, can the minister tell this House if he supports such devastating cuts to education and moving forward with a curriculum no one supports? If he does, how can he possibly claim to care about job creation . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the budget that this government introduced includes \$600 million to make sure we address labour shortages in Alberta. Yes, labour shortages in our province: who thought we would have had that challenge in the middle of this pandemic? But this province is bouncing back faster than anyone could have imagined. We have a long way still to go to help make sure we support people. But, on top of that, maybe the member opposite missed the fact that Bow Valley College just this week announced the fact that it's opening up its school in this exact area.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, my constituents have reached out to me upset and shocked at their high utility costs. As a power engineer who ran a power plant and a large industrial consumer of electricity, I'm very familiar with ideological decisions made by previous governments that have led us to this point. Most recently the NDP decision to rapidly transition from coal while subsidizing major corporations with hundreds of millions of dollars from taxpayers is one example of poor ideological decision-making. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: could you explain what you're doing to help reduce the impacts of these poor policies? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, in 2015 Albertans elected an accidental government with paper candidates. Now, when they descended on the Legislature with nothing more than their hopes and dreams, they then proceeded to oversee the largest overbuild of the transmission system in our province's history. They broke the electricity system, and we're going to fix it. We are going to bring fiscal restraint and accountability to electricity in Alberta, something that the NDP is just not capable of doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that from 2015 to 2019 the rapid expansion of utilities came with a \$7 billion price tag and a whopping \$1.3 billion was lost on the Balancing Pool, a bill we all will be repaying until 2030, and given that I only have 35 seconds and it would take 35 years to tell of all the mistakes the NDP made with our electricity market, can the same minister explain what he is doing to address these failures? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP asks about the high cost of electricity, it's ironic, not as ironic as the NDP ethics critic being investigated by the RCMP cybercrimes unit, but it is ironic nonetheless. Now, we are bringing forward some solutions that are going to help Albertans. That includes the \$150 rebate. We're also bringing fiscal accountability to the transmission grid. They spent \$7 billion in four years on transmission; in the last two years we've spent \$100 million. That's fiscal accountability, and we will continue to look at ways that we can drive down prices and NDP-proof the electricity grid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the rate cap masks the true cost of energy by shifting the cost from the ratepayer to the taxpayer and given that many Albertans are worried about future and current costs, once again to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: how are we continuing to encourage a diversified grid without spending unnecessary taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the path forward for lower electricity prices is increased competition and more choice, so we are creating long-term solutions and encouraging competition with our commitment to the energy-only market. This approach is working because we have 4,000 megawatts of generation that are going to be coming online shortly and are at different phases of approval in front of the AUC. We're going to do all of this without hanging increased costs on the ratepayer. They broke the electricity grid; we're going to fix it.

Women's Economic Equality

Member Irwin: On International Women's Day let's reflect on some important facts. Women are the key to every aspect of a healthy economy and a healthy community. Data shows that when women entrepreneurs are financed, they are extremely successful, which benefits the broader community. Research also shows that women-founded and -cofounded start-ups tend to perform better than all-male ones, and businesses founded by women in general are shown to be significantly better financial investments. Why has this government not prioritized the economic empowerment of women in Alberta? Do they not want to support some of the strongest drivers of our economy?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the members across want to talk about the economic empowerment of women. Let me tell you about how they empowered women. Tens of thousands lost their jobs while they were in government. Every single woman paid higher bills because of their carbon tax. Every one of them faced higher personal income taxes. Thousands and thousands of women entrepreneurs lost their businesses during their term. There was a mass exodus of women from this province. And you know what? This government, on this side, has done everything to reverse that.

2:30

Member Irwin: Given that advancing gender equality in economic and social spheres is not just the right thing to do but is also the smart thing to do and given that this is an evidence-based way to increase the prosperity of industry as a whole and that investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender

equality, poverty reduction, community safety, and inclusive economic growth, why does this government ignore the data, ignore the clear indicators, ignore the very women of Alberta, and diminish what could be a major economic ministry into an associate role with barely a mandate or any capacity to enact change?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we could talk about how governments should and can support women. I can tell you that this government – this government – has done more to support the equality of women by making sure that the women in this province have access to affordable daycare. The previous government across: you know what they did? They managed to put together a pilot program that didn't deliver daycare to even the most deserving and most needy of it. I've got to tell you that this government has done a way better job on that.

Member Irwin: Given that women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, workers doing unpaid care work at home, and given that women not only work but so often are expected to take on second, third shifts associated with household work and caregiving and given that women remain disproportionately impacted by poverty and are often limited in their ability to work due to the need for child care, where this government has let them down once again, why is this government so set on making it even harder for women by raising costs on absolutely everything and making life less affordable?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, wow. You know, the members opposite, when they were in government, raised the cost of everything for women in this province by instituting the carbon tax. We on this side of the House eliminated the carbon tax. We reduced taxes. We're eliminating the fuel tax for three months. We're doing rebates on electricity. I'm sorry, but I think that this side of the House knows exactly how to help women.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, for two years front-line workers in hospitals, restaurants, schools, essential businesses, and more have gone to work in uncertainty. They feared getting COVID-19. Many did, and some are still recovering. Now, we all hope the pandemic is ending, but these workers are facing a new crisis: massive increases to their personal cost of living, many coming as a direct result of decisions from this UCP government. Can the minister of labour explain to these front-line heroes why his government won't provide real relief on utility bills and reverse the decisions that are driving up their costs after all that these workers have done for us during the pandemic?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. In response to COVID-19 Alberta's government has taken a number of actions to protect and support Albertans through these challenging times, including job-protected leave, deferring WCB premiums when businesses needed it most, and paid vaccination leave. We know that there is much to be done, and that is why Alberta's Budget 2022-23 will go further in delivering for Alberta workers.

Ms Gray: Given that I hear from many people in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods who need their vehicles to get to and from the office – and for many of them their vehicle is the office: they drive cabs, delivery trucks, trades vehicles, and so much more

– and given that this government pulled the 5 per cent cap on insurance rates after being lobbied by their insurance lobby friends, can the minister tell this House for the record how much the average Albertan's insurance has increased since this government took office, and can he tell them why he won't restore the cap and end these ridiculous increases that are hurting families in all of our constituencies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell this House is that the reforms that we brought forward in Bill 41 last fall around automobile insurance seem to be working. These were reforms that dealt with the fundamental, systemic issues that were pushing up automobile insurance rates, issues that the members opposite simply didn't deal with. I can report to this House that automobile insurance premiums are flat to declining, and that's good news for Albertans.

Ms Gray: Given that answer and that Bill 41 hasn't helped my constituents and given that my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West and Official Opposition Finance critic confirmed today that the UCP's sneaky bracket creep scheme is costing Albertans \$1 billion in taxes and given that this UCP billion-dollar tax grab is going to hurt my constituents and all Albertans – it's frankly shameful – Minister, my last question is simple: how can you possibly stand there and pretend to care when you're taking another billion dollars from our constituents, all Albertans, a billion dollars they don't have, while everything is getting more expensive?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for just 35 seconds about caring for Albertans. As we consider the next generation of Albertans, I believe it's critically important that we put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory by making disciplined financial decisions, by positioning the province for disproportionate investment attraction, economic recovery, and growth. That's what we're doing. That's what this budget does. This leaves the next generation for a prosperous Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Construction Industry Prompt Payment Framework

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, previously Alberta had no specific rules or regulations for payment timelines in the construction industry. If not directly addressed by a contract, these timelines were left ambiguous. Bill 37 amended the Builders' Lien Act and became the new Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act in 2020. This act addresses these issues by introducing a clear timeline and regulations for payment and liens in the construction industry. Can the Minister of Service Alberta talk about the specific regulation changes individuals in the construction industry can expect to see upon implementation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As our economy continues to recover, to grow, and to diversify, Alberta's government is protecting jobs by bringing its prompt payment legislation into force. Members in the construction industry had been advocating for this framework for many, many years. While the NDP sat on this for four years, we have taken action and worked with the industry at every level to create legislation and regulations that make sense. These regulations will solve so many problems, including dealing with the administration of an adjudication process

for dispute resolution as well as dealing with lien holdback payment protocols and the transition . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the construction industry is a multibillion-dollar sector of Alberta's economy that creates thousands of jobs for Albertans, employing approximately 1 in 10 Albertans, and given that this new legislation will act to protect contractors, subcontractors, labourers, and suppliers who have provided labour and materials for a construction project, to the same minister: can you identify the specifics of how this legislation will seek to protect labourers and suppliers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question, and I'm happy to tackle that. We know that over the last number of years the average time for payment in Alberta's construction industry has increased from within 45 days to well over 70 days. That's just the average; in many cases it's well over 100 days. That is why this prompt payment framework was so important and why I was so proud to work with the construction industry to develop it. The legislation will address, first and foremost, ensuring that when a proper invoice has been issued, payment will be issued within 28 days. That's going to move the needle in the construction . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you to the minister for that answer, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are numerous changes to the original Builders' Lien Act and given that there has been collaboration with construction industry representatives to create supporting regulations and to develop specific processes and further given that the Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act, the builders' lien forms amendment regulation, and the prompt payment and construction lien regulation will come into force on August 29 of this year, 2022, to the same minister: what can workers expect to experience during this rollout transition?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. We have had so much collaboration on this issue over the last year and a half. We've been working so closely with members of the construction industry since 2019 to develop these new rules that will be in place this summer in Alberta. Over the next six months what they can continue to expect from us is that we will continue to work with industry very closely on education and on training and to establish the tools needed for this adjudication system to ensure a seamless transition when the act and regulations come into force on August 29.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine. If members are exiting the Chamber, I ask that they do so quickly and quietly.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

Energy Industry Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards

Mr. Yao: Virtue signalling: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada is a master at this. But he can do so much better. He can

demonstrate honest virtue by supporting Canada's energy industry, that ranks high in environmental, social, and governance measures. He can advocate on behalf of our industry to the international community and stop reliance on nations like Russia. Environmental measures weigh how a company performs as a steward of protecting nature. Social aspects examine how it manages its labour standards, its customers and their communities. Governance deals with a company's leadership and financial aspects.

Despite the negative reputation of Canada's oil sands, environmentally we retain a quality that virtually no other jurisdiction in the world can advertise. We reclaim used lands back to their original state. No other energy sector has financially invested in research and development to reduce carbon emissions as much as operators in Canada's oil sands. They have brought emissions levels initially witnessed with the first oil sands operations down to quantities currently seen around the world with conventional oil operations. Socially, employees of Canada's oil companies are well treated and support a society that is tolerant of all. Governance: we can rest assured that investors in Canada and her energy industry contribute back to pensions and other causes benefiting our lives.

Exxon is losing \$4 billion, Shell \$3 billion, and BP a whopping \$25 billion by exiting a nation that has demonstrated hostility to a democratic nation. Admittedly, our Prime Minister created a regulatory environment that is difficult for these companies, but he can repair this. The world is witnessing the consequences of relying on energy from unethical regimes like that of Russia. Meanwhile western democracies are attempting to voice their disagreement by imposing economic sanctions, which ultimately serve as nothing but virtue signalling since the international community continues to purchase Russian oil and gas.

The left will say that now is the time to invest in windmills and solar panels, but we know these to be unreliable sources of energy. This Prime Minister and the world need to embrace Canada's energy industry, that has high environmental, social, and governance ratings, and quit their hypocritical virtue signalling.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, on February 18 Trudeau pulled a fast one, announcing a halt to public funding of Trans Mountain. That's right. The federal government's mismanagement of this project caused a \$9 billion deal to turn into a \$21.4 billion boondoggle, and the project is only half done.

Now, let me outline the details of this public disclosure because they are very intriguing. Trudeau, after invoking the Emergencies Act, announced TMX's demise amongst chaos. He did this while arresting peaceful protesters, freezing bank accounts, running over elders, and pepper-spraying citizens. He did this in the wake of a violent eco terrorist attack at the Coastal GasLink Pipeline site in B.C., where 20 assailants wielding axes terrorized employees and used explosives to destroy construction trailers, including an attempt to set fire to a vehicle with workers inside.

He did this while a madman amassed troops along Ukraine's border, beginning an onslaught to kill innocent people in a ruthless attack having the potential to start a world war. But Trudeau looks at this turmoil as an opportunity, an opportunity to divest of a pipeline he had no intentions of completing, to fulfill his misplaced vision of destroying Alberta's fossil fuel industry, an ethical industry that could replace Putin's tyrannical oil, paralyze his funding, and make Canada the world's preferred supplier of clean energy.

Mr. Speaker, the Emergencies Act authorizes the federal government to take extraordinary measures in responding to national emergencies. It replaced the War Measures Act, with war

characterizing the severe nature of its invocation. Its use should not be taken lightly. If absolute power corrupts absolutely, with this megalomaniac in charge, Canada appears absolutely corrupt.

Thank you.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, Judy came into my office a couple of years ago and shared a heartbreaking story. She showed me pictures of the drug paraphernalia laying in her granddaughter's room that she had received from injection sites. It was enough to last a month. Judy told me her granddaughter was going to die because no one cared. People were enabling her in her addiction. Judy wanted me to remember her granddaughter as we focused on trying to make sure that other people did not lose their loved ones. A few months later, sadly, Judy was right. Her granddaughter Judaine passed away.

This story is heartbreaking and is all too common in our province and our country. Mr. Speaker, people living with addiction are exactly that, people. They are sons, daughters, grandkids. They are siblings, parents, and grandparents.

Our government cares deeply about this issue and is committed to fostering a healing journey and removing barriers so individuals can access help. Recently we expanded the 4,000 new recovery spaces that were planned to 8,000 spaces dedicated to detox, treatment, and recovery. Alberta is also the first province to eliminate all user fees for publicly funded treatment. We've also launched the Digital Overdose Response System, a mobile app that can help prevent overdose deaths. If a user of the app becomes unresponsive to a timer, EMS is dispatched to save their life.

We recently announced that Alberta will be the first province to provide an injectable opioid treatment drug, Sublocade, at no cost. Sublocade provides the client with 30 days of protection from overdose and reduced cravings so they can pursue recovery. We also recently announced \$1.4 million to expand and create a low-barrier division of the virtual opioid dependency program. Thanks to this program Albertans anywhere in the province can get same-day access to evidence-based opioid treatment medications.

Mr. Speaker, addiction ruins lives. It destroys communities, and it tears families apart. I'm proud that our government is providing the help necessary to help recover from addiction to improve lives, rebuild communities, and strengthen families here in Alberta.

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 oral notice to Government Motion 12 to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke (i) its proof of vaccination requirements for airline passengers and (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirements for international airline passengers entering Canada.

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

The Speaker: You can extend the Routine if you choose. The other thing, though, I just wanted to check with the Government House

Leader: are you comfortable that the motion that you read is, in fact, the motion which you desire on the Order Paper?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I'll read it one more time, Mr. Speaker, if you like.

The Speaker: No. If you have, it's fine. I just want to make sure that you have what you want.

Mr. Jason Nixon: No. I think we're good.

The Speaker: Okay. If you want to extend the Routine . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. I will extend the Routine, please, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill consists of several legislative amendments which support government's commitment to responsible financial management and respect for Alberta taxpayer dollars. The bill also enacts several specific tax changes and supports red tape reduction by harmonizing federal and provincial tax legislation. If passed, these measures will help ensure efficient use of Albertans' tax dollars and protect valuable public services today and well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

2:50

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

The proposed changes, Mr. Speaker, to the MGA will ensure municipal bylaws align with the provincial approach to public health issues. Let me be perfectly clear. The changes proposed in this bill are extremely narrow and are strictly focused on public health requirements related to COVID-19. If passed, the legislation would require municipal bylaws relating to masks to prevent the spread of communicable diseases or COVID-19 vaccines be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. That's it. This approach will limit the ability of municipalities to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province, again, only specifically related to COVID-19 or similar communicable diseases.

For example, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing mask bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores and retail businesses. These changes otherwise

would have no impact on the day-to-day operations of Alberta municipalities. Most municipalities, Mr. Speaker, already comply with public health requirements for COVID-19, so the proposed changes will have zero impact on the vast, vast, vast majority of Alberta municipalities. Local governments would continue to have the authority to implement masking bylaws for the operation of municipal facilities such as recreation centres, public transit, and other municipal buildings and places that they actually own. Individual Albertans and Alberta businesses should have the option of whether or not to wear masks or to require their customers to wear masks, and the proposed amendments to the MGA will ensure that they have that choice.

These changes will come into effect upon receiving royal assent. If passed, Mr. Speaker, this bill will ensure that Alberta has one clear public health policy as we move together on a path, we hope, towards normal. I say "we hope" because no one can predict what this virus will do next.

The Speaker: I had almost mistaken that for a second reading speech.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 202

Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, that being Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 202 will allow medical officers of health, cabinet, and the Minister of Health to make and issue health orders as needed but with the added transparency and accountability that can be provided by the MLAs in the Legislature so they can represent the views of their constituents, which, of course, is the role they were elected for.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:59 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose because the Member for Lethbridge-West and our Official Opposition Finance critic – while asking her questions, the Government House Leader was heckling her by saying, "Shannon, hey, Shannon," and questioning how she was asking her question. It is a long-standing precedent in this House not to use first names, and heckling in that manner seemed to be a very deliberate attempt to throw her off her leader's question in this place. I call a point of order because using first names in this way seemed particularly malicious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I confess I can't recall if I used the hon. member's first name. Certainly, it would be a point of order if I did, and as an abundance of caution I'd be happy to withdraw and apologize if I did use the hon. member's first name.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. I, too, did hear you use her first name, so I appreciate the apology.

At 2 o'clock the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order, and is someone from the government side wanting to argue this point of order? I'm not sure who – the Government House Leader himself.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah, absolutely, we will rise. At that time the hon. member, whose name evidently I did use, from Lethbridge . . .

Mr. Schow: West.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you very much.

. . . West heckled to the Minister of Finance that he – he, Mr. Speaker – was pickpocketing Albertans in her question. Actually, it was not a heckle. I have to rephrase. That is certainly an inappropriate thing – so I will rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) – and not something that an hon. member of this place should be accused of.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues. Certainly, if the hon. member had referred to him as an individual, then that would be unparliamentary, and if that was the case, I would apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Well, I appreciate the apology and withdrawal because I do have the benefit of the Blues, and it says: "For the folks watching at home, the minister also doesn't want to talk about the billion dollars he's pickpocketing in personal income." In fact, that would have been a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. The statement is withdrawn and apologized for.

At 2:10 the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs rose on a point of order.

Point of Order
Oral Question Period Practices

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly hopeful this won't take long. It may not be the worst sin committed here, but it was fairly blatant. Under 23(l), "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." At that point the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud stood up and said something very close to: I received a text right here in question period that said this. Now, I refer to you the comments you yourself have made in this House and, more specifically, to the memo that you sent at the start of the session in which you wrote, and I quote: "Members may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but only use

them as reading devices and not for streaming, sending or receiving messages. All connectivity, including Wi-Fi and mobile data services, must be turned off during this time (i.e., airplane mode on and Wi-Fi turned off)." I just believe that if it was important enough to you to put it to us in a memo, it might be important enough for you to rule against us doing what you warned against in the memo that you took the trouble to send.

The Speaker: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister was very excited about calling this point of order, but he did not hear correctly. The member very clearly was talking about e-mail she received during estimates, when the minister was providing information that stakeholders patently disagreed with and were taking the time to watch the estimates and correct the government through e-mails to the Official Opposition, something that all ministers should be aware seems to be happening more and more often. I don't believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Why, thank you. I appreciate the submissions.

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and what the member did say is: "And given that people in the sector were e-mailing me today during estimates to fact-check the minister in real time . . ." Now, this isn't a point of order, but I might just add that I am very excited that someone did in fact read the procedural memo. So from the very bottom of my heart to you, sir, thank you. Thank you very much.

Hon. members, this concludes the daily Routine. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

Prior to rising, it is important to note that the Legislative Assembly policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure in the Grassland Room and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca