



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 9, 2022

Day 6

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
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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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Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
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)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (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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Vacant
Vacant

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 9, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to introduce a group of trustees from southwestern Ontario who are visiting Alberta for the Rural Education Symposium. They are guests of the Minister of Municipal Affairs as they hail from the Thames Valley school district, where the minister grew up. I'm hoping they could perhaps provide me some tips on keeping the minister in line. Please welcome the school board trustees to the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Oil and Gas Pipeline Development

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The terrible situation in eastern Europe has shone a light on why we need to build energy infrastructure in Canada and increase our energy exports to the rest of the world. Alberta is a rights-respecting democracy with the third-largest energy reserves on the planet. We can be a major force for global stability by displacing conflict oil from Russia and other dictatorships. The world needs oil. The world needs Alberta oil.

Unfortunately, we have seen activists and misguided politicians standing in the way of us building the pipelines that we need to get our energy to market. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. Alberta can cut off Vladimir Putin's war machine and others by building pipelines, building them fast, and building them right now. Alberta stands ready, willing, and able to supply the energy needed to displace Russia from global markets. But one thing, though: we need Ottawa and Washington to stop killing our pipelines.

On that note, the NDP members across the aisle should also stop standing in the way of pipelines. Let's not forget their record. They surrendered on Energy East, they opposed Northern Gateway, and they opposed Keystone XL. Then they appointed radical anti-oil activists like Tzeporah Berman to important positions overseeing our energy sector.

Albertans agree that this nonsense has to stop, but just recently we saw the NDP pass a resolution endorsing illegal protests along the Coastal GasLink pipeline in B.C., this despite the fact that all 20 elected chiefs and councils along the Coastal GasLink pipeline support the project. When the resolution passed, the NDP supported their radical members with one word, "solidarity," Mr. Speaker. Solidarity with whom, though? United Conservatives stand in solidarity with the elected Indigenous leaders along the Coastal GasLink pipeline and encourage Indigenous participation in the resource economy. The NDP, meanwhile, will continue to support

radical activists who want to shut our pipelines down, who are now engaging in violence.

The world is waking up to the necessity of building pipelines and getting Alberta oil to market, and our government is getting the job done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Mr. Schmidt: Albertans own the resources, and they should get more faster: that's the late Peter Lougheed in a 2006 interview expressing concerns that Albertans aren't sharing in the prosperity that comes from our vast resources. He went on to say about oil and gas royalties, "It is wrong in my judgment, a major wrong, and I keep trying to see who the beneficiaries are. Not the people in Red Deer, because everything they have got is costing more."

Fast-forward to 2022. We have oil at \$120 a barrel. There are reports of heavy profits coming in from all over the province. CNRL reported nearly \$3 billion in earnings in the fourth quarter of last year and raised its dividend by almost 30 per cent. Suncor netted almost \$2 billion. TC Energy earned over \$4 billion last year.

Billions in profits, Mr. Speaker, and what do everyday Alberta families get? They get record high gas prices. They get utility bills in excess of \$700 a month. They get to hand over another billion dollars to this Premier as a result of his sneaky budget creep tax scheme. They're paying more for groceries, school fees, tuition. Heck, this government even raised the fees for families trying to go camping this summer. My constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar can't make ends meet, and similar hardship is being felt right across the province. The Finance minister has a constituent whose utility bill was \$1,900. And his response? A measly 50 bucks – 50 bucks, Mr. Speaker – while oil and gas companies earn billions on top of the billions in tax cuts that this UCP government gave to them. Tax handouts for corporations, massive tax hikes for Alberta families.

Enough is enough. Albertans deserve a bigger slice of the pie. They're wondering why the rich get richer and they have to decide between buying groceries and putting gas in the car. They're left worrying that their utility bill will be sent to collections, that their kids will be forced to give up on their dreams of a postsecondary education. It is time for a change, Mr. Speaker.

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

Budget 2022

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to share that for the first time since 2014-2015 Alberta's budget is balanced, with a projected surplus of \$511 million. And it doesn't end there. Surpluses of \$900 million and \$700 million are targeted for 2023-24 and 2024-25, respectively. As a member of Treasury Board it has been an honour and privilege to work with the Minister of Finance and my Treasury Board and government colleagues to fulfill our government's commitment to balance the budget in our first term.

Favourable commodity prices certainly helped, but balancing the budget was also the result of growing the economy, financial discipline, and responsible government. To see this, consider that the previous NDP government raised spending an average of 4 per cent per year. At that rate of spending, even at projected commodity prices and assuming their policies hadn't harmed businesses or our energy sector further, Alberta would have a \$6 billion deficit this year, a \$7.5 billion deficit next year, and a \$9 billion deficit in 2024.

The previous NDP government also significantly increased taxes and regulatory burden. This year Alberta will collect approximately \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenues at our 8 per cent rate than the previous NDP government did at 12 per cent. Our government also has cut over 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and businesses an estimated \$1.2 billion while making Alberta a more desirable place to invest.

In Budget 2022 Health and Education continue to be funded at the highest levels in Alberta's history. Advanced Education, Children's Services, and social services are also seeing increases to meet the needs of Albertans.

With a growing and diversifying economy, Alberta is the best place to start a family, find a job, or build a business. Albertans have every reason to be optimistic, and with continued responsible government and financial discipline, we can avoid burdening our children so they can share in that optimism.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans got to see exactly how out of touch this government is from their needs and concerns. The Finance minister, in responding to a question from his own caucus, decided to take the opportunity to boast about the Alberta affordability advantage that he claims all Albertans get to take part in. Seriously.

He said this as Albertans are facing skyrocketing utility bills. Some owe thousands in outstanding payments. He said this as Albertans are bracing for this government to take a billion dollars in higher income taxes because of the bracket creep. He said this as Albertans are facing higher school fees, higher property taxes, higher insurance bills, higher camping fees, and the list goes on. And guess what? All of these cost hikes come as a direct result of the policy decisions of this government.

Can the government be any more tone deaf? There is no affordability advantage for Albertans right now, not for my constituents being forced to choose between putting food on the kitchen table and keeping the lights on, not for those staring down bills for school fees that they'll never be able to afford, not for those who are being forced to park their vehicles because gas is more than \$1.60 a litre and their car insurance has shot up by more than 30 per cent.

It is insulting for this government to talk about an affordability advantage when they have done everything in their power to make life unaffordable for Albertans. For Albertans to have a real affordability advantage, it will require a change in government. We need a government that actually cares about Alberta families and making life affordable for them. My message to my constituents in Edmonton-Manning and to all Albertans is that help is on the way. They just need to hang on a little bit longer because in 2023 the government is changing.

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

1:40

Budget 2022

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great time for Albertans and residents of my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Last month MLAs returned to the Legislature. When they did, this government unveiled a budget that for the first time in eight years will be balanced. This budget will help Albertans look forward for the future of this province.

One of the key pillars is going to be health care. We all know the challenges faced during this pandemic, and our government is committing a total of \$3.5 billion for health facilities, equipment,

and IT systems to expand health care capacity for Albertans no matter where they live. This includes \$133 million over three years to upgrade and expand hospital operating rooms and departments.

I'd also like to highlight that annual corporate tax revenue is expected to be \$400 million higher than the previous government's with a rate that is 4 per cent lower. Had we kept tax rates where the NDP had them, we would have had much less revenue because these crucial businesses would have gone elsewhere. COVID did make the fiscal situation challenging, but I want to thank Minister Toews for making our province an ideal place to do business.

Furthermore, on top of this budget, we have shown fiscal restraint. In comparison, if we kept spending increases at the same rate as the previous NDP government, then Albertans would be facing a massive \$6 billion deficit this year. This would take limited tax dollars to pay interest payments on debt compared to programs and services that Albertans require.

Another point that is important to my riding is our ongoing supports for youth and their journey towards a better education. We will be providing \$600 million for the Alberta at work program. Now, this new initiative will help prepare the future generation of youth for the workforce through skills training and knowledge for K to 12 and postsecondary students.

This budget is great for Albertans and residents of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Thanks to the hard work of our government, we can all look forward to more great things to come in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member is aware that the use of proper names for any reason is unacceptable, and he'll govern himself accordingly in the future.

The Very Reverend Bill Phipps

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, in Calgary and across Alberta people are mourning the loss of the Very Reverend Bill Phipps. Bill was an extraordinary man who embodied so much of what is best in our province. He was a leader, he was a man of faith, and he was the prophet in a baseball cap. He was a fierce advocate for LGBTQ2S-plus rights and economic justice. He founded organizations such as Faith & the Common Good and Greening Sacred Spaces. He was so passionate about climate change that he went on a week-long hunger strike and what he described as, quote, a prayer of courage for political leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Bill was a relentless advocate for the marginalized and dispossessed. He also had a wicked sense of humour, and he knew how to enjoy life. He loved to camp and watch baseball. He threw out the very first pitch at the Blue Jays game in 2000.

He knew what was great about Canada, but he didn't shy away from harsh truths about our history. When he was the United Church of Canada's 36th moderator, he offered one of the first apologies to First Nation peoples on the role his church played in the residential school system. His words are worth reflecting on today.

We know that many within our church will . . . not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens.

Mr. Speaker, right up until the end of his life Bill Phipps was a passionate, thoughtful, unyielding force for positive change in Alberta, Canada, and the world. I admired him deeply. On behalf of everyone in Alberta's NDP caucus I want to offer my deepest condolences to his partner, Carolyn, his family and his friends, and the entire United Church community.

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

Federal Emergencies Act

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shakespeare wrote his plays for everyone and often commented on the conditions facing ordinary citizens who were deemed by some to be the underclass, you know, the fringe minority of his time. When he wrote *Hamlet*, he said: there's something rotten in the state of Denmark. He was commenting on the lack of leadership in his own country, not in Denmark. Albertans and the vast majority of Canadians have been saying for some time that there is something rotten in Ottawa.

The PM of the present invoked the Emergencies Act against us, legislation that historically has been used to declare war. Under the guise of safety he gave his government powers, including the ability to seize private property and monies of everyday citizens that were protesting against him. Hard-working, law-abiding citizens' rights were trampled. They had to endure the onslaught of character assassinations by the PM and other elected officials, the media, that justified his draconian use of powers typically reserved for times of war. The overwhelming majority of the protesters of the freedom convoy were peaceful despite being painted quite the contrary by a number of other leaders and, like the NDP here, members at home.

Peaceful protest is a constitutional right in this country. Everyone must protect this, not crush that right with draconian use of this power, as we've recently seen. While we've seen legislation used during the pandemic at many levels of government limiting the rights and freedoms of Canadians, nothing compared to the gross overreach by the PM or his divisive language. His actions were condemned across the world, including by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Here at home only the NDP supported him, their federal friends voting in the act to make it come into effect. At home the NDP said nothing while the whole country was crying foul as they sought to trample the constitutional rights of many Albertans taking place or participating in that convoy.

Leaders have pushed people too far. Everyday folks came together in a common cause, forcing changes to be made, freedoms to be restored, and made us all consider the quality of our leaders of the present day. There is indeed something "rotten in the state of Denmark."

Utility Costs

Mr. Dang: Life is getting more expensive for Albertans thanks to the short-sighted policies of this government. My constituents are reaching out to me directly with their worry and outrage over the lack of relief for consumers to their skyrocketing utility bills. People are asking why this government dropped the utility rate cap to pad the bottom line of already-profitable utility companies at the expense of everyday Albertans.

Albertans are doing their best to trim household expenses wherever they can, but, Mr. Speaker, they can only do so much. One constituent had to make the decision to pull their child from daycare to make ends meet and pay their nearly tripled utility bill. Another constituent shared with me, quote: I'm on fixed rates and have done everything in my power to be mindful of my consumption; I cannot afford to keep paying these ridiculous amounts and still afford food, my mortgage, and clothing for my children, you know, the basic necessities of life; I'm okay paying \$200 of gas we use to heat our home, but the other \$250 is carnage. End quote.

We're facing inflation of over 5 per cent. Albertans have seen a zero per cent increase in their wages. This means that Alberta families are dipping into their savings and going further into debt to just get by. People across the province cannot keep trying to pay more with so much less. Albertans and Alberta families should not

have to choose between buying food and keeping their houses warm during the winter. The government has promised a nearly useless utility rebate. The rates needed to trigger this rebate are highly unlikely. Relief is not coming, so as it stands, Alberta households will not see a dime of relief from this government for their rising utility bills.

They say that actions speak louder than words, and this government's inaction when it comes to keeping life affordable for Albertans is loud and clear.

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

United States Oil and Gas Imports

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the U.S. banned Russian oil. For those watching, right now, as I speak, Russia is killing civilians in Ukraine. Putin's unethical war machine is murdering children. If you buy Russian oil, you finance war crimes. By any reasonable standard Russian oil is unethical, and I applaud President Biden on his decision.

But how will they make up this loss of supply? The obvious choice is, of course, us. Canada is a global leader on ESG indexes, which include human rights, climate change action, and reconciliation. But who is Biden actually talking to? I'll tell you: Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Really?

Venezuela. In 2018 independent experts concluded that there were crimes against humanity happening: murders, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and torture. And how do they treat Indigenous people? Two words: Kumarakapay massacre, Venezuelan troops shooting and torturing Indigenous people in just 2019.

Saudi Arabia. Did we all forget about Jamal Khashoggi? How is the media not upset about this? And, further, do you support LGBTQ2S-plus rights? In Saudi Arabia you can be stoned to death just because of who you love. It is terrible.

And Iran. Come on. In the streets they chant: death to America. In what upside-down world are we living where you would rather send money to, and thereby strengthen the military of, people who want to kill you? You can't make this stuff up.

Mr. Speaker, through you to President Biden, please, sir, do not jump out of the frying pan into the fire. You are a champion of human rights, of LGBTQ2S-plus rights. You support Indigenous reconciliation. The choice is clear. Put your money where your values are. You may even be surprised at just how fast we can ramp up production, and, hey, we also have a net zero pipeline pretty much built in Keystone XL.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has question 1.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's postsecondary institutions can be the engine of our economic recovery, preparing our future leaders for the world of tomorrow, but how about today? Those future leaders now are struggling because of this UCP government's tuition hikes. I have a document from the University of Alberta showing that the minister personally signed off on tuition hikes in engineering, medicine, business, and other areas, some as much as 104 per cent increases. A simple question: does the minister believe somehow that higher education also means sky-high tuition rates?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary institutions are required to consult with students regarding acceptance of tuition increases. My assumption is that they have already done this consultation prior to coming to the Minister of Advanced Education. This is just more misinformation from the NDP without any reference to the actual facts. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition in Alberta is \$6,567, and the national average is \$6,693. Alberta remains below the national average in tuition cost, and we have added millions of dollars in financial supports to ensure all Albertans have the opportunity to attend postsecondary.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government is pushing our future leaders out of this province with these extraordinary hikes. According to StatsCan 2021 was the first year since 1988 that Alberta has a net negative migration of young people aged 18 to 24. The U of A Students' Union indicated that 61 per cent of students think that there is at least a 50-50 chance that they will leave the province, with 14 per cent already deciding to pack their bags. Why would the minister drive young people out of the province with these ridiculous tuition hikes, which are outrageous?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member opposite forgot that there was COVID and that that's probably why there wasn't migration to and from the province in postsecondary. Again, I want to reiterate the actual facts. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition in Alberta is \$6,567. That is well below the national average of \$6,693. Again, misinformation.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, for all the students out there watching this minister floundering around today, I want you to know that the NDP has your back. Let me explain how it works for you. You can stop these cuts, actually support your ambitions and desire to succeed to build a better economy. Our proposal strengthening postsecondary for a resilient future is online at albertasfuture.ca. Check it out. My question to the minister is that I can send around a copy to her office afterwards. I would be happy to do so.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Looked a lot like a prop from here. Tough to know for certain, but that's what it looked like from here.

The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I failed to hear the question in there, but what I did want to share with everybody: you know what will keep Alberta students in Alberta or people coming to Alberta? Jobs. Jobs will keep them coming to postsecondary. They will keep them coming to Alberta. I know it's something that in K to 12 our students are looking forward to. They're looking forward to going to postsecondary. They're looking forward to going to in-person classes once again when they're able to graduate, but at the end of the day we need jobs here for Alberta students.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the UCP government why they refuse to give Albertans back more of their income when inflation rises, or as the Premier once called it, income tax bracket creep. The Finance minister, in response, went on a bit of a space-walk, refusing to acknowledge his billion-dollar pickpocketing of the family budget. This year alone UCP inflation creep will take \$400 from families, \$350 from the seniors' benefit, and more than \$1,000

from Albertans living on AISH. I'll try again. Will the Premier reverse his inflation creep and help struggling Albertans? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government just announced the other day a 13-cent rebate on fuel taxes as well as rebates on people's electricity bills. That's a sharp contrast to that party across from me, the NDP, who brought in the job-killing carbon tax and continue to support Justin Trudeau's ridiculous carbon tax increases. Will that member stand up in this House and join the government to call on the federal government to get rid of the carbon tax once and for all and to stop punishing hard-working Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, for the folks at home, the UCP is recycling old talking points because they don't want to talk about how they're raising your costs, your taxes, taking money from your budget. That's my message to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier himself as an MP in Ottawa raged against these sneaky tax increases. I'll ask the same verbatim question the Premier asked the Chrétien government. When is the Premier going to "stop this destructive tax on inflation, or will they continue to be known by Canadians as the bracket creeps?"

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government is lowering taxes. The reason the hon. member is so upset is that she's upset about a balanced budget and the fact that we've been able to fix the tremendous damage that the NDP did when they were in power. That hon. member used to be the environment minister who oversaw a carbon tax coming in on Albertans that raised the costs on everything and continues to support the federal government bringing carbon taxes on the province of Alberta and the people that live here. Again, will that member finally stand up to Trudeau, or is she going continue to sit with him?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we hear every day from Albertans who must choose between buying groceries and a tank of gas to drive to a medical appointment. No rebate off-sets the UCP's billion-dollar income tax bracket creep. None. But every day this week the minister and the government refuse to acknowledge their billion-dollar tax increase. I'll ask, again, the exact verbatim question the former MP for Calgary Southeast, now the Premier, asked. To the Premier: "Why is this government telling Canadians they will get tax relief when in fact they will end up with less money in their wallets at the end of the day?"

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House will never be lectured by the NDP when it comes to taxes, particularly that member, who brought in a carbon tax on this province that they never campaigned on, that they hid from Albertans, that raised the cost of everything inside our society. This government got rid of that carbon tax, got rid of the NDP carbon tax, and continues to stand up to the federal government when it comes to the carbon tax. When is the NDP going to do the right thing for Albertans and join this government, stand up to Justin Trudeau, and get rid of the carbon tax inside this country?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the next question.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, with revenues flowing into government coffers, all this government is willing to offer Albertans is a fake

natural gas rebate and 50 bucks. Meanwhile TransAlta reported that 2021 was a, quote, record year. It earned \$1.26 billion over 12 months. Shareholders and CEOs are making off with massive profits while people in Calgary and right across the province watch in horror as their utility bills skyrocket. As this government and utility corporations are earning billions in revenues, don't Alberta families deserve more than \$50?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the NDP truly cared about the high cost of electricity, they would not have cancelled the cheapest form of electricity that our province had to offer. If they cared about the price of electricity, they wouldn't have allowed \$7.5 billion worth of transmission, much of it not needed, to be built in their term. Enough with the manufactured outrage on the part of the NDP. They should apologize to Albertans for making everything more expensive.

Ms Ganley: That minister may be unwilling to talk about the pain Alberta families are facing, but it's real. Rural Municipalities of Alberta reported that delinquent oil and gas companies owed municipalities \$253 million in unpaid taxes. The government claimed that it was bringing in a legislative hammer to force the companies to pay last year, but it hasn't worked. In fact, municipalities actually owe more this year. Can the minister explain why companies are netting billions of dollars in profit but Alberta municipalities aren't seeing any of that money, even dollars they've been owed for years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.
2:00

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We brought in legislation last year to help municipalities collect taxes from oil and gas companies. The oil and gas companies were happy. The municipalities were happy. Everybody was happy except the NDP. Now, they're not wrong in that we need to do more and to do something else, but when they fought us on what didn't work, gosh knows how hard they're going to fight us on what we have to do that's stronger. They didn't support the municipalities the first time around. They are not on the municipalities' side. They showed that when we brought in this legislation.

Ms Ganley: More bluster from a government that admits its own program doesn't work.

One of the first actions this government took after coming into office was to hand out \$4.7 billion to already-profitable corporations. They claim that the massive giveaway was necessary to create jobs. It didn't create jobs. This government is still 130,000 jobs short of where it should be. Families are struggling, and this UCP government is nowhere to be found. All they have to offer are fake rebates and empty promises. To the government: why did corporations get billions and families got 50 bucks?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question coming from the NDP. Again, this government will not be lectured, when it comes to taxes, by the NDP, who never saw a tax increase that they did not like. Again, that side of the House has brought in carbon taxes, supported the federal government on carbon taxes. Carbon taxes have raised gas prices by 40 cents to date, 40 cents a litre. Again, will that hon. member stand up and apologize to the people of Alberta for supporting those ridiculous taxes and join this side of the House in calling on the federal government to get rid of all carbon taxes inside this country?

The Speaker: I just want to provide a very brief caution to all members of the Assembly. This is a great time to do it because every individual who had the opportunity to ask a question or answer a question took that opportunity to really point at other members of the Assembly, and I'm just not convinced that that helps raise the level of decorum. I am more than happy for you to direct your pointing at me. I have no feelings and no heart, so please feel free to do so.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the direction of the provincial government: those are the first words of Dr. Verna Yiu informing her medical colleagues that there is no longer a requirement for AHS staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19. It's a clear message that under the UCP clinical decisions are made by desperate politicians, not health care professionals, yet another reminder that Albertans can't trust the UCP with their health care. Why is the Premier pandering to an extremist fringe of his own caucus instead of protecting Albertans who are sick enough to be in hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to state for the record that I do believe that you actually have a heart.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all health care workers for actually getting vaccinated. Just under 98 per cent of full-time and part-time health care workers working for AHS got vaccinated and 99.8 per cent of doctors, so I want to thank you. Our focus throughout the entire pandemic has been on ensuring that we can protect our health care system to provide health care services for Albertans. We are balancing the risk in doing that, the risk of measures being put in place with the risk of people getting infection. This calculation has changed with omicron. We've made some changes to go along with it, and I'll speak more on that in a second.

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this minister made the decision, not the health care experts.

Albertans recovering from surgeries who are struggling against a life-threatening disease have a right to expect that the people providing care to them have been vaccinated against a highly contagious disease that has killed almost 4,000 Albertans. Immunocompromised health care workers deserve protection, too, but the UCP isn't listening to them. They're listening to the people who blocked the border at the Coutts border crossing, caused almost a billion dollars in damage to our economy, and conspired to murder police officers while UCP members cheered them on. I'll ask the Premier again: why is he putting the safety of critically ill Albertans at risk to pander to a violent, extremist fringe group?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I reject the entire premise of the question. Our entire government's focus is on protecting the health of Albertans. As I indicated before, the calculation of the risk has changed. As the hon. member knows and as this whole Chamber knows, there is a shortage of health care workers. We need all the health care workers that we can get to be able to deliver the services that Albertans need.

The highly transmissible nature of omicron, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that two doses aren't as effective as they were against delta

have changed that calculation, as has the need for us to be able to provide services. We made this change, just like Manitoba did, just like Quebec did, because we're focused on providing health care to Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the critical staffing shortage is in part because this government failed to protect the health care system and repeatedly pushed it to the limits because they put politics ahead of public health. Albertans know full well that this decision isn't about health care; it's about a weak and desperate Premier whose political career is on life support. Every single decision this government makes is an attempt to save his job on April 9 in Red Deer even if that means making hospitals less safe for Albertans battling cancer. Can the Premier tell this House how many votes he thinks he'll get in Red Deer thanks to his irresponsible meddling in Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on providing health care and health care outcomes for Albertans. We made a choice yesterday, looking at all the evidence, and it's the same choice that was made in Quebec. It was the same choice that was made in Manitoba. We are focused on expanding the capacity for health care. In our budget we provided an additional \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years. We committed \$3.5 billion into infrastructure to expand our health care. We are focused on providing the best health care for Albertans, and that is what we'll do.

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

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great day for rural Alberta, with the government of Canada matching our government's historic investment in rural broadband expansion. The combined public investment now stands at an impressive \$780 million, with more money likely coming from the private sector. The NDP committed not one red cent – or should I say “orange cent”? – to broadband expansion when they were in office, which made no sense. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why was it so important for the government to deliver where the previous government failed and bridge the digital divide for rural Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that great question from my colleague. Yes, today I was so excited to be able to announce that Alberta's government has secured a matching agreement with the federal government for every single dollar of our \$390 million commitment to rural broadband. That means \$780 million of public-sector funding will be going to build much-needed, critical broadband infrastructure in rural Alberta. The NDP in their four years in government did absolutely nothing on this. We are taking action today. That is so important. We know how important it is. This is a priority. We have released a comprehensive and credible strategy on how to get there. And guess what? That is a funded plan.

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

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. This is very welcome news for rural Alberta. Given that our government committed a historic \$390 million over the next four years to bring high-speed Internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta and given that the federal

government has matched this commitment, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: what kind of support do you anticipate seeing from the private sector now that the government has stepped up to the plate on broadband funding?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a great question, and you know what? We've always said that we need to work with all levels of government as well as the private sector to solve the broadband problem, and that's exactly what we're doing. As I said, we've got \$780 million between the Canadian government and the Alberta government that is going towards this important infrastructure. And guess what? It's going to be private-sector companies like telcos and Internet companies who will be building much of this infrastructure, and they are going to have to have skin in the game, too. Part of my job is to negotiate the maximum amount of dollars from them in exchange for the public-sector funding. I am confident that we will be able to push the total commitment north of a billion dollars.

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

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister again for that answer. Given that our government recently released our rural broadband strategy, a plan to close the digital divide for Albertans by 2026, and given that there is a tremendous economic need to ensure all Albertans have access to reliable high-speed Internet by this time, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: how do these recent funding announcements affect the timelines for connecting all Albertans to reliable Internet services?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, another great question from my colleague and one that is so important for rural Albertans. What I'm really pleased to say is that we have been working very closely with the federal government throughout all of our negotiations on the matching funding that we announced today, and we are very close to being able to announce the first tranche of co-investment into the first projects that will see shovels in the ground this year. That is going to bring immediate relief to Albertans this year. While the NDP love to talk, we're taking real action, committing real dollars, and working with all of the stakeholders, municipal leaders, the federal government, and the private sector to get the job done.

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, do you have one more? No?

Mr. Rehn: No.

Mr. Jason Nixon: He'll take one more.

The Speaker: Yeah. Missed his chance.

Utility Costs

Ms Renaud: Today I stood with Nora Yaghi, who runs a home-based floral business in my constituency of St. Albert. Nora, like too many Albertans, is being hit by sky-high utility bills and recently saw her bill climb over \$140, more than the same time last year. Nora found the fake natural gas rebate and the \$50 cheque offered by this government laughable. Will the minister explain to Albertans like Nora why they promised relief on skyrocketing utility bills in this budget but then delivered virtually nothing?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that we are as equally frustrated as Albertans are with the high cost of electricity. Our electricity market is an open and free market, and

it's a product of supply and demand. Unfortunately, the previous administration had a series of policies that drove the cost of electricity up. I would encourage anyone that is struggling or at risk of having their utilities cut off to please contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where there are supports that can help them.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Finance minister promised Albertans like Nora there would be relief coming for Albertans to ease the soaring monthly cost and given that the only acknowledgement of the raging-high bills in this no-help budget was the so-called natural gas rebate, which turned out to be a fake, and given that this won't do a thing to support business owners like Nora coping with these sky-high costs, will the minister explain to Albertans when the real rebate is coming, and if he can't, I assume Albertans just aren't going to see a dime this year?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so sad when the NDP finds someone who is struggling. Their first thought is to turn on the camera. If I could just encourage the members opposite to spend less time politicizing vulnerable Albertans and encourage them to contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate. There are real supports that can help people like Nora have lower electricity bills. I would encourage them to certainly let those constituents be aware of those supports that are available to them.

Ms Renaud: Given that real people have real concerns they want real answers to, not bluster, and given that these costs and lack of supports from this government mean that small-business owners, real business owners, real people like Nora, are forced to pass on costs and forced to re-evaluate their whole lives – this is serious; this isn't about politics – will the Finance minister apologize to Nora and her customers for their action, actually lack of action, and then more bluster today? Answer the question. They need help today.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, this is going to come as a surprise to the hon. member, but facts are bipartisan. They can repeat these statements as often as they want – they can even put them on Twitter – but that doesn't make it true. Everything the NDP did for four years was to make life more expensive for Albertans. They did it to the electricity grid by raising prices, and then they brought in the biggest tax in our province's history, making everything more expensive, the carbon tax. The best thing that we can do to keep electricity prices low is to make sure that they never get close to the electricity grid ever again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is the only one with the call.

Budget 2022 and Seniors' Expenses

Ms Sigurdson: The cost of living is having a significant impact on seniors. Utility costs are making some question if they can remain in their homes. Increases to groceries and property taxes are pushing seniors to the brink. I know the UCP claim their tax reduction on gasoline is the answer, but it means nothing for seniors who don't drive. For those who do drive, the UCP allowed insurance to skyrocket after removing the rate cap. They care more about their corporate friends than they do about seniors. When will the minister start making life more affordable for seniors?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So untrue, all of the statements she makes. Let me be clear. I'm pleased to share with you my ministry budgets, that have received a 4.2 per cent increase over last year, to bring the grand total to over \$701.2 million. With this funding we will continue to keep the seniors' benefit... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I'm trying to call the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to order. The minister is making it a little bit difficult. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall will come to order.

Ms Pon: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I just get so excited when I talk about seniors, so I'll just keep going. I just want to let you know that this is very important, to provide safe, stable housing for families, seniors, survivors of family violence and that those keep them healthy and safe.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that seniors with low incomes used to be able to turn to the seniors' benefit and special needs assistance for help and given that the UCP deindexed these benefits, meaning they won't keep up with skyrocketing costs, and given that we have called repeatedly for the UCP to reverse these cruel and heartless decisions, would the minister explain why she is willing to stand by and ignore Alberta seniors?

Ms Pon: Well, I don't know why the member says that I'm ignoring them. I just mentioned that this year we increased close to 4 per cent our budget and provided more service to our seniors. By the way, our seniors' benefit is one of the highest programs across Canada, and we have the lowest poverty rate for seniors. We have been looking after seniors. We will continue to do that. It's not like the opposition party. In the four years they did nothing for seniors. This government takes action and looks after our seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP's budget does nothing to address affordability for seniors and given that seniors are not getting any new support – if the UCP had continued to have the seniors' benefit indexed to inflation and the cost of living, a couple would be receiving over \$350 more; this is a significant amount of money for people struggling to meet their basic needs – and given that the minister's answers are vague and unhelpful, if the minister won't do anything to help seniors, should she continue to be the minister?

Ms Pon: Yes. I am. I should continue as the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Mr. Speaker, we did pause indexing seniors' benefits while we want to get our fiscal house in order. We are so proud to present our budget in the black. We have a surplus. The opposition party in four years just increased the deficit year after year. They hate to hear that. I just want to let you know that we balanced a budget this year. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has another question.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure of going to High Prairie hospital a few weeks ago to commemorate the opening of the newly added dialysis facility. I've heard from many constituents these past couple of years about the need for dialysis treatment to be more available. I'm happy to see its completion. To the Minister of Health: what does this new dialysis facility mean for

the hospital, the constituents, and the health care system of Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Alberta's government has invested \$5.2 million to build the new dialysis unit at the High Prairie health centre. This six-station unit will treat up to 12 patients daily and will be open three days a week. It also means that High Prairie area residents like those from Whitefish First Nation won't have to travel hours to either Slave Lake or Peace River to receive this life-saving treatment. This investment directly improves the quality of life for the residents of High Prairie, the surrounding area, and all residents of Lesser Slave Lake.

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

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that there have been questions on the number of rural doctors and especially the availability of doctors in the Wabasca area and Lesser Slave Lake as a whole, people are worried that this will have an impact on the level of health care that they will receive in the area. To the same minister: are there any plans to increase the number of rural doctors available for rural Alberta, especially in the areas of Lesser Slave Lake like Wabasca? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The focus of Alberta's government is on ensuring equitable access to health care across the entire province. This is a challenge not only in Alberta but across the country. I've spoken directly with our counterparts in AHS to ensure that recruitment efforts are prioritized for Wabasca. AHS is currently assessing a few candidates in the area right now. Wabasca will also be one of the first communities in need to receive a new medical graduate under the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE, program. Albertans deserve quality health care no matter where they are in the province, and we're focused on delivering it.

2:20

Mr. Rehn: Thank you to the minister. I know many in the Wabasca area that will be pleased to hear that. Given that there has been an increase of services provided in the area, many have been asking for the increase of services to keep coming and given that rural Albertans can find it difficult to access the health care treatment they need in their communities, to the same minister: what is the ministry working on to continually improve the quality of health care available for rural Albertans like those who live in Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank the hon. member for the advocacy for his constituency. Ensuring the continuity of care in Alberta's health care system is a cornerstone commitment of our government. The Speech from the Throne affirmed this, as did the commitment that we made in Budget 2022. By focusing on our overall hospital capacity, lowering surgical wait times across the board, and addressing the issues facing our continuing care facilities and many other aspects of health care, Alberta's government is committed to improving the quality of service to rural Albertans and to all Albertans. We are here to build capacity and serve the health care needs of Albertans.

Women's Workforce Participation

Member Irwin: Two hundred and thirty-two pages in Budget 2022 and barely a mention of getting women back to work. Women have been hit hard during the pandemic, and the government's signature postbudget announcement for women was worth \$1 million, a whopping .001 per cent of the government's projected spend this year. This UCP government ignores jobs for women, and they're determined to increase utility bills, car insurance, income taxes, tuition fees, camping fees, and more. Why were women left out of this government's jobs plan, and how can this province succeed when half the population is left behind?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about how the members opposite, when they were in government, left women behind. Tens and tens of thousands of women became unemployed as they destroyed our entire Alberta economy. I'll tell you what we've done just in the last couple of days: \$1 million in bursaries announced yesterday for women in STEM at NorQuest College, Bow Valley College, and Yellowhead Tribal College; a \$3 million investment supporting women who are looking for career opportunities in the transportation industry just yesterday. I can tell you that we've taken action.

Member Irwin: Given that this government's job plan ignores women – it really does, Minister. Take a few minutes; read it. Given that this government is clearly unconcerned about women, with extensive commentary in the budget about the challenges men face in the labour market, and given that the employment rate for women is 7.7 per cent lower than it is for men in Alberta – and I'd argue that a competent government would care about ensuring that all Albertans can participate in the economy so that every Albertan can succeed and pay their bills – is this associate minister really comfortable with having fewer women employed than men? Does she care at all about doing her job?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that the member opposite has brought up how women are being treated because I'd like to talk to you about how the NDP treats the former CA president from Calgary-Bow. It's with misogyny. It's with racism. Let me quote some of the things from the member from the constituency of Calgary-Bow.

I was warned about speaking out – that I would be a pariah, that I would be “finished” . . . Recent events with the party have demonstrated to me an unwillingness by [my] party staffers to act in good faith, act respectfully, and act with decency.

This is how they treat their own members. God knows how they're going to treat other Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Irwin: Given that I'm hearing from women every single day who are struggling, struggling to re-enter the workforce – and this is how this government is responding. This government brags about labour force participation even though the rate is 69.9 per cent, far below the 76.5 per cent rate they inherited when they took office. This government goes on at length about how tough the labour market is for men when it is dramatically worse for women on every single metric. Minister, admit it. This government doesn't seem to care whether women will get back to work. Where is the jobs plan for women? Where is the action?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's amazing to me how the members opposite seem to play with numbers. We have a 60.6

per cent employment rate amongst women in this province. I'm going to tell you that that's pretty remarkable in this country. I'll tell you what else. You want to know what we're doing to make sure that women can re-enter the workforce? It's called \$1 billion in child care, \$1 billion. When they were in power, I can tell you what that government did, a \$25-a-day pilot project that wasn't even accessible to most Albertans.

Rental Housing

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Even this Finance minister, who receives over \$250,000 in compensation, claims he can't afford his utility bill. For Albertans who make far less, it is even more severe. The spiking price of utilities, groceries, fuel, and insurance is making renters question if they can remain in their homes. To make matters worse, home prices and rent are skyrocketing, too. The *Globe and Mail* reported that the average price of a single-family home jumped 11 per cent between January and February. I'm wondering: what is the UCP doing to ensure that Alberta renters can remain in their homes?

Mr. Schweitzer: It is rich coming from the NDP when they want to talk about the economy, when they chased away thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment for this province. The number one thing that we can do for people to help them pay their bills: you want to know what that is, Mr. Speaker? Make sure they have a job. The NDP don't know anything about the economy or what it takes to attract investment. This government is leading the way. Alberta is going to lead the country in growth. We're diversifying our economy, leading the way in tech, film and television, agricultural value-add, manufacturing. The list goes on and on for Albertans.

Mr. Carson: Given that even with an increasing supply of homes in Calgary the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has noted that the affordable supply for the lowest fifth of income earners is decreasing – only 9 per cent of homes in the city are affordable for 20 per cent of the population – and given that the Calgary Real Estate Board has said that investors from other parts of the country are planning to buy property in the city this year, rent could spike even more. What will the UCP do in the wake of this to ensure that all renters can access homes that they can afford?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been accused of many things, but peddling in the truth is not one of them. That is the caucus that made everything more expensive for everyday Albertans. They did that by bringing in the carbon tax, the largest tax in our province's history. Then they did the exact same thing by cancelling cheap coal-fired electricity, and they never bothered to tell Albertans that their electricity bills were going up. They turned a blind eye as they overbuilt the electricity grid by \$7 billion, again raising people's electricity bills.

Mr. Carson: Given that this UCP government has left the majority of struggling renters to fend for themselves through the pandemic and given that two years ago the residential tenancy dispute resolution service processed 91 per cent of urgent cases in 15 days but only processed 50 per cent of those cases in the same timeline last year and given that this is a drastic drop in ensuring that people with the most urgent needs and potentially living in dangerous situations can seek justice and resolution to rental disputes, the Minister of Service Alberta must tell Albertans why he is letting wait times get longer when renters need more support now.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we know that at this point in time our turnaround times on RTDRS dispute resolutions are a little bit slower than normal. That's understandable given all of the challenges that Albertans have been through in the middle of COVID, but the good news is that we're coming out of that. The good news is that Service Alberta's budget in Budget 2022 continues to financially support the RTDRS. We have increased the RTDRS budget compared to when the NDP was in power, and we are making sure that we will be able to get back on track to ensure that everyone who needs a dispute will have it heard in a timely manner.

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

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government made a commitment to reduce red tape by a third because we knew that unnecessary and redundant red tape was bad for business. I'm just wondering if the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can give this House an update on her success, our success, in removing red tape in this province. [interjection]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. associate minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has cut more than 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and Alberta businesses over \$1.2 billion to date. Our efforts have been recognized by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who recently awarded our government with the golden scissors award for Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, which makes it easier to recognize out-of-province certifications in regulated occupations, including optometrists, dental assistants, pharmacists, firefighters, veterinarians, social workers, accountants, engineers, and so much more. Incredible work is being done to save Albertans time and money and attract jobs and investment back to Alberta.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that our energy sector is so important to our economy and getting Albertans back to work and given that the NDP, during their time, strangled our energy industry, can the minister outline relief red tape efforts for our energy sector and her success in that area?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Commingled well abandonments have been enabled, meaning that only one approval is needed to abandon multiple produced pools at the same time, saving industry \$584 million and speeding up reclamation. Switching from CCIR to TIER has saved industry 450 workdays and over \$330 million. We established a competitive royalty rate for helium, helping to attract investment and create jobs, and the Alberta Utilities Commission is able to approve certain natural gas fired power plants in as little as 12 days.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that red tape is not just limited to our economic sector and given that we're about keeping our promises in this government and given that other

sectors have had their fair share of red tape through numerous forms, applications, and other requirements, can the minister detail any red tape reduction reforms to other sectors in Alberta that have helped make things better for everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have set a 28-day timeline for project owners to pay invoices to general contractors and have set a seven-day timeline for contractors to pay subcontractors after receiving payment. We're improving AISH by streamlining and simplifying the steps for accepting and processing applications, including the automatic enrolment of people into seniors' financial assistance programs upon turning age 65. We're also allowing municipalities to establish entertainment districts, which will revitalize communities and support tourism.

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

Utility Costs (continued)

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government continues to brag about their budget and make laughable claims that they're creating an affordable advantage, the reality is that they're leaving Albertans behind, like my constituents in Edmonton-Manning. For months I've been getting messages from my constituents who are struggling to cope with these skyrocketing costs. Yuri wrote to me about his utility bill that doubled to more than \$600 last month. What does the minister of economic development have to say to Yuri, whose life is unaffordable because of this terrible government?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, right now we have, around the world, a geopolitical crisis that's happening. The cost of living is going up because commodity prices are going up due to a conflict in Europe where Russia has invaded Ukraine. But the NDP continue to take advantage of crisis after crisis after crisis. When you take a look at how they handled the pandemic, there wasn't a day that went by when they didn't try and exploit an emergency. Right now we're dealing with a geopolitical situation. Alberta has the resources the world needs. We have to communicate effectively with the world about that situation.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that only months ago the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity stood in this House and bragged about how the government wasn't going to do anything to help Albertans with their skyrocketing utility costs and given that Robert wrote to me about how his bills have climbed to over \$600 each month for his family of three and that this government is only offering a measly \$50, which means he will still owe \$550 when it used to be \$250, can the minister clarify if the plan is still to do nothing to support families? Is that really what the associate minister meant?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I can say that in our province's history there was once an NDP MLA that told the truth. Now, I don't know who it was, and I don't know when it was, but I know it wasn't anybody over there. I would encourage the members opposite that when they find Albertans struggling with the high cost of utilities, put the cameras down, refer them to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Put Albertans first. That's what we're doing on this side of the House.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: I know that the associate minister likes to be as creative as possible, but I can tell him that that was beyond the point of creativity and into the point of unparliamentary language, for which he'll apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Nally: I retract and apologize.

Utility Costs (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while this government is hammering families with their unaffordability agenda, they're also hurting local businesses and given that Janelle, who owns a farm in my riding of Edmonton-Manning, is not eligible for the agricultural rates, meaning that this government's do-nothing approach to utilities is actually putting her livelihood at risk, and given that even if she did qualify for the fake natural gas rebate and a cheque for \$50, it's not going to help her farm, will someone, anyone on that side of the House stand up, apologize to my constituents, and promise to do better?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad to be talking about electricity. I'm so glad to be talking about rural Alberta. I've been taking phone calls on electricity in rural Alberta every day that I've been elected, and so did the person that sat here before me when they were in government. It is punitive, the carbon tax that they brought in, that their friend in Ottawa has put on us. It's punitive to agriculture. It's punitive to rural Alberta. If they want to do one thing good for rural Alberta, they should join us, ask to repeal the carbon tax. It makes everything more expensive. It accelerated the coal phase-out. It's wrecked our electricity system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Bill 4

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, it's another day and yet another reason why Albertans can't trust the Premier and his UCP government. Last year the Premier ducked responsibility for public health decisions and said, quote, these decisions are better taken locally. In fact, he encouraged municipalities to implement their own public health measures due to the diverse needs across the province. Now the UCP government is contradicting themselves and taking the decision-making power away from municipalities through their changes to the Municipal Government Act. To the minister: why the flip-flop?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, COVID has been going on for two years, and we just heard the NDP admit that they haven't learned a thing in the last year and a half. On this side of the House we have, and consequently new information leads to new ideas. The fact is that there wasn't 90 per cent of people vaccinated a year and a half ago, there wasn't 65 per cent of people with two vaccinations a year and a half ago. This is ending. The only people I know unhappy that COVID might be ending are the folks across the aisle. The rest of Alberta can't wait. Get onboard, folks.

Member Ceci: Given that these powers currently exist under municipal authority but the Premier is now saying that he will directly target them for his own political reasons in an attempt to save his own skin at his leadership review and given that this government claims it's a grassroots party and that this Premier even signed a grassroots guarantee but now he's launching a direct attack on local democracy and the wishes of Albertans and given that these decisions should be made at the local level between democratically elected leaders and their voters, why is this government imposing a top-down governance style and usurping local democracies?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, there's so much to say to knock that down. We're all anxious to do it. It is so easy. The fact is that we are doing what Albertans want. Even in the city of Edmonton 68 per cent of the citizens of Edmonton don't want a mask bylaw. Council was told that. It's us that are onside with the people of Edmonton. We wish the NDP would get onside with them. They've elected NDP people, and they don't listen to the people of Edmonton. They should come over here because we do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has repeatedly shown disdain for municipalities, their democratically elected leaders, the voters who elected them – and, in fact, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland recently described municipalities as, quote, the children of the province and said that it's time for someone to get spanked – and given that this is the same government that constantly warns of federal government overreach but is now doing the exact same thing they accused Justin Trudeau of doing, why does this government constantly contradict itself at every step, providing further proof that Albertans just can't trust them?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the hon. member that in estimates couldn't come up with a Municipal Affairs question five times in a row, after formerly being the Finance minister. We do listen to municipalities. I'm going to blow my horn here, and I might regret this, but in fact, Mr. Speaker, I was the one called talented and lovely by the municipal leaders this morning. I was the one called their BFF several times in the bear-pit session. Now, I am far from perfect, but I can assure you that we listen to municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

2:40

Capital Plan

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools are essential parts of our communities, and they're an influencing factor in attracting and retaining families and businesses. The Foothills composite high school has recently been modernized but unfortunately was not expanded and is facing capacity pressures. Alberta Education considers a good capacity for a school to be between 80 to 85 per cent. Okotoks composite high school is currently at 102 per cent. To the Minister of Education: what is the plan for building new schools and addressing pressures for smaller rural communities? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, under Budget 2022 we are investing \$2 billion over the next three years to maintain and enhance existing schools, continuing work on the 51 previously announced projects, and to support building 15 new school projects. We understand that schools are community hubs in rural communities in particular and that they are facing growth pressures, which is why nine out of the

15 school projects were announced in rural Alberta, including Camrose, Raymond, Milk River, Evansburg, Acme, Bow River, Manning, Penhold, and Valleyview. We continue to recognize the need for new school projects.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that prior to Alberta Education approving a new school, Alberta school boards and municipalities invest substantial amounts of money to run services to a location to qualify for a new school and given that the Minister of Infrastructure released a 20-year capital plan outlining the importance of a high-performing education system and given that providing details within that plan could provide more predictability for planning, to the Minister of Infrastructure: can you provide details on how your capital plan will be utilized in decision-making for future projects?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last week we announced 15 new school projects right across the province, and there are 66 schools in planning, design, tender, or construction, and 22 of these schools will be completed in 2022. As the member pointed out, continuing to build world-class schools is a major component of the 2022 strategic capital plan. We are looking at creating solutions to address the issues raised about allocating lands. I know that my hon. colleague will continue to advocate strongly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that my constituency, much like many others, continues to grow each year and given that an essential piece to economic recovery is improving capacity in our infrastructure such as schools, water pipelines, and roads and given that the Alberta government just announced the 2022-23 fiscal budget, which allocates \$6.7 billion in capital spending over the next three years, to the Minister of Infrastructure: what assurances can you provide to communities like Highwood and constituents that investments will keep up with the community's rate of growth?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I am proud that Alberta Infrastructure will be spending \$4.8 billion over the next three years to build vital public works projects. Calgary and Edmonton will receive about a billion dollars each, but \$1.3 billion will go to other areas. Another billion and a half will go to capital maintenance and renewal all across the province. The Infrastructure Accountability Act provides the framework by which capital projects are evaluated. We're not making political decisions, but we are making sure that every region gets their fair share of funding, including NDP ridings.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to rise and advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Bill 3 Special Days Act

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this very special day. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Special Days Act. I have the copy here.

Throughout the year Alberta's government recognizes many dates that hold significance for the people of this province, whether it's a celebration of heritage and history such as Black History Month or currently Francophonie Month or a call to take action on important social issues such as Sexual Violence Awareness Month. These dates all help us build a better province.

Mr. Speaker, there are several ways that Alberta's government currently acknowledges special days, weeks, and months. Most commonly, currently, we use proclamations or declarations to recognize their significance and share them with Albertans. However, neither of these methods have any legal protection, and also they're not easily tracked, leading to confusion and repeat requests and people not sure of what's going on. If passed, Bill 3, the Special Days Act, would be a housekeeping and good order and governance bill that would introduce a simple solution and help us more effectively recognize these special days. It would give ministers the authority to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial . . .

Speaker's Ruling First Reading of Bills

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member and the Minister of Culture as I know he hasn't had the opportunity to introduce many pieces of legislation, but first reading of a bill isn't a debatable reading. It seems to me like there's significant and perhaps very good content, but the purpose of first reading is to introduce the bill to the Assembly. The Assembly can then go on, and you can make as many additional comments as you like in further readings. So I just provide some caution. I know that we've seen this happening a little bit more in recent days, that ministers are using the opportunity to debate the bill at first reading. It's not the purpose, so I encourage the member to get to the presentation of it as quickly as possible.

Bill 3 Special Days Act (continued)

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not intending to debate, just give a brief summary so that members understand what the bill is being tabled.

Anyway, it would just give ministers the authority to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial orders. Using mechanisms to recognize special days in Alberta will reduce our red tape and standardize the future requests for approach. All ministerial declarations will be tracked on a central web page, helping to raise awareness and designating a place where people can find the details. It's a straightforward change that will not affect how Albertans submit requests; however, it will help draw greater attention to these causes, cultures, and milestones that these dates represent.

I look forward to discussing the bill in more detail in the Legislature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this special moment.

The Speaker: My pleasure. I'm certain that a brief summary can be done in less than a minute.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a tabling.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a postcard that was created by Moms Stop the Harm in response to the drug poisoning emergency in our province, advocating for safe supply, supervised consumption sites, and harm reduction.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'm pleased to rise and table the requisite number of copies of five separate documents that I mentioned in estimates this morning so that everyone can have a look at them. The first is a chart from the choice in education survey in 2020 outlining the income of respondents in the survey by educational choice.

The second is a chart that is available on the Alberta Education website outlining projected and funded head counts of school divisions. It shows that despite overprojections due to COVID, boards have continued to be funded based on a higher student number than actually attending.

The third is a chart outlining student enrolment growth from 2007 to 2022.

The fourth is a table from the fiscal plan, which shows the projected increase in educational staffing for the '22-23 school year.

The fifth I look forward to speaking more about this afternoon in estimates. It outlines project approval for the 2015 to 2018 time period. During this period the previous government approved between 17 and 18 projects per year.

I would suggest that all members have a viewing of these documents. Thank you so much.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has a tabling.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By your permission I wish to table the requisite copies of the 2019 Alberta Labour Force Profiles showing that, in fact, in 2019, when the NDP left government, the participation for women in the labour force in Alberta was 66 per cent and not 76 per cent.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of order. At 2:04 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Schow: Indeed, I did, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and bring this point of order to the attention of the Chamber under Standing Order 23 (h), (i), and (j). At the time that you had mentioned, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre was speaking, asking a question to the Minister of Health. At that time he insinuated – I shouldn't say that. He outright said that members of the UCP were cheering on the blockaders down at the border that had cost money to the Alberta economy. Now, I find that comment, first, to be misleading, but, more importantly, he specifically pointed to the hon. Member for Taber-Warner, immediately to his right. While you cannot do things directly, you also can't do those things indirectly.

I would first say that that was a point of order because the language he used was certainly imputing false motives against

another member, and it was language that was likely to create disorder. Second to this point is that you did mention to all members of the Chamber that pointing is not something that we should be doing going forward. I respect that direction. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre does not. So I would ask that that member retract the comments suggesting that the Member for Taber-Warner was in fact cheering on when he was down there listening to his constituents, which is his job and duly elected to do so.

The Speaker: The opposition House leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order but a matter of debate. Certainly, it is a matter of public record that members of the UCP did cheer on and support the blockade, the same blockade that caused almost a billion dollars of damage and included people conspiring to murder police officers. This government caucus loves to use similar language to accuse the NDP – they delight in it, actually – of supporting various groups. We hear it constantly in this Chamber. In this case I would suggest that we are hearing some well-deserved embarrassment rather than a point of order. I believe this is a matter of debate.

To the Deputy Government House Leader's secondary point, I would simply note that your caution around pointing was delivered well after the Member for Edmonton-City Centre spoke. I know all members of this House will be thinking and reflecting on your caution and trying not to point going forward.

I do think this is a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for your interjections. I agree. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

With respect to the pointing, listen, I'm not making an outright ban on something. I'm just suggesting that it is generally less helpful than more helpful, and if members can keep it in mind, we'll all be better served.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

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

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon 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 estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation in the Grassland Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Labour and Immigration in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:55 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	113
Introduction of Guests	113
Members' Statements	
Oil and Gas Pipeline Development.....	113
Budget 2022 and Cost of Living.....	113
Budget 2022	113
Budget 2022 and Cost of Living.....	114
Budget 2022	114
The Very Reverend Bill Phipps.....	114
Federal Emergencies Act.....	115
Utility Costs.....	115
United States Oil and Gas Imports	115
Oral Question Period	
Postsecondary Tuition Fees	115
Budget 2022 and Cost of Living.....	116
Provincial Fiscal Policies.....	116
COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce.....	117
Rural High-speed Internet	118
Utility Costs.....	118, 122
Budget 2022 and Seniors' Expenses.....	119
Rural Health Care	119
Women's Workforce Participation	120
Rental Housing	121
Red Tape Reduction	121
Bill 4.....	122
Capital Plan	123
Notices of Motions	123
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 3 Special Days Act	124
Tabling Returns and Reports	124

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