



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 15, 2022

Day 9

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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 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
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)
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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),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Vacant
Vacant

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 15, 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.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we are joined in the galleries by seven social work students from MacEwan University. They are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

I also see a friend of the Legislature, Mr. Doug Brinkman.

Please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Ukraine

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, for weeks now the world has been forced to witness heartbreaking scenes coming out of Ukraine: families fleeing, bombs hitting Ukrainian cities, homes, even hospitals as Vladimir Putin continues his illegal, unjustifiable, and evil invasion of peaceful, democratic Ukraine, with millions of refugees fleeing violence being wrought solely on the whim of a tyrant with no respect for human rights or care for the suffering he's inflicting on a sovereign people. It's tragic, it's wrong, and history will record it as such. Today I watched as Ukrainian President Zelensky addressed the national Parliament in Ottawa. He spoke about how 97 children have lost their lives in the invasion, a devastating statistic.

I speak today as a proud Ukrainian Canadian, one of hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are members of the Ukrainian diaspora. Alberta is home to the largest Ukrainian diaspora and the largest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine and Russia. The contributions of the Ukrainian community can be seen in every corner of this province.

This province has come together to support Ukraine. Albertans, whether of Ukrainian descent or not, have risen to give what they can to offer support to the Ukrainian community. The universities are offering financial support to Ukrainian students impacted by the violence. But there's more that we must do. We need to ensure that Alberta is a welcoming place for Ukrainians fleeing this unfathomable violence. We need to ensure that this province gives all the support it can to support the Ukrainian people now and into the future. We need to be there to support Ukraine's people now, during this brutal, senseless attack on a democratic country and the very pillars of democracy. We must be there for them now and when Ukraine recovers from the atrocities of this invasion. I know that Albertans will continue to be there for the Ukrainian people.
[Remarks in Ukrainian]

Canmore Nordic Centre

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, when most people think about Alberta's primary industries, they tend to think of oil, gas, agriculture, and

forestry. Seldom is tourism or sport thought of as a primary economic driver for our province despite the pride that most Albertans take in having the most incredibly majestic Rocky Mountains just outside their back door. As our province emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and looks to our future, it's critical that the government not simply make routine capital investments but that we strategically make capital investments into projects that will grow and diversify Alberta's economy.

That's why last week our government announced a \$17.5 million investment for upgrades to the Canmore Nordic Centre. This announcement signalled to the people of our province and literally the entire world that our government recognizes the important role that Alberta's tourism industry plays in Alberta's greater economy and that we recognize the important role that tourism will continue to play in Alberta's economic future.

These \$17.5 million upgrades will solidify Canmore as a top international destination for sport and recreational tourism, and they will make Canmore, Alberta the single, only Biathlon World Cup host destination in all of North America. Major international events, including the 2024 International Biathlon Union World Cup and the FIS Ski World Cup, are already planned in town. This upgrade will help us to attract even more.

World Cup weekends help support our local tourism and hospitality businesses while also lending free air time to Travel Alberta in key European markets. The economic impact of these kinds of major events is huge and can be \$5 million to \$7 million for a single weekend, seen through hotel stays, restaurant sales, retail purchases, and experiences. These events also typically garner international viewership of over 30 million people.

This major capital investment, funded in full by the funds generated from the Kananaskis conservation pass, is an investment in Alberta's sport-tourism industry, an investment in our province's economic diversification, and an investment in Canmore. Our town is already home to more Olympians per capita, and soon we'll be welcoming even more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Minister's Senior Service Award Recipient

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Benita Galandy, a recipient of the minister's senior service award, from my constituency of Grande Prairie, for her work and dedication at the Elders Caring Shelter. Since the beginning of the pandemic Benita has dedicated almost 8,200 hours to the Elders Caring Shelter in Grande Prairie, where she developed a framework to ensure that seniors in her community had access to the supports they needed and had stability and safe shelter. Moreover, before the shelter was well established, Benita went so far as to live in a camper on the property so she could dedicate as much time as possible to the seniors she served.

I, personally, first became aware of the shelter years ago as a small-business owner in Grande Prairie. My team was so inspired by the leadership and dedication of Benita that we began sponsoring a Christmas celebration for the shelter's residents. The shelter was originally built in 2003 and focuses on Indigenous cultural programming. While there are other seniors' homes in Grande Prairie, Métis local 1990 wanted to ensure that the lifestyle, nutritional, and cultural needs of Métis seniors would be served. Although the Elders Caring Shelter is geared towards those of Aboriginal descent, they take all applications of men and women over the age of 55. The shelter has been so well received that a second shelter is being built by the Métis local. It will have 34 beds and assist in housing additional seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the compassion demonstrated by Benita is one that should be celebrated. She is highly regarded within the Grande

Prairie Indigenous community and has become a role model for many. I am proud to be wearing handcrafted jewellery today that was made by a resident at the shelter. This resident shared his work with me and explained how Benita encouraged him to pursue it. He donates the proceeds from sales of his crafts and jewellery to support the shelter and says that it's one way he's learned to give back.

Benita Galandy restored hope in those who had none and demonstrated outstanding service to Alberta seniors while also fostering a sense of community among those seniors at the shelter. To Benita I say: thank you, and congratulations on this well-deserved recognition. It is people like you that make our world a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Social Workers

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the gallery today I have invited some dear friends of mine. They're social work students from the social work program at MacEwan University. They are the next generation of Alberta social workers. I congratulate you on all of your hard work in the program, and I thank you for your sense of duty and answering the call of supporting our community.

Last week was Social Work Week, a time to show appreciation to those who carry the emotional labour of the province when Albertans are in need. This UCP government chose to acknowledge social workers during Social Work Week with an announcement of wage rollbacks of almost 11 per cent for the profession. Eleven per cent. This is how this UCP government shows their appreciation for the sacrifices so many social workers and other health care professionals have made to help Albertans get through one of the darkest times in Alberta history.

Social workers are known for working in the most complex of situations and oftentimes need to be creative and resourceful, a task that can go unseen and most often forgotten as a tangible aspect to the crisis. This UCP government clearly does not value the social work profession. This UCP government may not value the gravity and stresses felt by those as we slowly look to climb out of this devastating pandemic, that has cost so many so much. This UCP government may not value the true plight of Albertans at this time.

Our team does value the social work profession. We do understand the severe impact that this pandemic has had and continues to have. We stand with Albertans as we continue to navigate out of these stressful times for Alberta. We are in this together.

Thank you to all social workers wherever you are. Though this government doesn't respect you or value the work you do in protecting lives and making this province a better place, you are making a difference. Our NDP caucus is committed to ensuring that you get the respect that you deserve.

Thank you.

Agriculture in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, there are exciting things happening in my riding that will benefit the whole region of southern Alberta. Southern Alberta is blessed with warm days and cool nights, which makes for the best sweet corn in the world, but we grow many high-yield, high-margin specialty crops such as sugar beets and potatoes. We have some of the best water in the world, which flows out of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Consumers today are demanding to know where their food comes from and what is being

put into it. Here in southern Alberta we have the best ingredients in the world. Seventy per cent of all of Canada's irrigation system is located in southern Alberta. It is a testament to the forward-thinking farmers of years past.

1:40

Almost two years ago we announced the long-awaited twinning of highway 3 between Taber and Burdett. This \$150 million project is part of a broader strategy our government is implementing to develop between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat into Canada's agrifood corridor. Our government will be adding over 260,000 irrigated acres. Last July we announced the first of the irrigation expansion projects, 60,000 irrigated acres with the Chin reservoir expansion. We will be making sure that there is potable water and proper utilities along this corridor to facilitate expansion of new and existing agrifood processing companies. We will be making that corridor a preapproved agrifood processing zone. This means that we will be doing much of the environmental, transportation, and municipal affairs work that needs to be done beforehand. That way, when businesses express interest in setting up or expanding their businesses, government can move at the speed of business rather than at the speed of government.

Due to our government's work, southern Alberta is on the verge of one of the greatest and largest growth expansions in generations, Mr. Speaker. The south will no longer be called the forgotten south; instead, it will be called the fantastic south.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Renaud: Far too many Albertans are struggling today, dealing with skyrocketing utility costs, insurance rates, school fees, property taxes, and so much more. This government enacted a sneaky plan to take a billion dollars in income taxes from the pockets of Canadians using a backdoor inflation tax, a policy that the Premier used to oppose; now embraces. They are cutting supports for the most vulnerable, taking money from the disabled and claiming that it wouldn't be onerous, ignoring the consequences of their actions, and relying on talking points to avoid addressing the suffering they're causing. Simply put, the UCP doesn't care. They don't even know how many Albertans are currently living in poverty: 1 in 10, Mr. Speaker.

As we watch this Premier more focused on keeping his job past April while too many Albertans are forced to choose between buying groceries or turning the lights on, it's clear who the real priorities for this government are. It's not the people struggling under the financial burdens this government keeps piling on them. It's not the people who are coping with the reduced government supports that mean that their lives are getting harder while the UCP celebrate their no-help budget. It's deeply insulting to these people to have their concerns about the 10,000 full-time jobs lost last month shouted down by the jobs minister or to watch the associate minister of natural gas ignore the requests for help from those dealing with skyrocketing utility bills.

This government's true priorities have always been on their wealthy friends and insiders, the ones who convinced them to lift the insurance cap even though the UCP knew that it meant that families would get hit with hikes of 30 per cent or more, the ones who convinced them that Donald Trump was worth a billion-dollar investment, that those Albertans who are facing utility bills of nearly a thousand dollars are only worth 50 bucks.

Albertans need a government focused on their jobs, not on the Premier's job, and in 2023 Albertans will get a government that finally puts them first.

Lethbridge Update

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we recently concluded the 2022 brier in Lethbridge. After two long years of the pandemic, being able to enjoy curling live and in person was fantastic. To host teams, supporters, and families from all across Canada in my hometown right here in Alberta was awesome. Curling, country music, and beer: let's get this party started. Canada is truly the best country in the world. The only hardship was Alberta not claiming the title at the very end, losing to team Newfoundland; however, I guess it depends on where you're from. But no matter whom you cheered for, the curling was sensational.

This kind of event and the economic benefits of attracting thousands to our province were also key pillars in our recent budget. Additional investments into health care, the attraction and retention of doctors, and EMS are critical. Alberta's government is investing \$1.8 billion for the redevelopment and expansion of the Red Deer regional hospital. Additions include a new cardiac catheterization lab.

As the MLA for Lethbridge-East I hope Lethbridge is next on the list for these same services so that we can also continue to support the growth of nearly every sector in Alberta's third-largest city. This growth, especially in agriculture and agrifood, also makes the planning, engineering, and feasibility of the third bridge in Lethbridge even more critical. While we were excited about the infrastructure investment in our Exhibition Park, our airport, a new school in west Lethbridge, new boilers at the U of L, research at the college, and more to come, we still have plans to make so that we can continue to manage the growth and service area of Lethbridge and southern Alberta. Lethbridge is a vibrant city with one of the most diversified economies in the province. We have affordable living and are the hub for everything from health care to tourism, trucking to advanced education, and we're Canada's premier agricultural gateway. It's no wonder we're Alberta's third-largest city and growing. We need the investment to match.

United States Oil Imports

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we're all watching a humanitarian crisis unfold in front of our eyes, and what this crisis has made obvious is that we must stop indirectly funding unethical dictatorship countries. Until just recently the United States imported an average of 709,000 barrels per day of petroleum products from Russia. That is extremely ironic considering that Biden cancelled Keystone XL, a pipeline that would have carried 830,000 barrels of Alberta oil per day to the U.S. This project could have prevented their reliance on Russian oil to begin with.

Let us not forget that the NDP has formerly supported eco radicals protesting pipelines. They also sat back and did nothing while Trudeau cancelled Energy East, all of which cripple Canada's ability to support our allies to boycott Russian oil. The NDP, Trudeau, and Biden continue to hinder Alberta's ability to provide ethical energy stability in the world. To be clear, Alberta is the solution to stability, and, Mr. Speaker, we all could use some stability right now.

Alberta oil represents human rights. It represents responsible environmentalism. It represents Indigenous opportunities. The lack of support from the NDP opposite, Trudeau, and Biden on supporting Alberta energy is nothing more than irresponsible complacency that provides strength to Russia. They obviously are aware that a continued global reliance and buying of oil from some of the world's most unstable regimes directly helps fund unjust wars. They also cannot think that Canadians will accept that Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, or Iran is an acceptable alternative to Russian oil. It's time for everyone to recognize the critical need for Alberta to gain more

access to world markets so that we can prevent the indirect funding of unstable world leaders.

While the NDP opposite, Trudeau, and Biden feel that it's more important to stand in support of their eco radicals, this government and I stand with Ukraine and everyone opposed to Russia.

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as president of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, or PNWER, I rise to share with my learned colleagues some background and some exciting news. Formed with leadership from the government of Alberta in 1991, PNWER is a nonpartisan, binational, public-private partnership focused on strengthening cross-border relationships, finding solutions to common challenges, and joint advocacy around common regional interests. PNWER includes Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Yukon, and the U.S. states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington: our closest neighbours, friends, and allies, indeed, particularly important during these times of geopolitical unrest.

PNWER seeks to build trust and enduring relationships amongst stakeholders around regional collaboration, competitiveness, and reduction of trade and regulatory barriers, making the region one of the most diverse, resource rich, and innovative in the world, with a combined GDP of over \$1.5 trillion. Within PNWER's active cross-sectoral working groups we address issues and opportunities in such diverse disciplines as agriculture, forestry, water policy and invasive species, economic development, workforce innovation, trade, transportation and tourism, energy, environmental leadership, mining, and disaster resilience. PNWER also manages several high-level regional and national programs, including the Legislative Energy Horizon Institute, of vital importance to Alberta as the largest energy producer in the region.

Mr. Speaker, it's now time to mark your calendars as Alberta proudly hosts PNWER's 31st Annual Summit in Calgary, July 24 to 28, bringing over 500 legislators from across the province, policy-makers, industry, and thought leaders from across Canada and the U.S. It will be an opportunity to showcase all that we are proud of, from ESG to energy security and so much more, as we engage with regional and national decision-makers right here in Alberta. Don't delay, and register today as we proudly share our great province, our great future, and renewal of the Alberta advantage with the Pacific Northwest region and the world.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has question 1.

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, a recent Angus Reid survey found that 60 per cent of Albertans can't keep up with the cost of living. That rate is the highest in the country. A recent *Edmonton Journal* project found that 86 per cent of respondents cited skyrocketing utility prices as the most common major cost pressure. I have two questions for the Premier. Is he really proud of the job he's doing when 6 in 10 Albertans can't make ends meet, and does he really think that his measly \$50 electricity rebate is going to make a difference for those families?

Mr. Kenney: Well, first of all, it's \$150, not \$50. She got it wrong by a factor of three. On top of that is the elimination of the fuel tax.

The real question for the NDP is: why are they cheering on their friend and ally Justin Trudeau to raise the cost of living by increasing the cost of home heating, electricity, and fuel on April 1? Why does the NDP support the Liberal April Fool's Day joke that will make life even more expensive because of their ever higher carbon taxes?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is in charge. He's done nothing to help these families, and he knows it.

It gets worse. According to Angus Reid half of Albertans surveyed said that they're now unable to handle an emergency expense of \$1,000 or more, and about half said that they can't afford their car insurance payment either, because the government pulled the cap. Is this really what the Premier thinks recovery looks like, families living paycheque to paycheque, one emergency away from going under?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the cost of living, which is exactly why they gave this government marching orders to scrap the carbon tax. I regret that the NDP opposed that. I regret that the NDP backed up Justin Trudeau all the way to the Supreme Court. I regret that the NDP wants to further increase carbon taxes on April 1. Albertans also regret their power purchasing agreement fiasco that passed \$1.3 billion of additional costs on to electricity consumers, their rushed shutdown of coal that has forced up higher power prices. When it comes to high power costs, the NDP is the arsonist, not the fireman.

Ms Ganley: Forty-six per cent of Albertans report having too much debt. Many can't afford to keep vehicles on the road, are putting necessary expenses on two or three credit cards, and owe thousands in back pay to utility companies. Some fear they will have their utilities shut off altogether. As of April 15 it will be legal for utility companies to do just that. Today I have drafted legislation to extend the ban on utility shut-offs for six months to provide Albertans some relief. Will the Premier support this move to protect Albertans? He sure isn't doing anything else.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is the only government in Canada that is acting to reduce the cost of living, the only government out of the federal government and nine other provinces that is not just reducing fuel taxes but eliminating them. This is the only government providing a rebate for high electricity prices. This is the only government acting. This government will be putting forward a motion calling on Justin Trudeau not to proceed with his scheduled April 1 increase in carbon taxes. Will the NDP stand with Trudeau or with Albertans in opposing that hike?

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

Health Care Worker Wages

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP continue to tear down and undermine the public health care system that we all rely on. For two years front-line health care professionals put their own physical and mental health on the line to protect the lives of others. They saved lives during a global pandemic. How does the UCP say thanks? By pushing to slash their wages. It's unconscionable. How can this Premier look these health care heroes in the eye and tell them that they're overpaid?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me introduce the member opposite to the concept of collective bargaining negotiations. That's exactly what's happening. We certainly intend to proceed with that in good faith, while that particular union is asking for a 15 per cent increase.

There will be a good-faith negotiation. The NDP froze nurses and all health care workers with zero increases for four long years. This government came to an agreement with the nurses' union with a significant increase in their compensation for the first time in nearly a decade, because, unlike the NDP, we respect our front-line health care workers.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, let me introduce this Premier to the raises of up to 40 per cent that he is handing to executives at AIMCo at the same time as he is demanding cuts from workers like Holly, a respiratory therapist in Red Deer. She works at the bedside, inserting breathing tubes, managing ventilators, literally keeping dying people alive. The UCP wants to slash her wage by 8 per cent. Today she said:

Behind the proposed wage rollbacks are humans. We worked tirelessly through the most demanding and stressful moments in our careers. It's not just the eight per cent, this negotiation feels like [the Premier] has devalued our worth to society.

Will this Premier apologize to Holly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, these are opening positions in collective bargaining negotiations. The opening position of one of these unions is an increase of 15 per cent, which we don't believe can be afforded by taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, workers like the one just referenced were put on a wage freeze for four years under the NDP. This government came forward with an adequate settlement with our nurses that both protects the need for fiscal responsibility for taxpayers but also recognizes the very hard work of our nurses. We're proud to have achieved that agreement. We'll continue to negotiate in good faith.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, after two years of attacks and mismanagement I invite this Premier to ask those workers their opinion of our government compared to his.

Holly goes on to say:

The moral injury repeatedly caused by this government is real and I feel it. The healthcare system will not go unharmed by the way the UCP government has treated healthcare workers. It will take strong leadership to repair and return dignity to our broken systems.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier refuses to answer my questions legitimately, so I'll just say this. On this side of the House the record is that we provide support for health care workers. We're ready to provide strong leadership, repair the damage done by this government, and treat workers . . .

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

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the former member of a government that froze nurses for four years just said that we should go and ask the nurses what they think about the collective bargaining agreement. They were asked. They ratified it overwhelmingly, because, unlike the NDP, we didn't continue the NDP's four-year-long freeze.

Mr. Speaker, how dare they stand up and pretend to be the party of the working person when all they were was the party of unemployment and economic devastation of this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

School Construction Capital Plan

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP is deliberately withholding funding from one of the largest and fastest growing

school divisions in the country. Edmonton public needs replacement schools for Spruce Avenue and Delton, and they also need a high school for Glenridding Heights and a new junior high in McConachie. To the Premier: will you please walk the halls of Spruce Avenue and Delton? Will you ride the bus with the kids in the northeast who need a junior high? Will you ride the bus with the kids in the southwest who are travelling long distances to overcrowded schools? Or will you at least acknowledge that your budget is ignoring the needs of Edmonton families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government's \$2 billion capital plan to modernize our schools means that there are 66 new schools being built or refurbished, more than the NDP. That's over three years. They did 60 over four. We're doing 66 over three years, and 24 of those schools are in the Edmonton area. Six of them are Edmonton public schools. Just today we announced capital funding for a new charter high school here in Edmonton, for the Aurora Charter School, about academic excellence, responding to parental choice and diversity in our education system.

Ms Hoffman: The NDP built over 240 schools in four years, so that's about 60 per year, Premier, and what you are saying here makes no sense.

Alberta families know that what you're doing isn't true, that if you were actually a believer in school choice, you would support construction for public schools in Edmonton or francophone schools, really, anywhere in the province of Alberta. Will you finally admit to francophone families across Alberta who have been shut out of this budget that it's a no-help budget? Will the Premier or the Education minister admit that they're failing francophone families across Alberta? This budget proves it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton public schools has six new schools under construction right now, as we speak. This government is building 66 new schools or substantial refurbishment of others with a \$2 billion capital investment, more than the NDP put forward.

But more than that, I know that the NDP oppose school choice. They hate the idea of parental responsibility in the education system. That's one of the reasons they were thrown out of office. It is also one of the reasons this government brought forward today a historic \$47 million capital investment in new charter schools, to amplify our tradition of school choice.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: So the Premier clearly doesn't care about franco-phone families anywhere in Alberta given that answer.

We also know that he doesn't care about the families in Edmonton public because he's refusing to fund a single project for kids in desperate need in the city of Edmonton. In Calgary over three years: only one new public school and only one new Catholic school. Is the Premier honestly going to try to convince Albertans that what he's doing is actually putting kids first or building for the future? Clearly, his budget puts in black and white that the Premier doesn't care about families in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere in Alberta.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP could characterize a \$2 billion investment in new and refurbished schools as nothing. In Edmonton the board didn't bring forward a priority project with more than 69 per cent utilization. Now, the minister is going to sit down and work that out with them.

M. le Président, quand on parle des écoles francophones, nous sommes en train de construire six écoles francophones en Alberta depuis – parce que nous sommes dédiés à l'éducation francophone ici en Alberta.

Fuel Prices

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were very interested to hear this government announce that they would stop charging the 13-cent gas tax on fuel in response to the sky-high prices in Alberta. At the time of this announcement the Premier was asked how the government would ensure this relief actually makes it down to Albertans and isn't just pocketed by retailers. The Premier did not have a very good answer, so I'll ask him again today. What specific guarantees will the government give that Albertans will actually see lower prices for gas?

Mr. Kenney: Well, once again Team Colonel Sanders is concerned about the welfare of the chickens, Mr. Speaker. The NDP doesn't just want to keep the 13-cent gas tax in place; they want it to go higher with an ever higher carbon tax. But this Conservative government is eliminating the 13-cent Alberta fuel tax on April 1. Will he stand in his place next week and vote with us to call on the NDP's ally Justin Trudeau to abandon his higher carbon tax planned for the same day?

Mr. Dach: I was just trying to ask a serious question, Mr. Speaker, on policy issues that Albertans are watching closely. How will this gas tax reduction work? Albertans are looking for an actual guarantee that the prices will go down 13 cents and not just be absorbed by retailers. That's all. It should be pretty simple, but it sounds like there really isn't any guarantee. Go figure. Now, as the Premier pointed out at the time, many retailers had already purchased their fuel orders before the announcement. Presumably, this means any price relief might be delayed. Can the Premier guarantee that prices will drop 13 cents on April 1, or is it just an April Fool's joke? Will he stake his job on it?

Mr. Kenney: The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. While we would have preferred to have the 13-cent cut implemented last week, the truth is that we needed to give the retailers time to run through their current inventory, where the fuel tax has already been assessed, and to give Treasury Board and Finance time to reimburse them for any current inventory they have as of April 1 so that they can then pass on the full 13-cent savings to all Albertans. But here's the weird thing. It's only the Conservatives who actually want to cut those taxes, and the NDP want to increase them.

Mr. Dach: Well, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the government doesn't know when or even if Albertans will see that drop in gas prices.

Now, the Premier at the time was asked why he didn't just do a rebate instead. He told the media to go talk to people at the pumps, and CTV did just that. They found more Albertans were in favour of cash in their pockets. Why didn't the Premier just provide blanket relief to families instead of these paltry one-off programs, or, better yet, why doesn't the Premier stop raising their costs in the first place? Will the Premier plainly say yes to all Albertans, that they will see the Alberta price drop by 13 cents on April 1?

Mr. Kenney: Well, yes. On April 1 their Alberta fuel tax will go down by 13 cents. But, regrettably, the NDP is supporting Justin Trudeau's tax increase. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Justin Trudeau will raise his carbon tax by 3 cents on the same day. If the NDP actually wants to see 13 cents of relief on April 1, will they join us to call on Justin Trudeau to stop his job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood has a question.

Charter Schools

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a successful history of providing parents choice in regard to their children's education. Charter schools offer unique programming that focuses on a learning style, teaching style, or an approach that isn't already offered in a school division. This is a great option for students whose needs differ from what traditional public schools can offer, but many parents in my riding are confused, and they feel that there may be expensive tuition fees or maybe not an option. To the Minister of Education: can you please explain the difference between an independent and a public charter school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public charter schools are autonomous, nonprofit public schools that receive the same base instruction funding as traditional public, separate, and francophone school authorities. A public charter school cannot deny enrolment to any student if they have enough space, and they cannot charge tuition fees. That said, they may charge fees and costs in alignment with the Education Act, just as any other public school authority. They also are accountable to the public taxpayer for the dollars that they do receive, and just like any other public school, they are providing accountability for what they get.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that public charter schools cannot deny access to any student if their school has sufficient space and resources available and given that parents wanting to enrol their children at a public charter school face a long wait-list and further given that the single biggest issue charter schools face is finding the space they need to accept more students, to the Minister of Education: would you please explain what you're doing to address the lack of student spaces available in public charter schools?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the member for the great question. Yes, you're right. There are thousands of students waiting for a charter school space. Mr. Speaker, under Budget 2022 we're investing \$25 million in operating funding and \$47 million in capital investment over the next three years to support charter school expansions and new charter schools and collegiate programs in Alberta's education system. This funding will support leases and facility improvements so that existing public charters can grow, new public charters can expand and have the spaces they need to deliver educational services to the students who want them. [interjections]

The Speaker: I just might remind members of the opposition that they have more time to ask questions than any other group in the Assembly. Perhaps they might ask their questions when it's their turn, not when it isn't.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for that answer. Given that students who are engaged in their education are more likely to succeed in the long term and given that public charter schools offer unique programs for students with more specialized interests, and further given that leased facilities only provide a short-term solution for lack of spaces in public charter schools, to the minister again: will you please explain what a charter campus model is and how this concept could be used to strengthen the public charter school system in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to strengthening choice in education, and that means finding long-term solutions to the lack of space that public charter schools are facing. A charter campus model would allow several public charters to be housed in a single facility. This concept would support the shared use of specialized spaces such as CTS spaces, career and technology studies, science labs, or gym spaces. This would offer a more permanent and cost-effective solution for public charter schools than leased spaces can offer. We're happy to do this for charter schools.

Social Worker Wages

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP have continually left the most vulnerable behind. They are not providing the funding necessary to affordable housing to address growing problems of poverty and homelessness. They are neglecting scientific evidence on the importance of harm reduction policies to address the deadly drug poisoning crisis. Workers on the front line, including social workers, have filled in the gaps of the UCP's neglect, but now the Minister of Health wants to cut the wages of social workers by 11 per cent. He should be ashamed. How does he justify such a cruel cut for Alberta's heroes?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As already said in this House, this is a set of negotiations. We respect the work that all of our health care workers have done over the last two years. Negotiations have been ongoing with HSAA. Last week both parties were able to put their first offers on the table. The HSAA put a 15 per cent increase, and AHS is looking to address certain overmarket positions, but this is a set of negotiations. They will proceed, and we were very pleased to be able to, through this process, reach an agreement with the United Nurses of Alberta, which was ratified by a healthy margin. I'm sure that these negotiations will proceed in a similar manner.

2:10

Ms Sigurdson: Given that social workers are vital to helping Albertans living in poverty and given that the Minister of Community and Social Services, who also used to be in charge of the mental health and addictions file, proudly talks about his career as a social worker and given that while the UCP are cutting wages of social workers, they are planning to increase the wages of staff at the province's investment company, AIMCo, by 39 per cent, what is the minister of community services doing at the cabinet table? Does he truly think part of the answer to addressing widespread poverty and mental health challenges is to cut the pay of workers on the front lines of the crisis?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, you're hearing comments from the other side, and they're talking about that the government is mandating these cuts. I want to be perfectly clear. There are issues that AHS has brought to the table, and there are issues that HSAA has brought to the table. This is a set of negotiations. We respect the tremendous work that all health care workers, including social workers working in the AHS system, have done over the last two years. This is a set of negotiations. It goes through a process. We are hopeful that they will be able to reach an agreement, just like the UNA did, that was ratified by a resounding amount. I'll look forward to seeing those results.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that as a registered social worker for 30 years I've had the opportunity to work with many incredible women – in

fact, the majority of social workers are women, as are most of the allied professionals that the UCP wants to pick the pockets of – and given that there is already a significant disparity between the wages of men and women in this province, what does the minister of status of women have to say to all the women in social work regarding why they deserve to make less while the cost of living is skyrocketing? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in this House as a former social worker and the Minister of Community and Social Services. We support social workers across the province. Not only do we support our female social workers, but we support male workers like myself, too. Budget 2022 not only balances our books but will increase our investment in housing, social services, including investment for women. I am proud to be the minister of this government. I'm proud to support women social workers across the province.

Support for Small Business

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, Alberta small businesses have moved from one hurdle to another and are still fighting for survival. They went from a roller coaster of public health restrictions that limited their ability to operate to record inflation and runaway costs on essential supplies needed to operate. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: why is there not one dollar in the new budget to help small businesses recover from the pandemic and deal with record inflation? Did he really need to build a surplus on the backs of Alberta's small businesses?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the pandemic we provided billions of dollars of support to small businesses throughout this. Right now those entrepreneurs across this province have created hundreds of thousands of jobs for Albertans getting back on their feet, leading the province forward. Now, the NDP's plan, when they were in office, was to grow a bloated government, to literally hire people to screw in light bulbs in your home, to then tell people, for job advice, to move to British Columbia, and, on top of that, to chase away billions of dollars of investment. That's not our approach. We want those entrepreneurs in Alberta to be successful.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the NDP cut the small-business tax by a third and given that far too many businesses were disqualified from accessing the small and medium-sized relaunch grant or waited six months to receive a dime from this government and given that Tracey, owner of a nail boutique in Edmonton, was unfairly disqualified from SMERG because she used the wrong browser or Ciara, a sole proprietor, waited over seven months for a pittance that didn't even cover the cost of interest from the debt she accrued or even of half of one month's rent, to the minister: why didn't he at least help businesses he left behind with his faulty program with additional support in this budget?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we helped thousands upon thousands of small businesses in real time through multiple ways. We had numerous opportunities. We followed up with every single applicant numerous times. Thank goodness it was the UCP government that was in office during that pandemic. The opposition would have shut down businesses for months and months and

months. When will they be with us to start moving forward and start cheering on those entrepreneurs instead of cheering against Alberta, which is what they do every day?

Mr. Bilous: Given that small-business owners are facing utility costs three to four times higher than in previous years – the additional costs for many are in the thousands every month – given that a number of small businesses view this government's fake natural gas rebate and \$50 electricity rebate as a joke and given that earlier today we proposed a piece of legislation that would prevent businesses' utilities from being shut off so that they can operate throughout the summer to pay down their debt, why won't the minister stand in this House and do something to support small businesses?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for a little trip down legacy lane. When it comes to the NDP's legacy on supporting businesses in Alberta, their strategy for jobs: grow government. Their strategy for people that want to work in the private sector: move out of Alberta. That was their plan. Unless you wanted to go to somebody's house to screw in a light bulb; then the NDP had a job for you. That was their jobs plan. Not our government. We believe in the private sector: the film industry, the tech sector, when it comes to manufacturing, the oil and gas industry. Yes, the oil and gas industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Child and Youth Well-being Review Recommendations

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Well-being Review Panel made 10 recommendations to the government in December 2021. The fourth recommendation from their report is to "recognize and enhance the essential role of schools in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students." To the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to support students' mental health and well-being?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government funds school boards directly through the specialized learning supports grant, which accounted for \$596 million this school year. This includes \$48 million towards student wellness programs, which allow for psychological and social-emotional supports, access to mental health workers and other wellness supports as needed. As well, we all know that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the mental health and well-being of our students. To further help, Alberta's government is providing \$110 million in targeted funding over the next three years to address pandemic-related mental health issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that the eighth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "explore and activate ways to better track, measure, and understand the learning impacts of the pandemic and inform decisions to strengthen school capacity to respond," to the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this important recommendation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that school authorities have the supports they need to provide a safe, world-class education to their students. Last spring we implemented a new literacy program for kindergarten to grade 3 students to help measure how classroom disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic are affecting student learning. In the fall of 2021 we announced we would be further expanding that program and investing \$45 million for learning disruption interventions.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't end there. We know that early intervention is key, and we will continue to ensure that students who are struggling receive the supports they need. I look forward to sharing more details on this in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for her answer. Given that food security issues for families directly impact children and youths' health while being in development and given that the sixth recommendation from the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "support existing and implement new province-wide efforts where necessary to support food security for children, youth, and their families," to the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget '22, to address food insecurity?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. We recognize that good nutrition positively impacts student learning. We are maintaining funding for the school nutrition program and will provide school authorities with over \$15 million for the program in the '22-23 school year. Funding for school nutrition is provided directly to school authorities, who have the flexibility on how to address local needs. Often they partner with nonprofit organizations or community organizations. This funding provides daily nutritious meals to more than 58,000 students in a school year. We're happy to continue doing and providing what we need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Provincial Park Fees and Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cost of everything is going up these days, and nearly all of the increases are a direct result of the UCP's policies. What seemed like one of the last affordable activities in our province has come under attack from the UCP. After they already found a way to tax inflation and increase camping fees last year, they've now found a way to get Albertans coming and going from our parks by doubling the fees to change or cancel a camping reservation. Why is this government so intent on increasing the cost of living for Alberta's families?

2:20

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is confused yet again or not encumbering himself with the truth.

Anyway, park fees . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . have not been doubled in this year's budget. There have been some changes to reservation fees associated with cancellations to be able to make sure that people, actually, who are reserving sites actually use them and people don't arrive on the long weekend and see the best sites sitting empty. But other than that, we continue to move forward with the award-winning Kananaskis

conservation pass and the largest investment in our provincial parks system in the history of the province.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'm happy to compare my track record of speaking the truth to that minister's any time of day and given that income taxes, property taxes, tuition, interest on student debt, utilities, and car insurance have all increased under this government and given that camping fees haven't been spared either – they've increased camping fees across the board and also introduced a \$90 fee just to set foot in Kananaskis Country, an area that belongs to all Albertans and has been free for all of us to enjoy for decades – and given that this government has already tried to sell off parks, why is this government relentlessly . . .

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in this Assembly each and every day and brag about the award-winning Kananaskis conservation pass. Last week I was in Kananaskis with the MLA for the area and the Premier announcing a record investment in the Canmore Nordic Centre inside Kananaskis, just one of many investments that are coming forward inside Alberta's largest park. But that member is the environmental critic for the NDP, and he wants to talk about the cost of living, and he continues to support Justin Trudeau and his job-killing carbon tax. Shame on him.

Mr. Schmidt: I'm sure the Member for Banff-Kananaskis enjoyed visiting the riding for once.

Given that this government rescinded Lougheed's 1976 coal policy with the stroke of a pen on the Friday afternoon of a long weekend after being lobbied by the coal industry and given that this move would have destroyed the amazing scenery in our parks, that attracts people from across the world – let's face it; nobody wants a front-row seat to an open-pit coal mine – and given that this would have cost Albertans jobs in the tourism industry, why is the government so intent on giving our parks away to corporate interests while increasing costs for Albertans to access them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the real question is: why is that member content to continue to make things up each and every day?

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: First of all, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member from Canmore, thank you for all of your tireless work advocating for Kananaskis. We are proud to continue to deliver for Kananaskis, and we're fixing the mess that the NDP made when they were in government, where they never invested in our parks system. They never made sure there were proper conservation officers. They never made sure there were proper parking lots. They never provided adequate services for Kananaskis. Shame on them, but we're getting it fixed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at both 2:20 and 2:22.

I owe the hon. Member for Edmonton-South an apology as we missed his question, but now the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a question.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned that the Minister of Advanced Education has approved exceptional tuition hikes for over a dozen programs at the province's biggest universities. We know that an educated workforce is critical to Alberta's prosperity, yet despite this, Albertans are paying more every day for

everything from utilities to income taxes to property taxes because of this government. Will the minister admit that approving these hikes is a short-sighted, job-killing decision?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, good. Another opportunity to inform the House that tuition in Alberta is below the national average. I know that the Member for Edmonton-North West the other day said that that was inaccurate. I'd encourage him to visit a website called Stats Canada. It's usually pretty reliable, and the information there is pretty objective and independent. You know, the information is very clear there for him to take a look.

But, you know, again, Mr. Speaker, what's concerning: April 1 we have a carbon tax increase from the federal Liberal government. The members opposite are supporting the Trudeau Liberals to jack up the carbon tax on April 1. We're trying to make life more affordable; they're making it more expensive.

Mr. Dang: Given that students who are mid-program have less than six months to contend with huge tuition increases, in some cases double-digit percentages, and given that Alberta lags behind other provinces when it comes to providing student aid and given that after-degree earnings for school counsellors have not doubled recently, does the minister even care that he is approving outrageous tuition hikes that students cannot afford and that may chase them out of their programs and out of this province?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, a lot of what the member opposite just said is inaccurate. All students that are in programs that have been approved for exceptional increases are grandfathered in at their current rates. They won't see any increases in those programs where there have been exceptional increases.

When it comes to student aid, we provide \$167 million in just this budget alone for student services. That's student aid and scholarships. Budget 2022 includes \$12 million for new scholarships and \$15 million in new funding for new bursaries as well.

Mr. Dang: Given that this minister has overseen drastic cuts to postsecondary education and given that this government's strategy for postsecondary appears to be downloading costs onto students without regard for the quality of the programs, will the minister just stop and finally admit that these hikes have nothing to do with enhancing the quality of the postsecondary education system he's responsible for and that, instead, he is trying to balance this government's budget on the backs of students and families?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, the information the member is providing is inaccurate. Again, I'd just like to remind the House that the NDP wrote the regulation that allows for exceptional tuition increases, so they should know the regulation full well. The regulation is clear, and it stipulates that increases can only be approved if the increase will improve the quality of the program. Under those parameters the increases were approved. As well, in those increases I also sought to ensure that new revenue is going to enhance student aid in those particular programs as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Child and Youth Well-being Review Recommendations

(continued)

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the second recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is for the government to "review effectiveness and alignment of existing child and youth mental health and well-being programs and services

to inform enhanced resource allocation" and given that the third recommendation calls for the creation of "streamlined and universally accessible pathways to connect children, youth, and families with mental health services and supports," to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this recommendation?

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Of course, the well-being of children is a top priority for this government. I'd like to thank the member for his service on that panel and the Minister of Children's Services for her work on this as well. We're focused on a recovery-oriented system of care for children. Just an example of some of the things that we're doing for children: we're expanding youth and mental health hubs, expanding phone and virtual support, and, of course, expanding access to services in school across a continuum for the youth of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. The fifth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "create more opportunities for children and youth to have improved access to cultural, sports, arts, and recreational activities." To the Minister of Culture: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this recommendation? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, it is important to keep kids active and truly get them back into sport and culture for their mental and physical health. Alberta has incredible youth organizations like the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association, KidSport, Free Play for Kids, and we're working in partnership with them to create an agenda for kids to return to play. We also have a number of capital projects that are our response to the fifth recommendation, supporting the Active Communities Alberta Society, Repsol Sport Centre, Telus World of Science, McMurray Métis Cultural Center, and others. There are more initiatives on the way, and I look forward to being able to announce them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that minister for his answer. Given that Internet access is not yet universal across Alberta and that children and youth without adequate Internet access can have difficulty learning, maintaining relationships, and accessing supports and given that the ninth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "improve broadband internet service and access to devices to address difficulties related to remote education and virtual mental health supports," to the Minister of Service Alberta: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to improve broadband Internet service?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. I'm so glad that the youth and well-being review had this recommendation, because you know what? They're

right. We need to work towards universal connectivity. And here's the good news: Alberta's government has committed \$390 million over the next four years to get us to universal connectivity. And not just that. We successfully negotiated with the federal government to get dollar-for-dollar matching for 100 per cent of our commitment, bringing the total public-sector funding up to \$780 million compared to the NDP's track record of zero dollars. Not just that, but by the time we're done, we will have hundreds of millions in private-sector funding to go . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is next.

2:30 Municipal Loan Interest Rates

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, life is getting more expensive thanks to this UCP government. Utility bills are skyrocketing, insurance bills are rising, income taxes, school fees are all rising. This government doesn't seem to care. When faced with the increasing cost of living, the Finance minister is standing by a plan to further hike the cost on Albertans by secretly making it more expensive for municipalities to operate. The minister is hiking borrowing rates for municipalities, which will result in higher property taxes and reduced services. I know that this minister loves to download costs to municipalities, but when will he realize that this is a mistake and cancel the interest rate hikes on municipalities immediately?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made a commitment to bring spending in line with other comparable provinces as per the MacKinnon report. Fair municipal funding is part of that commitment. It's important to remember that MSI was not designed to be a long-term program and was initially scheduled to end after 10 years. Municipalities have long asked for a funding formula that is predictable and consistent, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working on that.

Member Ceci: Considering that I was asking about borrowing and given that the Finance minister deindexed income taxes, meaning that Albertans will pay higher income taxes, and given that he deindexed benefits for seniors and the disabled, meaning that they will get less as costs go up, and given that now the minister is making it more expensive for municipalities to borrow money for capital projects at the same time as this UCP government has slashed a billion dollars from the MSI and given that this will only result in Albertans paying higher property taxes, will the minister explain why he's so focused on making Albertans pay higher and higher costs while he delivers less?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government delivered exactly what we said we would do. We committed to implementing a predictable funding formula which will allow municipalities to effectively plan for the future. That is why in '24-25 the local government fiscal framework will replace the municipal sustainability initiative, with municipalities receiving \$722 million. Funding in future years will rise or fall based on changes in provincial revenues, ensuring that municipalities share in provincial revenue changes.

Member Ceci: The questions are about borrowing, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has stood silently by while his colleague has hiked borrowing costs on municipalities and given that this isn't the first time that this government's selfishness has resulted in higher property taxes for Albertans and given that all Albertans have come to expect from this Finance minister is increasing costs and many are waiting for the other shoe to fall, since the Minister of Finance won't undo his latest secret tax hike on Albertans, will he at least promise that this will be the last time he picks the pockets of Albertans this year?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the members opposite obviously want to ask about borrowing. That's something they know an awful lot about. What they don't know a lot about is how to balance a budget and how to live within our means. The new funding levels and ties to provincial revenue changes ensure funding is sustainable for the province given our current economic circumstances and the economic circumstances at the time. Our government is engaging with municipal stakeholders to gather input on the design of this funding formula and detailed program design of this framework, which the minister and our colleagues are doing all week, obviously, as we meet with municipalities from across the province.

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

Justice System Delays

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are over 3,000 cases in Provincial Court alone that are at risk of being passed over for unreasonable delay. Those are the facts from the Alberta Crown prosecution service. Strangely, though, the Justice minister doesn't agree, telling the mayor of Edson last week that no court cases are at risk of being thrown out because of his incompetent management. Can the minister please inform this House how he was so badly briefed on this and what the actual number of court cases at risk are?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, for allowing me the opportunity to clarify my comments. The Alberta Crown prosecution service tracks all criminal cases, well, both in Provincial Court as well as in QB to ensure that matters proceed to trial within the time limits that are specified in the Jordan case. Indeed, there are Jordan cases that are in courts across the country, and that includes here in Alberta. The issue of Jordan applications, though, is complex and has – my comments related to the overall situation here in Alberta was on the basis that the current number of successful applications is less than .1 per cent of all . . .

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

Mr. Sabir: Given that the previous Minister of Justice showed a deeply concerning lack of respect for the administration of justice and given that the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association described the minister's comment to the mayor of Edson as inaccurate and stated that there are 1,281 cases involving a serious and violent nature that are beyond the 18-month threshold as of December 31, 2021, and they could be thrown out, will the minister apologize and commit to regular public reporting of these numbers so that Albertans can trust the information that he provides?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, as of February of this year there are more than 47 more trial prosecutors that are working for the Alberta Crown prosecution service than in 2019 under the NDP, and work is actively under way to fill any outstanding vacancies. Now, for matters regarding exceeding the time limits, the delay is not necessarily attributable in whole or in part to the Crown. Our government has made good on its commitment to add the 50 new prosecution positions in '22-23, and we have ongoing job competitions as well, and we've increased the size of our articling program to ultimately grow the ranks . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Given that defence lawyer Andrea Urquhart spoke to the media about the Justice minister, saying, and I quote, he really is on an island of his own in terms of what is going on day to day inside courts, end quote, and given that Alberta deserves a Justice minister who faces facts and then works to solve problems, will the minister get off his own island and get back in touch with the people of Alberta, who are concerned with the situation in our courts that this UCP minister is desperately trying to hide?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's also remember that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the adjournment of cases has been considered by a number of courts in Alberta and across Canada. Although the final ruling in each case has been dependent on the specific facts that are arising, generally speaking, courts have interpreted the COVID-19 pandemic to fit squarely within the exceptional circumstances provided for in the Jordan case. We also will be bringing forward legislation as well, because the member has asked about legislation and public reporting, and we look forward to having the right to know act . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Rural Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural crime has been a rising issue for my constituents and across the province. Albertans are looking for direction on how they can legally protect their property. Rural residents continue to grow frustrated with the catch-and-release system of these criminals. In some cases constituents have been victimized by the same criminals who were previously caught on their property. To the Minister of Justice: what can be done to support those who have fallen victim to rural crime?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the Member for Camrose, Alberta's government brought forward Bill 18 to set up Alberta's very own provincial parole board, and as a member of the national parole board I can say that having an Alberta Parole Board means a fair, faster, and more responsive justice system that helps to end the revolving door concern that the hon. member has brought up, because all Albertans deserve a justice system which protects them, protects their loved ones, and protects their property.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2022 includes funding for 50 more Crown prosecutors who will help reduce the strain on our justice system and given that this will lead to more timely court proceedings, reducing the number of those who are caught and released, to the same minister: how soon will we see this increase, and how will these additional prosecutors be utilized?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To bolster the justice system, our government remains committed to recruiting prosecutors. As you know, as of February of this year, as I said to the previous question, we have 47 more trial prosecutors working in the Crown prosecution service than in 2019 under the NDP, and work is actively under way to fill any outstanding vacancies, as I said. We've increased the number of articling students from eight to 20 to help recruit lawyers who will ultimately work as Crown prosecutors, and as a government we will continue to prioritize placing new articling students in locations other than in just Edmonton and Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been a greater pressure put on officers who are responding in rural areas from both concerned residents and bolder criminals and given that there is a growing concern for organized crime and safety in rural communities, to the same minister: are there plans to assist with the challenges that officers face in these rural areas as well?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government introduced a program that's called RAPID response. RAPID stands for rural Alberta provincial integrated defence, and this is a program that's meant to help tackle rural crime by giving provincial peace officers the authority to respond to a wider range of calls. This involves over 400 officers from the sheriffs and fish and wildlife, many of whom work in rural areas, and this helps to assist and free up RCMP officers to respond to and investigate serious matters. Let me say that during the first five months of RAPID response, sheriffs took nearly 1,000 impaired drivers off our highways.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In light of the remainder of the daily Routine we will continue immediately to the Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there will be no evening sitting this evening.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At approximately 2:20 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you have no objection, I'll just combine the points of order called at 2:20 and 2:22 because they are

essentially the same thing. You had given this House a great deal of guidance around the language “deliberately misleading the House” as well as the clarity that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. In this case the Government House Leader accused the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and said that the member is “not encumbering himself with the truth” and then again at 2:22 said that the member continues “to make things up each and every day.”

Mr. Speaker, you’ve ruled very specifically on the Government House Leader continuing to accuse the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar of deliberately misleading the House. I call your attention to June 11, 2020, November 16, 2021, and I suspect that with more time with the Speakers’ rulings database I could find other examples. I believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Nope. A matter of debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I’m not sure that I agree, and I think that there are additional cases, including April 12 and November 2, but I will just provide some additional caution to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. In his supplemental question he made comments that reflected: I’ll put my track record of speaking the truth against your track record of speaking the truth. Unfortunately, I don’t have the benefit of the Blues. It’s reasonable to assume that he has done the same thing that the Government House Leader has done.

Mr. van Dijken: Shame.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock will come to order.

But I think that in this case an apology and withdrawal is acceptable as we have had lengthy discussion on this issue over periods of time.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize for the demeanour of the members opposite.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Point of order 3, which was called at approximately 2:33. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was speaking, referring to the Minister of Finance, but I believe the hon. Minister of Children’s Services was taking the questions at the time. He said, “Promise that this will be the last time he picks the pockets of Albertans.” Of this, of course, you have made many mentions in this Chamber, about picking pockets, specifically referring to a member, not the government as a whole. I think it’s a bit of a gutless comment to make, and I’d ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly will stand adjourned until tomorrow 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 Health in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for the ministries of Culture and Status of Women in the Grassland Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for Advanced Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations in the Grassland Room.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:45 p.m.]

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