



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 16, 2022

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Vacant
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 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, joining us in the galleries today are several guests who are in Edmonton for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta spring convention.

First of all, seated in the Speaker's gallery are family friends of mine, councillors for Cypress county Robin Kurpjuweit and Keith Ritz.

Also in the gallery today is the reeve of Lethbridge county, Tory Campbell. He is a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Federal Fiscal Policies and Inflation

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, this morning Statistics Canada released the latest data on the inflation rate in Canada as of February 2022. Unfortunately for Canadian families, the inflation rate continues to increase, moving from 5.1 per cent in January to 5.7 per cent last month. The inflation rate for Alberta is also concerning although thankfully it remains below the national average.

Mr. Speaker, inflation isn't just an issue for academics and economists. It's an issue that impacts ordinary Albertans and families right across our country. It means it costs more to fill up your tank of gas and more to fill your grocery cart at the store. While some will write this issue off, claiming that it's all due to rising global energy prices and supply chain challenges resulting from COVID, it is important to recognize that government policies have an enormous impact on rising prices, and in Canada's case the inflation rate is being driven up by a host of bad policies set by the Liberal government.

For one, they need to get their spending problem under control. Over the last two years the federal government has racked up hundreds of billions of dollars of debt with no regard for the consequences. How does this relate to inflation, you ask? It is the way in which the federal government is paying for this debt. In order to finance hundreds of billions in Liberal spending, the Bank of Canada has printed an enormous amount of money out of thin air and then is using this money to buy the feds' debt. Mr. Speaker, it's a pretty simple economic principle. When you rapidly increase the supply of something, the value goes down. In this case, it is the value of Canadians' money that is going down, meaning that the price of basic goods and services goes up. This is inflation or currency devaluation.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is more than that. On April 1 the Trudeau government is raising the carbon tax, hiking the already high prices

of energy even more. Every day the Liberals are deliberately making life more expensive. It is high time that they stop and bring their fiscal house in order.

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

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand in this House every day as the representative of Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I want to inform this House that I intend to run again to keep serving the people of my beautiful constituency. There has never been a more important time for good people to come forward and serve in Calgary and right across this province.

Families are struggling. I hear from them every day. The cost of living is unbearable for so many; 6 in 10 Albertans report being unable to keep up with their utility bills. Most have massive debt and little financial flexibility should an emergency occur. This government knows all of this, and still they have moved to hike property taxes, school fees, tuition costs, camping fees, even car insurance. Many in my constituency drive for a living. They drive trucks; they drive cabs. Insurance increases spurred by decisions of this government are crippling.

What's more is that they are hiking costs while also failing to deliver on the jobs they promised. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate among all major cities in Canada. They have cut funding for education, and they have ignored public health during the greatest public health challenge we have ever faced. We still have nothing to help with the cost of natural gas and a measly \$50 for electricity bills, that are soaring over \$700 per month. And northeast Calgary still doesn't have a new school, a needed school. To those on that side of the House, there's a reason why you have lost the trust and confidence of Albertans. It's because you have failed them over and over and over.

Come 2023, or much sooner given how this Premier's job prospects look, Albertans, I pledge to you this. We stand here in this House ready to serve you. We stand ready to support your families, create good and sustainable jobs for you, and we will never waver in our support for public education and public health care.

Thank you.

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

Rural Veterinarians and Budget 2022

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years as an MLA I've had the distinct pleasure of being able to work alongside educators and practitioners of veterinary medicine. Our collective aim is to bring awareness to the lack of rural veterinarians and the dire need our communities face. This shortage affects not only our province but the entire world. This need was officially recognized by Alberta's Legislature by unanimously passing my Motion 524, which states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the important work of rural veterinarians and explore ways to increase the number of veterinarians serving rural communities.

After drawing attention to this shortage, I was ecstatic to learn that Budget 2022 includes \$59 million to expand the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinarian Medicine. This is an example of the steps we are taking in Budget 2022, the first balanced budget since 2014, to make life better for Albertans.

Since my motion has passed, I've heard from the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association as well as the University of Calgary veterinary medical college. They are ecstatic, to say the least, and they have a plan to move our province out of the peril we are in with the veterinary shortage. This plan includes students from our rural communities. Advocating for our Alberta youth is something that I'm extremely passionate about. Ensuring our youth have a bright future was one of the main reasons why I campaigned to be an MLA. We also have a place for those who wish to immigrate to Alberta to start their practice and raise their families in rural Alberta.

As we proceed on our path to normal, we will continue to expand health care capacity, get rural broadband to 400,000 Albertans in 200,000 households to bridge the digital divide, and get even more Albertans working. These are among the reasons why I'm proud to serve as the Camrose constituency MLA.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, there's not a day that goes by that I don't hear concerns about this government's curriculum. Parents, teachers, students, principals, superintendents, territorial governments have expressed deep concern with the draft proposed. Rather than listening, the Premier and the Education minister reject the premise of concern and push on ahead. It took nearly a year of pressure to get them to drop the fundamentally flawed and racist social studies curriculum. Even though it was rejected by Indigenous groups, francophones, school boards, and virtually every teacher in this province, the Premier was defending and insisting that it would be imposed on Alberta's students. Even now I just don't trust this Premier not to try to sneak it past Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear to everyone that this curriculum is beyond saving. The Premier and the Education minister have zero credibility on this issue. A real government, a government interested in listening to Albertans, would accept failure and start over. Instead, Albertans are being subjected to sham consultation, a consultation that doesn't mean anything because if this government was actually interested in what Albertans think, they would have listened to them when they rejected the draft the first time. A prime example of this was the six prerecorded videos instead of the e-tutoring hub that the government promised. Shameful.

It's beyond clear that this UCP just doesn't care about what Albertans think. It's obvious that they are only working to ensure that one voice seems included in this curriculum, and that is the Premier's, the Premier who puts his friends in charge of writing the drafts that ended Alberta's decades-long curriculum partnership with the Northwest Territories.

We need to get this right. That's why our leader has promised that, should we form the next government, within 100 days we would start over with a real consultation and build a curriculum that Albertans would be proud of, a curriculum that reflects Alberta and its people, communities, and history, not a curriculum that reflects the whims of this Premier. We deserve much better.

1:40

Ranching

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, it's bull sale season. My riding may be known for its mountains and charming towns but also consists of beautiful rolling hills and prairie fields, where some of Alberta's oldest cattle ranches are nestled into the foothills. Alberta's ranching heritage dates back generations, and our province is now home to 47 per cent of Canada's national cattle herd, and that has accounted for 2.2 per cent of Alberta's overall GDP.

Today our ranching community represents so much more than just dollars, cents, and statistics. The western ranching ideals that took root in Alberta generations ago now manifest themselves in every area of our modern-day culture, not just in cowboy hats and boots and big belt buckles but in a much deeper and more meaningful sense. The Albertan spirit is one of resiliency and adaptability. No matter what comes our way, whether it be drought or rain, sunny days or early winters, an eternal optimism shines through. When times get tough, solutions are found even if they're a little bit muddy, and there is no conflict or business deal that a strong handshake can't settle. Whether through young graduates working 12 hours a day in their office towers, new mothers welcoming community children into their day homes, or neighbours running fresh baking next door, the traditional western values of hard work, self-determination, and compassion for those around us are a part of who we are.

The past two years have brought unimaginable hurdles. The cattle industry swung from financial strain caused by packing plant backlogs to soaring meat prices and from a strong calving season to severe drought conditions, causing a shortage in feed supply. Yet through it all our ranchers pushed on to ensure the world can continue to bring food home to their tables.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's small farms and independent cattle ranchers play such an important role in our homegrown food supply chain, but their history and heritage play an even more important role in defining who and what our province and our people continue to be. Through even the toughest of times the western ideals instill in us an unwavering belief in better days ahead and a belief that strength is always found amongst each other.

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, those who work in the agriculture and agrifood sector feed the world and deserve to be celebrated. They have continuously overcome the challenges that have been thrown at them for the past few years. However, for agriculture to thrive through these uncertain times, the provincial government must start listening to the needs of agriculture. With the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, who is the fifth-highest exporter of wheat, there is further uncertainty in the wheat market. This comes after the challenges of severe drought and poor growing seasons. The shortage of Alberta crops led producers to be more reliant on international feed this year, and the problems with rail capacity and blockaded borders made it challenging for producers to secure feed for their livestock. Farmers are trying to make up for the loss of last season and are facing cost pressures like they've never seen before such as fertilizer and utilities.

A global conflict, devastating drought, and a pandemic are out of the control of the UCP. However, the UCP's absence of leadership is making the situation worse. Due to the UCP's delay in getting drought payments out, ranchers are left wondering how they're going to pay their bills. Unfortunately, I've seen nothing in the budget to learn from last year's mistakes or the last drought and to prepare for the emergencies of the future.

The province could be better prepared to ensure economic stability year over year if they maximize the amount of available federal money by signing on to the AgriStability proposal. Even though producer groups have aligned on this, the UCP still refuses. Instead of securing tens of millions of dollars from the federal government for insurance, the UCP are jacking the price of premiums. The rise of the premiums of crop and livestock insurance by 10 per cent will obtain nearly \$40 million off the backs of farmers. There is no need to do this while the government rakes in royalties on sky-high oil

prices. Agriculture has had enough challenges. Instead of creating more, the UCP should start addressing them.

Thank you.

Oil Sands Development and Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, \$10.3 billion – \$10.3 billion – in resource revenue from bitumen deposits. While Budget 2022 is great, I think it's fair to say that it wouldn't be balanced without the endowment from Alberta's northeastern region and, quite specifically, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the home of the biggest players in Alberta's oil sands. In 2020 our provincial revenue from bitumen royalties was just \$2 billion. Now we are forecast to produce a whopping \$10.3 billion, a major contribution to Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenue from Fort McMurray as well as the Cold Lake region.

These revenues go a long way in financing the province's key development projects such as revitalizing the Calgary and Edmonton downtown cores to attract corporate investment, constructing educational institutions to invest in our youth, and redeveloping and expanding our health care infrastructure, as witnessed in Red Deer.

The actions of Russia have highlighted the need for Canada's hydrocarbon sector. With real solutions needed for energy demands and windmills and solar panels being exposed as unreliable, it's time our government starts investing in northeastern Alberta.

Ordinarily we'd see communities form around industries in remote locations. Instead, we witness approximately 10,000 workers commuting from across the country to work in the oil sands. These workers commute using jet airplanes, which are extremely carbon intensive. They also work shift schedules that interfere with their circadian cycles and are away from their families for extended periods.

The current situation dictates that people leave Fort McMurray to attend universities and colleges that provide more options than our local community college. The state of the local hospital dictates that citizens will travel about 46,000 times a year to Edmonton and other areas to visit health care specialists and professionals.

With strategic investments in institutions in Fort McMurray like additional funding and support for Keyano College and the Northern Lights health centre along with releasing Crown lands for future growth and affordable housing, not to mention finishing the twinning of the highway, Fort McMurray could grow to attract these 10,000 workers and build a prosperous community that contributes even more to Alberta.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Last fall I stood in this Assembly and asked for this government to take action on a very serious crisis facing our province: an alarming rise in the deaths of children and youth in the child intervention system. At that time the heartbreaking number was 30, and the largest increase was in youth transitioning out of government care. Mr. Speaker, that number, a few months later, is now 45; 45 children and young people have died since last April. Forty-five: 20 young people transitioning out of care, 18 under the age of 12, 80 per cent of them Indigenous, two and a half times the number who died 10 years ago.

Last fall the Minister of Children's Services claimed she had reached out to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and advised her ministry staff to do a review of policies, but three separate FOIP requests show there are no records, zero, that the minister spoke with the advocate or even her own deputy minister

about the support and financial assistance agreement program last year, the very program that 20 of these young people were on.

Efforts to follow the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations for greater accountability by government ministries in their responses to his recommendations to improve outcomes for children and youth in care have been shot down at every opportunity by the UCP, as recently as in estimates last week by the Minister of Children's Services.

The child intervention budget shows no increase in funding, no increase in front-line staff, and, shockingly, \$10 million less for youth transitioning out of care. Insultingly, the Minister of Children's Services has claimed that reinstating a dedicated caseworker, the only consistent support in these young people's lives, two and a half years after she cut those supports was somehow the plan all along.

Mr. Speaker, I am at a loss. I don't know what it will take to make the UCP understand the gravity of this situation and how deeply they are failing their responsibility for the very children in their care. In the words of Cindy Blackstock: when governments know better and they don't do better for children, that amounts to negligence.

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

Alberta's Sister Relationship with Hokkaido, Japan

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take some time this afternoon to talk about the relationship between this province and a region in Japan. Hokkaido and Alberta will celebrate their 42nd anniversary of being sister provinces this year. For those who don't know, Hokkaido is an island province located on the northern part of Japan. Its capital, Sapporo, is the home of the alcoholic beverage with the same name. Hokkaido shares much of the same economy as Alberta as its focus is on agriculture, forestry, and food processing.

In 1980 these two regions became sisters, and along with it came many great cultural and educational opportunities. For over a decade Alberta and Hokkaido have partnered in high school exchange programs, where students from Alberta and Japan develop their international language skills by spending eight weeks in each other's homes and schools. The Hokkaido Sports Association and the Alberta Sport Connection have also regularly signed an agreement for a friendship sport exchange between the two provinces, and Alberta has played a key role in helping Hokkaido develop into the curling capital of Japan.

In 1985 Stony Plain and Shikaoi were also named sister towns. This year the two communities will celebrate 37 years of friendship, which is the second longest lasting relationship between Alberta communities and those in Hokkaido. This mutual understanding and respect is key to showcasing the culture and lifestyles of our respective communities. In Stony Plain students have been able to take part in the Shikaoi exchange program. It gives kids from both regions a chance to take in the unique perspectives each community has to offer. Another great example of this relationship can be found in the heart of Stony Plain, which hosts a beautiful Japanese garden filled with ponds and flowers named after Shikaoi.

These types of relationships are essential to not only international relations with Japan and the province of Hokkaido, but it also serves the quality of life of residents and kids living in Stony Plain, who get to learn, live, and breathe Japanese culture. [Remarks in Japanese] As translated: Japan and Alberta will always be friends.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's priorities these days are, shall we say, askew. The Premier thinks the best way to recover from COVID is by cutting the wages of health workers. His response to Albertans struggling to pay their bills was a budget that raised their income tax. His efforts at utility relief are in shambles. Meanwhile the person who should be giving him advice in all this is out campaigning against many of his colleagues to save his struggling leadership. Why is the Premier's top priority fighting with his own party instead of fighting for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that it's nice to see the hon. the Leader of the Opposition back, and I'm glad to see she's in good health.

Mr. Speaker, this government: every day our priority is fighting for Albertans. In fact, we have fought our way to the strongest economy in Canada, the strongest job creation in Canada, and we are fighting for Albertans dealing with the rising cost of living with \$1.7 billion of consumer relief on an annual basis. That's even more than the NDP was taking out of their pockets with the carbon tax. This is the government that has brought in the strongest economic renewal that this province has seen in many years, and the future is looking bright.

Ms Notley: That's money that didn't find its way into the budget because, of course, it was something they came up with about three days ago.

Meanwhile instead of working for Albertans, this UCP government is collapsing into its own infighting, melodrama, and power struggles. The whole government's focus on this Premier's leadership comes at the expense of Albertans. In fact, I have a note that's been sent to all political staff calling on them to start phoning for their boss at 4 o'clock. Mr. Speaker, staff leaving at 4 p.m. is not a sign of a government firing on all cylinders. Why is the Premier's leadership campaign the top priority of this government? Why do Albertans rank so low on the UCP list?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, while the NDP is always talking down Alberta, this government continues to build investor confidence, to create jobs and growth, to keep our election commitments. We have now implemented 88 per cent of the 372 commitments on which we were elected. The Minister of Finance just came back from selling Alberta's amazing turnaround story to investors in New York and financial institutions in Toronto. Just last week the Minister of Energy and I were in Houston fighting for increased exports of Alberta energy, because we are the solution to global energy supply and security issues. Every day on the job fighting for Alberta's economy.

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, to all the Albertans watching at home: this is exactly why you can't trust this UCP government. Now, our NDP team is united, strong, and putting forward actual policies to help your family make ends meet and come out ahead. Meanwhile in UCP land the Premier's top adviser is campaigning for him. The Premier's staff are campaigning for him. The Premier's newest MLA is campaigning for, well, himself. Premier, is there anyone over there who's actually campaigning for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has never stopped campaigning for themselves since the day after they were kicked out of office by Albertans. While this government has passed more legislation than any in Canada through the COVID crisis, we never downed tools. In fact, this was the only government in Canada to come out with a comprehensive economic recovery plan in the first three months of

COVID, and the benefits are now clear as we lead Canada in economic growth, in job growth, in diversification, the best year ever in tech, in film and television, in manufacturing, in exports, and, yes, in oil and gas.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Utility Costs

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's one team effort over there, it's the UCP raising costs with their bracket creep, hikes to school fees, car insurance, taxes, more, all this as utility bills are through the roof. Now, I've heard from Alberta families who say that the Premier's rebate crumbs are not enough. These families may face losing their heat in a month, but we can't let that happen in this building. Speaking of legislation, our caucus has drafted a bill that would prevent shut-offs from April until October. Will the Premier work with us to get that passed, to finally do something real to help Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government is putting forward \$300 million of relief for electricity consumers through a \$150 rebate to deal with the mess left by the NDP. They increased transmission costs by \$7.3 billion. They had to pay out \$1.3 billion to coal generators. They brought in their carbon tax, and they're cheering on Justin Trudeau's increase of that on April 1. People's power prices are higher today because of mistakes made by the NDP. We're trying to help people out with \$300 million of relief.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, people's power prices are up because these guys took the cap off.

Now, we're hearing from Albertans. Monty wants that price cap back. Hamdi is stretched beyond capacity. Karrie is overdue every month. Stephanie has to choose between power and groceries. Niki is so tired of the Premier's excuses. Safia worries that she and her son will be in the dark because they can't pay their bills. These are real Albertans. We're offering a solution. We could work today to make it happen. Why won't the Premier do that?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's take on this canard about this so-called NDP rate cap. It applied only to a minority of electricity consumers and then only a minority of their costs for generation, not transmission. Altogether it represented \$108 million of notional relief for taxpayers. The rebate that this government is delivering is three times that. It's \$300 million of relief. On top of that: \$1.4 billion of relief by eliminating the fuel tax, where the NDP brought in their carbon tax. All of these costs were made worse by their shutting down coal and imposing their carbon tax.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's really simple. Justine is on maternity leave. She wrote to us. Her last energy bill was more than \$500. She says: we have to resort to credit cards and a line of credit to cover our utilities; I fear for how we're going to be able to get out of this debt. No one should have to put the gas bill on their credit card to avoid getting their utilities cut off. Why won't this Premier work with us to pass a bill to bar people from being cut off their utilities while these prices are so sky-high?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if the NDP was concerned about folks like Justine and their ability to pay for their power costs, then why did the NDP rush to shut down the cheapest and most reliable form of electricity production in Alberta with our coal plants, putting thousands of people out of work? Why did they impose over a billion and a half dollars in costs on people like Justine through their

carbon tax? Why are they cheering on Justin Trudeau's plan to raise that carbon tax on April 1? Why did they build \$7 billion of additional transmission, that people like Justine are having to pay for? Why did they push so many Albertans into energy poverty? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is spreading mistruths about the Education budget. Yesterday the minister claimed that funding was exceeding student population growth over the last 15 years. Well, this is wrong. When enrolment increases by 24 per cent and inflation increases by 26 per cent, you have to add them together to come up with the real cost that Alberta schools are facing. To the Premier: is it that your UCP Education minister doesn't want to tell the truth, or is it that she doesn't understand inflation and basic addition?

Mr. Kenney: Well, as we expect from that member, of course, being unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans know that we have to operate more efficiently, which is exactly what we've done, while investing more in education. Under the budget tabled last week, Mr. Speaker, the total Education budget is going up to \$8.54 billion from the 2020 budget of under \$8 billion. If you look over the past decade, the increases in investment in the Education budget have consistently outstripped enrolment growth, population growth, and inflation growth. We are right to invest in education but also to challenge our partners there to do it more efficiently.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier is wrong. You have to add population growth plus inflation. The incompetence gets much worse. The UCP claims that it doesn't even know how many students are enrolled in school this year. That's right. We're more than halfway through the school year, and the UCP minister can't tell us how many kids are going to school. It's either the most secretive government in Canada, because they won't share the enrolment numbers, or the most incompetent, because they don't even know. Does the Premier really think Albertans will trust the UCP with K to 12 education when his minister doesn't even know how many kids are going to school? If I'm wrong, if she actually does know, will the Premier stand up and tell us right now?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, we're funding 730,000 kids in the education system, Mr. Speaker, in this year versus 716,000 last year. Those are fully funded positions. Yesterday we announced equal funding for charter schools that the NDP underfunded with respect to special-needs kids. We're letting them finally grow and expand, so the Aurora charter here in Edmonton will be able to build a high school. Since 2007 we have seen a 48 per cent increase in educational operational funding versus a 26 per cent increase in inflation and a 24 per cent increase in enrolment. Spending has outstripped inflation and enrolment.

Ms Hoffman: Those numbers the Premier just said are still estimates. They're on the website as estimates.

What we do have is big money going to construction and funding of charter schools. The NDP government offered stability for charters, but our priority has always been public schools, where the vast majority of students learn. The UCP shows disdain for public education when they refuse to fund a single project for kids in

Edmonton public or Lethbridge public or St. Albert public or many other public districts right across Alberta, so the Premier bangs his drum for charter schools but snubs public school families. Premier, why do charter schools get more teachers, better career path funding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. In fact, right now 66 schools across Alberta are being built or substantially refurbished, including six with the Edmonton public school board, but more broadly, in the Edmonton region there are 24 of those 66 projects. Yesterday we announced another one, allowing Aurora charter to build a new high school. Here's the great thing. We're making these record investments in education and in building schools, building hospitals, building infrastructure while doing it with a balanced budget.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, once again I must rise in this House to bring to this government's attention the absolute tragedy occurring in our child intervention system. As I first raised last November: more children and youth in the system have died this year than any year on record, and the year isn't even over yet. The numbers today now exceed the worst year on record by more than 30 per cent, 45 children and youth. These are children, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Their lives matter. Can the Premier please tell this Assembly, in light of knowing about this trend for almost half a year, what concrete new actions his government is taking to address this devastating issue?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising such a profoundly important and serious question and for her evident concern for children in care, particularly as we see those terrible fatalities experienced last year. Undoubtedly, much of this has been connected to the dislocation, disruption of COVID, that has seen an increase in domestic violence as well. I can say that Children's Services reviews all deaths to determine what happened and if it could have been prevented. Rigorous follow-up is required and happens in every single instance, and several mandatory reviews must happen whenever there is a case involving the death of a child . . .

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

Ms Pancholi: That's a deeply unsatisfactory answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Children's Services assured us that action was being taken. Since that time deaths have increased by 50 per cent; 15 more young people have died, five more children under the age of five, six more young people transitioning out of care. In 2017 two youth transitioning out of care died, and the NDP established the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. This year that number is 20, yet the UCP refuses to convene an all-party panel, and they refuse to allow government ministries to report to this Assembly on how they're implementing recommendations from the advocate. Will the Premier call an all-party panel immediately to address . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it is truly regrettable to see efforts to politicize such an issue as this, such a tragic issue. Last fall, I can report, Children's Services commissioned a report to investigate the rise in deaths, and from that report we will use the data to inform

how best to improve the system. We're continuously improving that system to support the safety and well-being of children. We're also investing additionally in youth mental health recovery programs, including \$7 million in the expansion of youth mental health hubs, \$1.25 million for the youth recovery program at Hull Services, and many other important investments to support kids facing crises.

Ms Pancholi: This is not about politics, Mr. Speaker. This is about keeping children and youth safe.

For three years the UCP government has refused to take responsibility on this file, and Albertans no longer trust them. The Minister of Children's Services didn't consider the consequences of removing access to caseworkers for youth transitioning out of care. There was no new funding for child intervention or to hire new front-line caseworkers. Funding for youth transitioning out of care has actually decreased. The government refuses any accountability or transparency. What will it take for any member of this cabinet – any member – to stand up and to take action to protect the children that are in your care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do hope the hon. minister will be able to deliver this or respond to further questions on this critically important issue. As I said, action is being taken. A report has been commissioned as of last fall on exactly this issue. Additional investments are being made. We're also launching a new suicide prevention grant program that will provide \$3 million over the next two years to organizations supporting youth mental health and suicide prevention. But I think all of this underscores the need for us, together as a society, to move on beyond the dislocation and often the mental and emotional stress imposed by the COVID era.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Capital Plan

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today at the RMA spring convention I was pleased to hear that the Premier committed a historic \$20.2 billion towards building the infrastructure of Alberta: the roads, the bridges, the schools, the health care facilities, and more; the things that Albertans need. As a rural MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I was particularly proud to know that rural and remote Alberta communities will be sharing in significant portions of this landmark capital investment. Through you to the Minister of Infrastructure: why was it so important to ensure that both urban and rural communities shared in this historic public investment?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for his strong advocacy for rural Alberta. Alberta Infrastructure alone will spend \$4.8 billion over the next three years, with about a billion dollars each for Calgary, Edmonton, and municipalities outside the major urban centres. I know that the one-third, one-third, one-third principle isn't just the case for Infrastructure but right across the government. This government recognized the importance of rural Alberta. That's why we are investing billions of dollars in irrigation, rural broadband, and maintenance projects.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that this historic capital investment includes 66 school projects in every corner of the province, in communities like

Camrose, Calgary, Valleyview, Penhold, Edmonton, Cochrane, Slave Lake, and more and given that building this educational infrastructure is critical to Alberta's recovery plan and our economic future, again to the same minister: how were these school projects chosen, and what steps has our government taken to take the politics out of building new schools?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we passed the Infrastructure Accountability Act to ensure that we are evaluating every project based on objective criteria. The member listed a number of individual school projects, but let me update this House. As of January 31 there are 47 school projects under way in rural Alberta, including new projects in this year's budget. Of the 47, there are 14 new and expanded schools and 33 modernizations and replacements, and 126 rural school projects have been completed over the last seven years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that following the pandemic our capital plan makes historic investments in expanding health care capacity for our province and given that Budget 2022 commits a total of \$3.5 billion for health care facilities, equipment, and IT systems to quickly expand health care capacity for all Albertans, no matter where they live, again to the Minister of Infrastructure: how will this historic \$20.2 billion capital plan ensure that all Albertans have access to the quality medical care and facilities that they need when they need them?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, there are eight health care projects within rural municipalities out of the 24 currently under way, and we completed four health projects in rural municipalities just last year. Obviously, major facilities in the cities, like the new Calgary centre, will also serve patients from rural municipalities. COVID exposed the limitations of our current health infrastructure. That's why this budget expands the health care infrastructure budget in a big way, including the Red Deer hospital, which will serve rural Albertans.

2:10 Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Speaker, this government, particularly the Minister of Children's Services, keeps asking Albertans to trust them, but the problem is that the facts tell a different story. Again the Child and Youth Advocate has renewed his calls for accountability and transparency in addressing issues prevalent in the child intervention system, calls that the minister keeps denying all the while the percentage of Indigenous children in care grows. These youth now account for 68 per cent of cases and 80 per cent of deaths. Will the Minister of Children's Services commit today to a public forum to report on the progress of the recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the questions about this very important topic. What I would say is that the process that is in place right now in terms of how we respond to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations when it comes to child intervention services and support services for youth actually came out of the last all-party panel on child intervention. Those changes were made just a couple of years ago. That is the process that we follow. There is absolutely a transparency report on every single recommendation that is made. In addition to that, I asked for another report to detail what we need to do when it comes to policy and practice to better support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Given that we are in the midst of the worst year on record for deaths of current or former youth receiving services under the Ministry of Children’s Services and given that we have raised this issue multiple times on this side of the House and the Minister of Children’s Services refuses to do anything other than again ask us to trust that actions are being taken, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations. Indigenous youth are dying under this government’s watch. How many more lives will be tragically lost before this government admits that they are failing Indigenous youth?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do just want to remind the members opposite that they left child intervention underfunded when they were in government. We came in, and in our first budget we not only paid for funds that they encumbered, that they hadn’t budgeted for, in child intervention; following an all-party panel we fully funded child intervention. We are committed to making changes where they need to be made. We are working with Indigenous communities on transitioning the responsibility of child intervention to their care, out of provincial government care. I think that that is an opportunity to greatly improve outcomes for kids and youth. We know we need to do better in this area, and we are doing exactly that.

Mr. Feehan: Given that over the last three years both the Child and Youth Advocate and the NDP have called for ministers to appear in committee to report on progress of recommendations only to be consistently denied by the UCP government and the minister and given that each time the excuse is due to a lack of scope – reviewing the annual report is out of scope, the standing committee is out of scope, and last week the minister said that estimates was out of scope – can the minister of either Indigenous Relations or Children’s Services tell this Assembly what venue is in scope for public accountability on actions to reverse these troubling trends?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this is a great concern for our government, and this is something that we have committed not only to take action on but to be transparent about. Again, the process by which we respond to recommendations that come from the advocate are posted online. I’m happy to speak about our action on those items, but I also asked for an additional report to be done to outline exactly what we need to do, whether there are changes that need to be made to policy, to practice, to legislation, to regulations. I’ve also committed to be transparent about it, something those members opposite did not do when they were in government.

Health Care Worker Wages

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it feels like déjà vu in the worst possible way. This government throughout the pandemic paid lip service to thank health care workers and then turned around to undercut and disrespect them. We’ve seen the government privatizing health care jobs during a pandemic and insultingly deride, quote, union-run hospitals instead of respecting the people who run them. Now the government is looking to slash the pay of a number of different health care workers, including respiratory therapists, who saved countless lives. Will the Minister of Health apologize to respiratory therapists for the insulting proposal and commit to pulling it today? If not, will he admit his recent words of thanks to health care workers ring hollow?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we’ve spoken over the last couple of days in regard to the bargaining that is going on between the HSAA and AHS, this is just that, bargaining. Negotiations have been going on for some time. Last week both parties put their first positions on the table in regard to the monetary items. AHS put a position in regard to concerns in regard to certain professions and being at market, and HSAA put a 15 per cent increase over four years on the table. This is part of the process, where parties put positions on the table. They negotiate, and we are hopeful they’ll reach an agreement, just like UNA did.

Ms Gray: Given that respiratory therapists, paramedics, pharmacists, and many more did so much to save lives during this pandemic and rather than offer them support and thanks for their Herculean efforts to protect Albertans from COVID-19, this government is moving to slash wages, given Holly Champney, a Red Deer respiratory therapist, stated that it “feels demoralizing to be offered a wage rollback” after all she and her colleagues have done, does the minister understand the harm these wage proposals cause, why these proposals appear to punish Alberta’s health care heroes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank all of the health care workers for the tremendous efforts that they have done throughout the pandemic and they continue to deliver for Albertans. As we indicated, this is part of a normal bargaining process. It’s the same process that was used with UNA, and an agreement was reached through that process, which was ratified at a very high level. I am very hopeful that the same process will reach agreement between AHS and HSAA, and then we can begin to move forward.

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Given that during the second wave of COVID-19 the UCP asked people to cancel their Christmas plans while the UCP flew off to Hawaii and Vegas, given that during the fifth wave the UCP threw a Christmas party for their members hours after telling Albertans to cancel their own plans, given that these are just some of the hypocritical actions that have absolutely shattered Albertans’ ability to trust this government, will the minister rise in this House and explain why any Albertan should believe him when his government claims that these cruel wage cuts are appropriate? Why are you trying to cut the pay of those who did dangerous work through the pandemic while your Premier wined and dined on the sky palace?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I already indicated, this is part of the bargaining process. I am very optimistic that the parties, using the same process, will reach an agreement just like was done with UNA, which had increases in their agreement. Our government respects the work of all health care workers, and we’ve recognized that through payments, you know, that the Minister of Labour and Immigration made last year in recognition of their tremendous work.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in our health care capacity. We are investing \$600 million this year and for the next two years an additional \$600 million. We’re investing \$3.5 billion in infrastructure. We are investing in health care for Albertans and for health care workers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks–Medicine Hat.

Agricultural Concerns

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta experienced a record-breaking heat wave last summer that saw temperatures climb to over 35 degrees Celsius. Many municipalities, including in the south, faced extreme agricultural drought. Recovery is a slow and difficult process, especially when the land has suffered previous droughts, and we all know that. Between not being able to produce enough crop and not being able to support sustainable pastures for livestock, Alberta's agricultural producers were faced with immense financial burdens. Can the minister of agriculture please explain what aid is available for farmers and livestock producers that are dealing with climate and drought complications in Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree. Last summer was a difficult one for our farmers and ranchers, and they're still feeling the devastating impacts. Fortunately, we acted quickly with the help of the federal government, created the Canada-Alberta livestock feed initiative AgriRecovery program, which made up to \$400 million in much-needed relief available to drought-stricken livestock producers and beekeepers. The first phase alone saw 14,000 applications on over 2.1 million animals, totalling \$180 million in payments. The second phase so far: 11,000 applications . . .

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that CP Rail is essential to the farming industry, in which grain is its largest transport and given that CP Rail is vital to the global cattle feed market and further given that livestock producers are expecting feed deliveries very soon, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to prevent CP Rail from striking, and how are we handling arising concerns from agricultural producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just took this question at RMA this morning. It's front of mind for the entire livestock sector. Currently we're heavily reliant on feed grains, namely U.S. corn. We're seeing about six unit trains of corn coming into the province a week, another one of DDGS, distillers grain. There simply isn't the grain supply in the south country, where most of these cattle are fed. I've been doing daily phone calls with the ag ministers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and working closely with our counterparts to make sure the feds know that this is critical.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural veterinarian care is scarce and a number of people in my riding have to travel an hour or two in order to find a clinic to find proper and adequate care for their animals and given that Alberta is still in need of hundreds of qualified veterinarians and that rural Alberta faces serious challenges when it comes to attracting new vets, can the minister confirm steps that we are taking to resolve this shortage and what is being done to encourage growth in the veterinarian sector in Alberta?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, and thank you to the member for the question. The vet crisis in rural Alberta, especially on the large-animal side, has snuck up on no one. This has been an issue for a long time. I am very excited to see in Budget '22 the addition of \$59 million going towards U of C to expand the seats from 50 to 100, and that is just the first step. More things will need to be done. It's about a four-to-six strategy approach from the dean at the U of C around recruitment, retention, changing the admission requirements, and making sure that we have vets in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: I just might remind members that interacting with those who are observing in the gallery is largely frowned upon. I encourage folks to not be doing that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each weekend it's chaos in Calgary Beltline communities. I represent them, but due to the ongoing Saturday protests, that have no end in sight, I've heard directly from businesses reporting revenue losses of 20 to 36 per cent. Residents can't get to and from their homes without being harassed, shoved, or worse. This isn't right. I'm not going to get into the purpose or cause of these protests because something needs to change. What I want to know is why the UCP government hasn't lifted a finger to bring order to this chaos.

Mr. Shandro: As the member knows since he ostensibly lives in Calgary, we have a municipal police service in Calgary, the Calgary Police Service. I understand that they are working with the community to bring order and to police. We do not have a provincial police force that the UCP would be directing, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to if the Calgary Police Service has any questions for us or the Calgary Police Commission. If there are any resources or any help that we could provide as government, I look forward to receiving those requests from the Calgary Police Service.

Member Ceci: Given that that answer is woefully inadequate and that the police are not doing anything in Calgary, given that the city councillors in Calgary are expressing a feeling of helplessness as the protest seems to be intensifying, and given that this UCP government has no problem running over municipalities when it suits them politically, why is this government now doing absolutely nothing and providing no support to find a compromise or properly enforce laws in Calgary's Beltline communities?

Mr. Shandro: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, everybody in Alberta has the right to participate in a democratic and peaceful protest, and we're respectful of that. The Calgary Police Service, like all police services in Alberta, makes operational decisions about deployment and enforcement tactics. I know that the NDP have the impression that governments and politicians should be directing law enforcement in certain situations. That's not the case. We look forward to making sure that if we get any requests from the Calgary Police Service or the Calgary Police Commission – I'd also point out that those councillors are also members of the Calgary Police Commission.

Member Ceci: Given that the UCP government also did nothing to resolve the illegal blockade at the Coutts border crossing for weeks and given that members of the UCP caucus actually cheered on those with the illegal blockade even after it surfaced that some involved were stockpiling weapons and plotting to kill RCMP members and given that we're lucky that no one was seriously hurt

or worse at Coutts but again we find the government sitting on its hands, is it really going to take someone getting seriously hurt in the Beltline protest for the Justice minister to do his job?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's focus on the Coutts situation and the response from the acting minister at the time, who used prudence and deference to law enforcement to ensure that every single member of law enforcement made it home to their families safe every night, as opposed to the NDP . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The minister.

Mr. Shandro: . . . who are advocating imprudence. Putting those lives at risk is shameful behaviour. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is next.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

Mr. Dach: Hard-working Albertans have been hurt by high prices and shipping delays, and in estimates yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation defended her inaction and could not even provide an accurate figure for the taxpayer cost of the 18-day Coutts border blockade. The Canadian manufacturers and exporters put the cost at \$44 million a day to the Canadian economy; the federal government at \$48 million a day. The minister claims that these are just, quote, numbers that have been highly thrown about and that the costs weren't as high as projected. Unquote. Is the minister really telling Albertans that she has no clue what the illegal Coutts blockade cost, or will she finally provide a real figure?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that those numbers were based on assumptions, and, in fact, in Transportation with JSG we did significant work in diverting traffic to the Del Bonita border entry, and that resulted in a lot of traffic actually getting through across to the border. The numbers that were thrown about were just based on assumptions. They haven't been quality checked, and we will do that estimation within Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Dach: Given that alongside these missing costs, Mr. Speaker, we're also trying to understand the lack of action from the Minister of Transportation and given that while truckers were left stranded at the border and the cost of the blockade hit Albertans' wallets, Albertans called on the minister to take real action to reopen the border and given that the minister claims that she didn't have the time or the ability to suspend commercial licences or really to take any action and that instead her most innovative solution was to create a WhatsApp chat to talk to truckers, does the minister recognize that she had resources at her disposal to end the blockade, or was a group chat the best she could offer Albertans?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member clearly mischaracterized my statements, and, in fact, the tools that were at our disposal like suspending commercial licences would not have withstood a constitutional challenge, so that was something that we couldn't do. Any other changes that we were looking at required changes to the Traffic Safety Act. In fact, we did significant work, working with CBSA and the U.S. border services, to divert traffic, which actually mitigated the economic impact, so we are proud of that work. Most of that response was within the purview of the RCMP.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, a WhatsApp group. It may surprise you to hear this, but it makes me think of Meryl Streep's famous line in that scene from the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*: "Florals, for spring? Groundbreaking." That is to say, a chat group app was not innovative and certainly not sufficient. Let's try one more time. What were the costs of the blockade, and if presented with similar disruptions of key trade corridors in the future, what actions will the Minister of Transportation take to protect Alberta pocketbooks and businesses?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I didn't even understand . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: I was very, very curious to see how the member was going to tie a *The Devil Wears Prada* quote into a question that didn't include a preamble. Unfortunately, he was unable to do that. That is a very clear example of a preamble, and I encourage him to govern himself accordingly in the future.

The hon. minister.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade (continued)

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as I was mentioning, I didn't quite understand some of what was mentioned by the member opposite. We took significant efforts to communicate with commercial truck drivers. In fact, I have received nothing but positive feedback. We alerted them to border crossings and timings and days that they were open and days that they were closed, and we have received much positive feedback from that communication. That was the entire intent, to make sure that commercial truck drivers had the information that they needed so that they could cross the border, and it was well done.

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

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Regulator is a hugely important part of the production of energy in the province of Alberta. It's an integral piece of the puzzle working with energy companies to ensure that we have one of the most efficient, profitable, and environmentally responsible energy industries in the world. As part of its mandate the AER oversees pipeline development, reclamation, drilling, well approvals, et cetera. To the Minister of Energy: how much of the provincial GDP is being overseen and regulated by the AER? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. The AER regulates oil, oil sands, natural gas, critical minerals, geothermal, and I can tell this House that that industry produces \$78 billion to Alberta's GDP. It's great to hear the NDP excited about the AER for once. When they were in government, there were four independent investigations because they weren't watching it. It's great to see they're interested in it now.

2:30

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AER oversees a huge portion of the GDP of the Alberta economy and given that it is very important that the oversight of this industry is built upon a system that is allowing for a constant flow of information between the government, the AER, and industry stakeholders and given that it is in the best interests of all Albertans to have an efficient, profitable, and environmentally responsible energy industry with appropriate oversight by the AER, to the Minister of Energy: what metrics has the Minister of Energy set up to ensure that the AER is fulfilling its mandate in the interests of the people of Alberta and the industry stakeholders?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The business plan in the Department of Energy includes metrics for all of our agencies for effective management of our resources. The metrics for the AER include targets, targets related to timelines, and these timelines are being met. It also includes red tape reduction, and those targets are being met. [interjections] I can hear the NDP heckling over there, and, again, it's so great that they're finally taking an interest in the AER, because they didn't when they were in government, and the AER went outside of its mandate and ended up with four independent investigations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are thousands of wells in my constituency alone that are at the end of life and need to have downhole abandonment and reclamation work done and given that oil and gas companies are coming out of the worst recession in Alberta history, where many feared for their very existence, and given that a new directive overseen by the AER is setting mandated spending by energy companies on end-of-life well cleanup and given that this could have a huge impact on practitioners, landowners, and industry, to the Minister of Energy: what kind of feedback loop is going to be set up to encourage industry to provide timely and effective feedback to the AER and the government?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to liaise with the AER and the industry and other stakeholders across the province to better understand the regulatory concerns impacting the whole industry, and we've made substantial progress on addressing those concerns. Take directive 088, which is part of the liability management framework announced in the summer of 2020. Under that framework there are mandatory minimum spends for cleanup of inactive oil and gas wells. We're taking a problem that's been developing for decades and fixing it. We're cleaning up inactive wells.

Automobile and Trucking Industry Insurance Costs

Mr. Sabir: Alberta truckers kept our supply chains open throughout this pandemic, working long hours under tough conditions. They deserve our thanks, but they are getting none from this government. Insurance costs are skyrocketing, and many owner-operators can't make ends meet. They are unable to pay for all the cost increases forced upon them by this UCP government. To the Minister of Finance: where is insurance relief for the trucking industry, and why won't this government do anything to help Albertans struggling to pay your skyrocketing insurance costs?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a hard insurance market in Alberta. We actually have one right across the country and on the continent. That's resulting in increased upward pressure on insurance premiums. But we have taken real action in Bill 41, that we introduced and passed last fall. Bill 41 dealt with the systemic issues that were pushing up costs, resulting in higher automobile insurance premiums. While the members opposite simply put in a cap, a cap that resulted in lower products, we brought in a real solution that's dropping premiums.

Mr. Sabir: Given that insurance costs have skyrocketed for all drivers because of your Bill 41 and the sellout by this UCP government to the insurance industry and given that this insurance crisis has made insurance out of reach for Albertans, including the tens of thousands of truck owners and operators, and given that it's essential we keep truckers in the industry and our supply chains open, to the minister again: how can this government possibly justify double-digit increases in insurance costs on these hard-working Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concern over the great trucking industry, transportation industry in this province, but while the members opposite put a cap on insurance rates in a competitive market and did not deal with the systemic cost issues that were driving premiums, premiums went up by 5 per cent per year under their watch. At the same time, products were being pulled back. Consumers were having less choice and fewer options. We brought in fundamental reforms that deal with these cost pressures. Insurance premiums, in fact, have flattened and are coming down. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that insurance costs are out of reach for Albertans and Alberta businesses and that instead of taking action to address their concerns, this government is talking them down and given that this government appears more focused on the Premier fighting to keep his livelihood rather than the livelihoods of Albertans and their businesses and given that my constituents are feeling left behind and ignored by this government, can the minister point to a single insurance relief program in Budget 2022 that will help lower insurance costs for my constituents and the trucking industry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the members opposite simply focused on caps and did not have the courage to deal with the real systemic issues that were driving up premiums, we dealt with those issues in Bill 41. That has resulted in a reduction of cost pressures. Insurance premiums for the automobile industry have flattened. In fact, we've seen a number of companies offering premiums in decline. We've seen reductions between 2 and 7 per cent by a number of insurance providers. Our policies are working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Kananaskis Conservation Pass Revenue

Mr. Schmidt: Kananaskis Country is an area that belongs to all Albertans and was free to access for decades. But it isn't just

Albertans who enjoy K Country. It attracted people from around the world and supported jobs in our tourism industry. The UCP has never seen a user fee that they didn't like, so they put one on nature and brought in a \$90 fee for Albertans to access Kananaskis Country. The UCP promised that this would bring in revenue to support maintenance in the area, but Albertans haven't seen it. I'm still hearing from people about the poor state of trails and facilities. Where is the UCP's K Country fee going? Albertans sure aren't seeing it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to rise in this place and talk about the award-winning Kananaskis conservation fee, which has been in place for half of a season, going into its first full season. Just the other day I was there with the member from Canmore announcing the new Nordic Centre, a significant investment in that community. We're going to continue to invest millions of dollars in Kananaskis going forward. Yes, sadly, it's going to take years to fix that hon. member's mess when he was in government.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the cost of everything is already going up under the UCP – income taxes, property taxes, tuition, interest on student debt, car insurance, utilities, and, of course, park fees – and given that Albertans aren't seeing any of the promised improvements to the area and that, instead, they're using the money to backfill previous cuts or fund previous announcements and given that the fee has only raised \$11 million after the UCP promised \$15 million, why are Albertans paying more but getting less from this government, and how many more cuts or cost increases will Albertans continue to see due to this shortfall?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Kananaskis conservation pass last year was not for a full year. Yes, it came in at \$11 million. We anticipate that for a full year it will come in at \$15 million.

In addition to the \$70 million investment the other day in the Canmore Nordic Centre, I have another announcement I can make today, Mr. Speaker. On Friday I'll be at the graduation for 20 new conservation officers, armed conservation officers that will be on the landscape. Another promise fulfilled to Albertans and going out of our way yet again to clean up that hon. member's mess when he was in government when it comes to Kananaskis.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Albertans aren't seeing any of the promised improvements from the UCP in K Country – it's just another broken promise and another reason that Albertans can't trust them to manage our parks – and given that nobody seems to know where the money from the K Country pass is going and given that we proposed an amendment that would ensure that all the revenue actually went back into K Country but this government voted it down, will the government now bring in an amendment to protect Albertans' money from the UCP, or will they continue to operate their slush fund without any accountability?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's already the law for that money to be spent in Kananaskis, which is being fulfilled. I've already announced just in this question period alone more than the entire Kananaskis conservation fee, which is just part of the investment that we're making in our parks system across the province. In capital alone this year: \$70 million going into our parks system. We're dedicated to fixing the mess that the NDP left us in Kananaskis and making sure that we not only protect Kananaskis

but that we invest money in our parks system from north to south, east to west so that Albertans can enjoy their backyard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

2:40

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us are concerned about out-of-control inflation. This year CPP for businesses and workers increased to as high as \$3,500 each. In only one year CPP went up more than 10 per cent. Higher payroll taxes punish businesses for each and every employee, and Alberta workers take less take-home pay for their families. To the minister: how can we reduce the damage of huge CPP increases on Alberta businesses and workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Red Deer-South is right to raise that issue of competitiveness. We know that when we provide a very competitive business environment, it results in increased investment attraction, job opportunities, and expanded fiscal capacity. That's why we immediately brought in the job-creation tax cut. That's why we focused on red tape reduction, regulatory modernization, and we're seeing the response, with billions of dollars of investment returning to this province, resulting in job opportunities, opportunities for small businesses, and economic growth.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP likes to tax anything that moves and breathes and given that under an Alberta pension plan rates for Alberta businesses and workers would be much lower while maintaining the same benefits and given that with lower payroll taxes this could produce a new, competitive advantage, with Alberta businesses hiring more employees, with Alberta workers taking home more of their paycheques to their families, to the minister: what is the delay in pursuing this game-changing competitive advantage to benefit Alberta businesses and workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta pension plan is a very complex issue. We are continuing with econometric work, actuarial work so that we can be fully informed and so that Albertans can be fully informed in making future decisions around an APP. We remain laser focused on ensuring we have the most competitive business environment in this province. That's resulting in billions of dollars of investment flooding in, thousands of job-creation opportunities, which is putting Albertans back to work.

Mr. Stephan: Given that five years ago it was estimated that CPP contributions by Alberta businesses and workers were about \$3 billion more than benefits paid to Alberta retirees and given that since that time Trudeau has been jacking up CPP so that this subsidy from Alberta is bigger, in excess of \$4 billion each year, to the minister: why are we leaving this on the table and not getting out of the CPP, which would save billions for Alberta businesses and workers each year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member is right to raise this question as we focus on competitiveness in Alberta. Again, this issue is complex. The issue of an Alberta pension plan has much complexity. We're doing the econometric work, actuarial work to ensure that we're well informed and so that

Albertans can be well informed to make future decisions. In the meantime we continue to do all we can to attract investment, create job opportunities, and we're seeing a tremendous response. We're seeing Albertans go back to work. We're seeing Alberta small businesses experience additional opportunities. Our plan is working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Given the estimates schedule only 45 minutes away, I ask that members exit the Chamber as quickly and as quietly as possible as we will be continuing immediately with the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has reviewed the following petitions that were presented to the Assembly on March 10, 2022: the petition of the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association for the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022, and the petition of the Calgary Heritage Authority for the Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022. I can advise the Assembly that both petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur that (a) residential farm and small commercial electricity and gas utility consumers in Alberta are experiencing record-high utility costs, (b) the government of Alberta's proposed \$150 rebate over three months is likely not sufficient to prevent Albertans from being unable to afford these costs, which will result in disconnection of these customers' service, (c) the current rules under the distribution tariff regulation and rules established by the Alberta Utilities Commission will allow for service providers to disconnect these customers' utility services starting on April 15, 2022, and (d) the legislated protection for residential farms and small businesses in Alberta is necessary to prevent these Albertans from being forced into undue hardship and further turmoil through the loss of their utilities due to unaffordable utility costs.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Bill 5 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill will improve safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders. People who work on or near roads have a higher risk of being injured or killed as a result of passing vehicles. These new requirements will apply to any stopped commercial vehicle that is

permitted to have flashing lights such as emergency vehicles, roadside workers, snowplows, and others. Albertans who work along our roads deserve better protection so that they can return safely home at the end of each shift. Bill 5 proposes the necessary changes to the Traffic Safety Act to improve protections for these workers and make Alberta's roads and highways safer.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View rose and gave oral notice of a Standing Order 42. The hon. member now has up to five minutes to explain the urgency of such a motion.

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do think this matter is extremely urgent. The cost of everything has gone up under the UCP. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, camping fees, park fees, car insurance, and utilities have all gone up. These are a direct result of UCP policies, and right now the soaring cost of utilities is making it increasingly difficult for Albertans to make ends meet.

This matter is urgent, Mr. Speaker, because people are suffering right now. I've heard from Albertans whose utility bills have gone up hundreds of dollars, and with the extra costs the UCP has piled on in other areas, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Many report that they owe thousands to utility companies.

Over the winter Albertans are spared from any disconnection due to a regulation that prevents utilities from being cut off between October 15 and April 15. However, April 15 is fast approaching. It's less than one month away today, and I know many Albertans are looking at that date with fear after the UCP failed to provide them real relief for utility costs. The UCP natural gas rebate turned out to be a fake. Their electricity rebate amounted to only \$50 a month for three months, and it's inconsequential for those facing bills of more than \$700 in any single month.

Today I rise to call on the government to extend the ban on utility disconnections over the spring and summer until it comes back into effect in the fall. Albertans are struggling. They've had a tough two years. They have had difficulties, and now costs are rising. They deserve to know that the fridge won't be cut off over the summer while they struggle to get their feet back under them. This will effectively give Albertans another year knowing their utilities can't be disconnected, and it will give them a real chance to catch up on their bills.

2:50

The government has passed similar legislation before. The draft bill that I proposed yesterday was partially designed from the legislation passed in this House during the first wave of COVID-19. We worked together and passed that legislation, protecting Albertans from undue hardship and stress and preventing the suspension of services from March 18 to June 18, 2020. We need to come together to get this done again. The Legislative Assembly can set aside the work this afternoon that it would normally be doing, because this matter is extremely urgent, and it is impacting Albertans all over the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond to the Standing Order 42. Is there

anyone wishing to do so? The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's one thing that I do agree on with the other member, and that's that the cost of everything has gone up. There's no doubt. We find ourselves perplexed on this side when they complain about the cost of everything going up, because that's exactly what they asked for. The whole purpose of a carbon tax is to make it more expensive to heat your home. The purpose of a carbon tax is to make it more expensive to drive your car. So they're getting what they asked for. They brought in the first carbon tax. And guess what? Things are more expensive.

Yes, we are equally frustrated by some of the actions that the previous administration has taken, Mr. Speaker. I will say that we are concerned, and we're frustrated when we see the price of utilities going up. Transmission fees on people's utility bills are going up substantially as well, and it's directly from the previous administration's poor policies. They spent \$7.5 billion. That's right; I said "billion," not "million." They spent \$7.5 billion on transmission – much of it was not needed – at a time when our economy just couldn't support it, and then they throw up their hands and say: why are utility bills so expensive?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to put that \$7.5 billion into a little context. In 2020 we spent \$100 million on transmission – \$100 million – in one year compared to their \$7.5 billion over four. In 2021 we didn't spend any money on transmission. It's called fiscal restraint, responsibility. We are extremely frustrated on this side when we see Albertans struggling with the high cost of utilities that are inflated for one reason and one reason only, and that is the Alberta NDP.

Now, here's the good news, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that we have demonstrated that we will have the backs of Albertans, and we will take care of Albertans that are struggling. We demonstrated that on day one when COVID first hit, and we came out with the utility deferral program that was designed to help Albertans that were struggling, because we did not want Albertans to have to choose between groceries or paying the utility bill. I can tell you that the Energy department moved heaven and earth to get that program implemented in place so that we could have Albertans' backs, and I can say that that has not stopped, nor will it.

For a number of weeks now I have been trying to bring to the attention of the opposition some programs that are out there to help Albertans. Now, as everyone in this House knows, when I begin to speak about these programs, they start lighting their hair on fire. They're hysterical, they're heckling, and nobody can hear. Mr.

Speaker, I'm going to share with you why this legislation that the NDP wants to do is not necessary. We don't need to write legislation for something that already has the programs in place.

For example, we have very strict rules about disconnections in this province, and there can be no disconnects over the winter months. If we have anyone that has a disconnect that has occurred, then we have programs in place to reconnect before it gets cold. Mr. Speaker, do you know what else we have? Supports for Albertans that are struggling. Low-income seniors that are suffering from utility insecurity: we have programs that will pay their bill and help them. We have the exact same program for low-income Albertans as well.

I have also been having ongoing conversations with the presidents and the CEOs of these utility companies, Mr. Speaker. Let me just tell you that I could not be prouder to be an Albertan with companies like this that are helping us manage the electricity grid, because they were wonderful in demonstrating restraint with Albertans. The one thing that we asked of them is to show restraint, and they absolutely have.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing that I would leave with Albertans is that if anybody is struggling with utility insecurity, please speak to your utility. The utilities have made it clear to me that if Albertans are working with them, they will then, in return, work back with them, and they will come out with reasonable programs that will allow them to continue to pay their bills and to keep their lights and their power on. All they have to do is reach out to the utility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for the responses to the Standing Order 42. This is a request for unanimous consent to set aside the business of this afternoon, which would include the committee meetings that are scheduled to sit.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the daily Routine.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-2023 main estimates schedule the Assembly will stand adjourned until this evening at 7:30. The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon for the consideration of the main estimates. The Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship shall consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Energy in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:57 p.m.]

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