



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 17, 2022

Day 11

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
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Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
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| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

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Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Long
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Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

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Nielsen
Rehn
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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Renaud
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Pancholi
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 17, 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.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by the Minister of Children's Services. I know that she's asked especially for us to join in with her today.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: With a voice like that, she's going to get put on full-time.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to bring your attention to the media gallery. It seems that they're all here today. I'm not sure what's happening.

Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce a familiar face around this place. He's the former Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and the current Member-elect for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. I would like him to rise. Welcome, Brian Jean, to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would also like . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order. I would also like to give a very special welcome to 115 grade 6 students along with their teachers – Ms Wilson, Ms Burke, Ms Dollimount, Mr. Saïpe, and the most fantastic, as I've been told, Mr. Jackson – who are joining us online today at C.W. Perry school in Airdrie. Please welcome the students joining us online.

Members' Statements

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

Government Policies and Economic Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID has caused a couple of tough years in our province. The pandemic, the restrictions, the economic challenges, the collapse in oil prices: all of these things have challenged our people and our government, but now things are looking up. Spring is just around the corner, and Alberta's recovery is well under way. We are past the worst of COVID. Almost all restrictions are gone, and our province is returning to normal.

Our economic prospects are better than they have been in many years. It's not just our traditional industries that are surging, but Alberta is also seeing remarkable progress on diversification and emerging industries. In recent months we've seen thousands of jobs, billions of dollars of investment announced in Alberta's tech sector. In fact, Alberta's tech boom has been so remarkable that some people have commented on the prospect that Alberta has the opportunity to become home of Silicon Valley north. From film and television to agrifood processing to petrochemicals, everything is on the rise. Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that it is the policies of this government that have made much of this economic good news possible.

Speaking of good news, just a few short weeks ago this government tabled the first balanced budget in eight years. The government is delivering for Albertans. We are delivering on our promises.

Colleagues, Albertans are noticing. If you take a moment to remove yourself from this building, the media circus, the petty political nonsense, you will hear Albertans sending messages of approval of the direction of this government. Albertans approve of moving beyond COVID. They approve of our pro-growth, pro-enterprise economic agenda. They approve of our fiscal prudence. The opposition won't want to hear this, but if an election were held today, the United Conservative Party would be re-elected with a majority. Friends, if we stay the course, if we remain united and we continue to focus on the priorities of Albertans, this momentum will continue through to 2023, and Albertans will reward this government with a renewed mandate to continue to build this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Executive Council Main Estimates Consideration

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, real leaders aren't afraid to debate, and there is no one in this House more up for a debate than the Leader of the Official Opposition. She owned every decision she made as Premier and was willing to debate policy decisions and choices made by the government she led because that is what a leader does. A leader is unafraid to stand up and debate the issues facing Alberta and the solutions for them.

But there are exceptions, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Premier figured that since he is unable to defend his budget and policy decisions, he avoided debating them with her directly. He wasn't willing to take questions on the chaos in his office, which has seen massive turnover. He even claimed that he didn't know how many of his own staff were on leave campaigning for him. He wasn't willing to debate his fake natural gas rebate or explain why he thought 50 bucks would address a \$700 utility bill. He wasn't willing to take questions on why he abandoned his decades-long opposition to bracket creep, the inflation policy being used by him to take a billion dollars from Alberta families. He refused to debate the tragic news of deaths of children in care, which have reached record levels in recent years.

He couldn't tell me why he failed to support my constituents who were devastated by the 2020 hailstorm. He couldn't tell me why my constituents of northeast Calgary, who were blamed by this Premier for spreading COVID-19, were denied the school and infrastructure they need. In a rare instance of forthrightness, this Premier actually admitted that he was unaware that his government was hiking borrowing costs for municipalities. The Premier's no-help budget leaves many Albertans behind, and he wasn't brave enough to debate his budget. Albertans deserve better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Energy Security and Affordability

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without fail I have constantly emphasized that it is vital to produce affordable energy for all. I have also repeatedly stated that pretending to care about the poorest in society while enacting policies that drive up energy costs and destabilize secure energy sources is disingenuous. I say all this because it is becoming increasingly evident that the true cost of the green agenda is not so sustainable concerning energy affordability and security.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Case in point: the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline permit based on an idea of preventing climate change, a virtue signalling notion resulting in reduced oil transportation, efficiency, and safety. Time and time again the pipeline cancellation trend applauded by the carbon dioxide alarmists has resulted in less investment and slowed our growth in energy production. In a time when energy security and affordability should be our top priority, the federal government continuously enacts policies undermining such. Despite soaring inflation, another hike in the federal carbon tax, to \$50 per tonne of carbon, is due on April 1.

Energy reliability, abundance, affordability are not qualities that green technologies are well known for. As the unfortunate energy crisis in Europe unfolds, it has never been clearer how such traits, which amount to establishing a reliable energy distribution system, are of utmost importance.

Alberta holds the ability to provide Canada with energy independence and sovereignty. However, the incessant campaign to shut down our fossil fuel industry while importing oil from despotic nations around the world such as Venezuela, Iran, and Russia does not only reek of cognitive dissonance, but it is unfortunately making it more expensive for regular folk. This could be our chance to step up and expand our energy market penetration, serve the needs of individuals both at home and abroad securely and affordably.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

1:40 Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This year started with tragic news. Yesterday it was revealed that a record number of children in government care have died. We also learned that the fatalities were almost entirely young Indigenous people. This is devastating news, and I want to take a moment to express the unbelievable grief of our caucus for this senseless loss of life and potential. This is not a political issue. This is a devastating human issue that should command the immediate attention of this government. These kids are not numbers. They are not statistics. They are not budget line items. There's no talking point or budget line that can justify the simple fact that we as a province are failing these most vulnerable youth.

Yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and I asked questions to the Premier and the Minister of Children's Services to work with us to solve this issue and present a plan of action. In response, this call for action and leadership was called politicizing the crisis by the Premier and only received vague promises for a

report to come in the future from the Minister of Children's Services.

I beg this government to try leading with compassion and empathy. Be open, honest, and transparent with the people of this province, who are stunned at the unfolding tragedy. This government is doing its best to prevent this topic from being discussed in an attempt to avoid the hard discussions that need to happen if we're going to do right by these youth.

This is not about the budget. This is not a contest about what line item increased or decreased. It's about saving lives. It's about whether or not this government has the political will and strength and courage to work with us and every other stakeholder to ensure that this tragic year is the last one. The people of Alberta care about this. They feel the pain of these losses, and they want action taken. They won't forgive a government that obstructs, hides, or ignores the crisis.

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

Bishop Desmond Tutu and Ted Byfield

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently two men passed away, one of whom was internationally famous and the other an influential Albertan that I once had the opportunity to meet. Both men shared a faith in God. One was a bishop in the Anglican church and the other had Anglican roots. Both believed that their faith in a loving God had to make a difference, and both of them, by the content of their character and support of democracy, helped to change their nations.

Bishop Desmond Tutu was the moral conscience of South Africa as he spoke against the apartheid regime. His job was not done when the system of apartheid collapsed. Through his work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission both victims and the oppressors had the opportunity to meet, listen, and, most importantly, to ask and grant forgiveness. It was his faith, compassion, and sense of humour that helped his nation to peacefully transition to democracy.

I heard him speak in Edmonton, and it was electric. He started by imitating a hug as he said to the Canadians in the crowd: thank you, thank you, thank you. It was heartfelt and moving as he recognized the contributions Canadians had made in pressuring South Africa towards rejecting the evils of apartheid and to become a democracy.

The second man, Ted Byfield, helped to articulate for my generation how we could better our democratic institutions by instituting a triple-E Senate, citizen-initiated referenda, and the right of recall. He helped to create the Reform Party and to clarify that what the west really wanted was to be an equal partner in Confederation. His magazine editorials, his compendiums of western Canadian history and the history of the Christian faith helped to set some of the foundation stones in my life.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Respect is not built upon the foundation of perfection but upon the character of a person and the impact of their lives on us. I am glad that I had the opportunity to ever so briefly rub shoulders with these men, and I will always be grateful for what I learned from their principled lives.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Loewen: The past two years have been incredibly difficult, and there hasn't been a single life left untouched by this Premier's mismanagement. Tens of thousands of Albertans have lost jobs, and multigenerational businesses have closed. This government has

seized churches and businesses, dragging Albertans through the courts for violating the very same health restrictions that this Premier and members of his cabinet personally violated. Then, ignoring this hypocrisy, the Premier has repeatedly demeaned and vilified Albertans, pushing mistruths and half-cocked facts. In true Alberta style, though, Albertans didn't give up on their principles, and they darn sure didn't stop fighting for a better tomorrow. Their out-of-touch Premier, however, in a bid to cling to power, continues to fatally divide Albertans and his own party.

Here are the facts. The Premier has trailed in the polls for 15 months. He's being out fund raised by the NDP 2 to 1. He is one of the least popular Premiers in Canada, and the majority of people who voted UCP in 2019 want to see him gone. Under this Premier we are divided, we are split, and it's not because of the people but because this Premier has gone back to the old ways of the PCs.

With an election set for 2023, the former base Kenney has so callously dismissed is fed up and is not buying this Premier's fake 180-degree turn just weeks before a leadership review. This Premier keeps claiming that anyone who opposes him is not a mainstream Conservative, yet the vast majority of Conservatives oppose him.

We need to reset the Albert agenda with an inclusive conservative vision that unites our movement and our province. Change is coming one way or another. The people are ready for leadership options, and there will be good ones. I am calling on all Albertans who have suffered under this hypocrisy, I'm calling on all Albertans who want to prevent a return of the NDP, and I'm calling on all Albertans who want to give this province the fresh start we all deserve: buy a UCP membership today, register for the SGM, come to Red Deer on April 9, and vote this Premier out of office once and for all. It's time for a little spring cleaning, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm sure the hon. member will know that the use of proper names for any reason is unparliamentary, and he'll govern himself accordingly in the future.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Political Labels

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some politicians label those who agree with them as mainstream and those who disagree with them as fringe minorities, extremists, or threats undermining stability. Some politicians say: of course, we can have unity if only you would agree with me. That is not unity; that is ridiculous. We are governed by laws, not by individuals, and our paramount loyalties are to principles, not to office holders. Some politicians say that those who disagree with them have unacceptable values or beliefs. That is for God, not them, to judge.

Dividing and labelling others only produces contention and destroys trust. That is not leadership. Great leaders lead in love and inspire the best in those they serve. Conflict is inevitable. Contention is a choice. Good leaders understand the difference.

Large groups should not be condemned and labelled by the actions of a few. Some seek to destroy a person's reputation by interpreting and sometimes twisting a person's words in the worst possible ways, calling them names such as racist and extremist. That is unfair to them, their spouses, and their children.

There is a better way. A loving God views all of us, His children, by our eternal possibilities and in our best possible ways. Our shared heritage as children of God transcends all other labels and is a label that produces peace. Let us be loyal to the truth and speak the truth in love. We will be happier and better.

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

Holi

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Holi is a wonderful custom and celebration that symbolizes the flowering of love at the end of the winter and the beginning of the spring season. It's a day for meeting new people, laughing, playing, and enjoying the great celebration of colours. Holi is a joyful and rich celebration that fills the entire atmosphere with vibrant colours and creates a positive environment where everyone is soaked in the colours but more in the spirit of Holi.

Holi is celebrated all around the world for its vibrant colours, which educate people to rise above, forgive, and greet others with a positive attitude and great affection. As well, Holi is a great time to enjoy the delicious traditional sweets and food with one another. The happy occasion is also incomplete without the breathtaking traditional folk music that creates a positive environment for everyone to enjoy. It is the world's most exciting and joyful celebration.

This celebration commemorates the triumph of good over evil. The festival's core theme is love and compassion for one another. On this special day we should put aside any grudges towards one another and promote joy. It is celebrated by people all around the country on the basis of many myths and tales; however, regardless of one's views, the spirit stays the same. It announces the start of spring, the season of hope and happiness. Nature is bursting at the seams with fresh leaves and blossoms. As a result, there is a lot of happiness all around.

I'm really delighted to be able to name this lovely province my home as a devoted Hindu. My desire for many of you throughout the world is that you have a happy and joyful Holi. Happy Holi, everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when we asked the Premier about the historic jump in deaths of children in government care, he tried to suggest that it was entirely about COVID and not his own government's heinous abdication of responsibility. In the middle of last year the UCP cut \$40 million from child intervention. In addition, the so-called review remains hidden, unfinished, and it's been five months. Once again, what exactly is this Premier going to do to change course and do better preventing the deaths of Alberta's most vulnerable children?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do appreciate the question. As I have said, the death of any child who is or has been in care is a tragedy, and it is a call to action. We are absolutely looking into each and every case to determine if there are changes needed to policy and practice. However, in the meantime we are still making changes as recommendations come forward. We respond to the recommendations that come from the OCYA, and we have committed to be very transparent and accountable and make changes where they're needed, as I said. Our transition to

adulthood program is one example of how we're working to address what we're seeing in this data.

Ms Notley: Well, speaking of that, Mr. Speaker, 20 of those we lost were young people over the age of 18. Now, the UCP went to court to defend their decision to scale back eligibility for benefits from age 22 to 24, arguing that they had a right to save \$10 million. Meanwhile in B.C. we see an NDP government battle the same kind of crisis by expanding benefits for these youth from the age of 24 up to 27. Will the Premier admit that these folks got it wrong, and will he reverse this cruel decision and start focusing on supporting these young people?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House in 2019, after these changes were made, we identified that there were gaps in transitions for young people who were transitioning into adulthood. We had a program that was in place. While there were caseworkers dedicated, we needed to do a better job of transitioning young people into adulthood, making sure that they had the natural supports in place so that they could be successful in their futures. We now have that. It was announced two weeks ago. We wanted to take the best pieces from advancing futures and make sure we support a successful . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, that answer is a clear example of why we can't have an honest discussion about the deaths of these 45 children in a 35-second exchange.

Now, when we were in government, we put together an all-party committee to have real discussions, and, yes, some good came out of us working together. Today it's clear that circumstances have changed, like, for instance, throwing a whole bunch of people off benefits, and there are new challenges. Will the Premier take this crisis seriously and re-establish that committee?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the members opposite back to the last term. The all-party panel was created because there wasn't, in fact, a lot of transparency or any accountability from the members opposite when things went wrong in child intervention. We are now working under those new processes. We have, I have committed to be completely transparent, to make sure that these reports are available to the public because we take this seriously, and so, too, should the public. We are going to take action. I know, obviously, the transition to adulthood program, which I've spoken about already, is one step, and I anticipate more changes will be coming soon.

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

Ms Notley: You kicked a whole bunch of kids off benefits, and you cut \$40 million last year, and you didn't put it back this year.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling. Yesterday the inflation rate hit 5.7 per cent, the highest since 1991. Now, the Premier might remember because it was back when he became the head of the CTF and started railing against government bracket creep. For the folks at home, bracket creep is when the government keeps more and more of your income even as inflation drives costs up. I want the Premier to remember 1991 and explain: why is he taking . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

You certainly can have private conversations, but doing private conversations across the bar never works out for anyone.

The Leader of the Opposition, from about 10 seconds ago if you would like.

Ms Notley: I'd like the Premier to remember 1991 and explain: why is he now taking a billion dollars from Alberta families through his bracket creep budget?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear. The only members in this House that have raised taxes during their term in government are the members across the aisle. They raised taxes on everything that moved, on individuals, on corporations, driving billions of dollars out of this province, leaving tens of thousands of Albertans looking for jobs, looking for work. We have brought fiscal responsibility back to the province of Alberta. We presented a balanced budget. Shame on them for raising these issues.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government has taken the tax burden off high-paid corporate CEOs and moved it to regular Alberta families. That's what they've done. The point is that the Premier's decision to ignore sky-high inflation has now gone from an annoyance to a billion-dollar tax grab. Families lose \$400 in a year. A vulnerable person on AISH: well, they lose \$1,000. The Premier once claimed that that loss of income wouldn't be onerous. Well, it is onerous. Why doesn't he recognize that inflation is a problem? Albertans need them to act now.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are acting. We're bringing in relief measures for Albertans. We're reducing and, in fact, eliminating fuel taxes as energy prices go up. That's what this government is doing in contrast to the members opposite, who increased taxes on everything that moved, brought in a carbon tax that added costs to every Albertan, every senior, every family.

Ms Notley: As the minister knows, Mr. Speaker, that gets rebated. What doesn't get rebated is a 100 per cent increase in tuition, a 30 per cent increase in auto insurance, a 50 per cent increase in utility bills, increases in school fees, increases in property taxes, and a billion-dollar tax grab through bracket creep. Why won't this minister stand up and fix the mistakes that he is making towards the people of this province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite were in government, they increased taxes on every Albertan, on every business, on every senior, on every family. They put this province on an unsustainable fiscal trajectory, leaving our books \$10 billion out of balance relative to similar provinces. We brought fiscal stability back to the province of Alberta. That means a future for future generations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what this government did was stumble into a windfall, and that's it.

Premier's Office Staff

Ms Notley: Now, yesterday I had the chance to ask the Premier some questions about his office also stumbling, an office that appears to have some very serious problems. Stakeholders we talk

to say that turnover is so high in the Premier's office that they never know who to talk to. It's a miracle anything gets done when no one sticks around. More than a 50 per cent turnover in one single year. A simple question: can the Premier explain why so many of his staff don't want to work with him?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question coming from Alberta's worst Premier. Here's a question I'd like to ask the former Premier of Alberta: how has she still not apologized to Albertans for bringing in the largest job loss in the history of the province? Let's start there. How about for not campaigning on her carbon tax, that caused economic devastation across this province? When is she going to apologize, though, for telling Albertans to take the bus?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier claimed that it's all actually about burnout and natural turnover in his office, but if that's true, we wouldn't be seeing so many of those former staffers actually taking the time to torpedo the Premier. One has to wonder if it has anything to do with the extracurriculars his staff have been assigned: his top adviser is off the job, serving Albertans in order to – and staff are being told to take off work at 4 o'clock, all to save his failed leadership. My question is: should I be even asking him questions anymore, or maybe should I be talking to the guy who's sitting right up there?

2:00

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's a ridiculous question. It's a distraction. We will not be distracted. We are focused on Albertans' business, and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You asked a question; you can hear the answer.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that business is about positioning this province for increased investment attraction. That business is about increasing job opportunities and opportunities for every small business in every region of this province, and our plan is working.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, look up the word "distracted" in the dictionary, and you'll see a picture of that whole group over there.

Now, half the Premier's Calgary office left last year, too. The scarcity of life rafts really tells us something about the state of the ship, Mr. Speaker. We actually do have big issues to manage in Alberta, but this Premier's number one priority is saving his own job, saving himself from his party, from his MLAs, from the guy up there. Why doesn't the Premier realize that even though it's called the Premier's office, it's actually there to serve Albertans, not his political future?

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Party Matters Referring to the Galleries

The Speaker: I know that the Leader of the Opposition knows that this period of time is to ask questions about government business, not about external party matters. I also know that the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that she ought not be engaging, as I reminded members of the opposition yesterday, with members in the gallery or otherwise.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Premier's Office Staff (continued)

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One bad poll and that's all it takes for that leader to jump the shark. Her close,

personal alliance with Mr. Jean seems to be quite obvious. I noticed the other day that he suggested to put her into cabinet, a Leader of the Official Opposition who has said she will go door to door to force vaccinations on Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Besides the plan to go door to door to every Albertan that the Leader of the Official Opposition has put forward to force vaccinations, I guess the question becomes: does Mr. Jean want to go door to door and force vaccinations as well?

Health Care Worker Wages and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans work so, so hard, and so many have stepped up, gone to work every day to perform essential services even as we faced an unprecedented public health threat and most of us were told to stay home. They cared for the sick. They stocked grocery store shelves. They taught in classrooms. Put bluntly, they were there for us, and now we need the government to be there for them. Why is the government cutting wages for front-line workers, any front-line workers, even as we see the highest rate of inflation in 30 years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows – we've actually talked about this issue for the last four days in question period. I assume that the hon. member is talking about the bargaining between AHS and HSAA. You know, as indicated previously, these were opening positions. That's how bargaining works. Both parties put positions on the table. AHS put positions on the table, raising concerns about payment of certain professions. HSAA put a position on the table of a 15 per cent increase over four years. I am hopeful that they'll be able to reach an agreement, just like we did with UNA.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, because of this government the cost of everything is rising. Car insurance is costing hundreds more per month. Tuition is doubling for some students. School fees are up. The government is even hiking camping fees. Do they hate summer fun over there? On top of all that, they're hitting families with a \$1 billion tax grab, and this government and this Premier know that as inflation goes up, so does the UCP tax grab. Families that already can't make ends meet are paying for that. Premier, right here and right now put an end to this. Will he commit to ending the insidious tax grab on the backs of families?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate that this government is not raising taxes. It was the members across the aisle, when they were in government, that raised taxes on everything and everybody. What we are doing: we're providing a utility rebate to Albertans to off-set the horrible utility policy brought in by the members opposite that pushed up utility rates for everybody. We're also coming forward with a holiday on the fuel tax, which will make Alberta fuel the cheapest across the nation.

Ms Gray: Alberta families are struggling. Many are facing utility bills verging on \$1,000 per month, and there's no end in sight. They owe thousands to utility companies already, and they are now being threatened to have their heat and their electricity turned off. Yesterday my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View brought forward legislation to ban utility shut-offs, and the government ignored it. The UCP continues to ignore Alberta

families. Will the Premier commit that not a single Albertan will lose heat or power in their home while they're dealing with a cost-of-living crisis not seen in 30 years? Will he have any real solutions for families?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have brought real solutions: a utility rebate, a fuel tax holiday. I want to speak to the underlying reasons why utility costs are high. It was the members opposite, when they were in government, that added 7 and a half billion dollars to our transmission system. The members opposite, when they were in government, hastily went to gas from coal, creating a \$1.4 billion liability for who? Alberta consumers. Moreover, they brought in a carbon tax that added costs to every Alberta family.

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

COVID-19 Related Travel Restrictions

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so disappointing that the NDP is desperately trying to keep the COVID issues alive. Last night in this very Chamber they even voted against a motion calling on the federal government to drop pointless COVID travel restrictions, including screening requirements and proof of vaccination for air travel. Once again they voted with their friend and ally Justin Trudeau against the majority of common-sense Albertans. To the Minister of Health: can you explain to those across the aisle and those in Ottawa why it is safe to drop these pointless travel restrictions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the member and this House know, we removed the vast majority of our restrictions over a month ago because it was safe to do so. In fact, total hospitalizations have dropped by over 600 since we lifted the restrictions exemption program on February 9. Federal predeparture screening requirements don't limit the spread or reduce severe outcomes. Dr. Zain Chagla, an infectious disease physician and associate professor at McMaster University, says that for PCR tests "the yield for this type of testing is very, very low for a significant amount of cost and anxiety to the traveller."

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that United Conservative MLAs voted to drop these pointless travel restrictions that only make life harder and more expensive for Albertans and Canadians and given that despite leaving them in place for far too long, even the federal government is starting to lift restrictions for travel, again to the Minister of Health: how will the government push back against the NDP's campaign of fear and misinformation about COVID and travel when the virus is clearly no longer the threat that it once was?

Mr. Copping: Thanks once again to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. Our transition to an endemic phase means learning to live with COVID and lifting the unnecessary barriers that harm both Albertans and our economy. It also means listening to partners like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whose president, Perrin Beatty, said that "blanket warnings about travel at this point are unjustified." Of course, we'll continue to watch COVID-19 trends closely, but we're continuing with our return-to-normal plan because it is working, because omicron is different, and because Albertans shouldn't have to put up with restrictions that no longer

make sense, restrictions that are supported by the other side of the House.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has been clear that it's time to drop these pointless COVID travel restrictions, a view shared by the majority of Albertans and given that the NDP believes these travel restrictions should remain in place indefinitely, again to the Minister of Health: when do you expect all of these travel restrictions to be fully removed, allowing Albertans to get back to their normal lives?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the federal government this morning announced that they will remove the pretesting requirement for fully vaccinated travellers as of April 1; however, it's tough to say when this federal government will realize that it needs to do the right thing and remove travel restrictions entirely for all Canadians. They should follow what interim president of the National Airlines Council of Canada, Suzanne Acton-Gervais, has stated: "Other countries have moved to eliminate pre-departure testing requirements entirely, and the latest scientific evidence suggests now is the time for Canada to consider doing the same."

2:10 AISH and Income Support Payments

Ms Renaud: The decision to deindex AISH will leave recipients with \$1,000 less to buy essential items. That's groceries, clothing, that's transportation, that's medical supplies. We are seeing inflation that we haven't seen since 1991. Some of the vulnerable Albertans that I'm hearing from weren't even born the last time things were so tough. They've never experienced this kind of hardship. Why is this government doing nothing to make life better for these Albertans?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 continues to maintain the core funding for social services. In addition, we increased funding for AISH. We increased \$36 million for employment support services. We not only function as a social safety net for those vulnerable Albertans, but we also help them to get jobs.

Ms Renaud: Given that the minister claimed earlier this week that he couldn't act until he generated wealth but given that this government has already shoveled money to their friends in the form of a multibillion-dollar handout and can't be bothered to even keep funding for those on income support at pace with the skyrocketing cost of living and given that no one from these communities can get time with the minister or the Premier or anyone even willing to listen about the devastating impact of these horrible, cruel, UCP government policies, will the government admit that they only care about their rich friends?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, with our commitment we're not only working with our nonprofit sectors here; we added another \$6 million under the civil society grant. We're working hand in hand with our community partners to make sure Albertans' lives are getting better through our support to them.

Ms Renaud: Given that I'm here begging – actually begging – for this government to listen, given I devoted my life to fighting for Albertans who are vulnerable and struggling to make ends meet, I am actually heartbroken that there is no compassion and support from this sitting government. I want the voices of vulnerable Albertans to be heard. Will the minister and the Premier come to a

town hall with me to listen to these vulnerable Albertans who are struggling and hurting right now because of your policies?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, we're listening to Albertans. I'm travelling around the province, and when I have the time, I talk to families, I talk to parents. Through our support thousands of vulnerable Albertans have been getting the support they need from us. We're committed to providing the safety net for vulnerable Albertans, but more than that, we're an empowering mechanism that will give people support so they can have a hand up.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Later today I'll be tabling a bill that will establish a venture fund that'll invite Albertans to invest in Alberta's future. The fund will directly invest in the growth of Alberta's tech and AI sectors and exclusively support early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Investing in the fund would provide Albertans the opportunity to earn returns themselves and support economic growth, diversification, and the creation of good jobs and the long-term economic well-being of the province. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has said in the past that this issue should be nonpartisan, so will he join me in supporting this bill, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite's interest in creating the most competitive business environment and an environment where we see the tech sector thrive in this province. That is certainly our goal, and we've been very pleased to see venture capital rush into this province, setting records year after year. In order to continue that momentum, we've included \$90 million in Budget 2022 in an Alberta technology and innovation strategy. There will be key components of that strategy rolled out in upcoming weeks. I know that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation will be pleased to be transparent with Albertans on the great opportunity of that plan.

Mr. Bilous: Given that our economy is in the midst of a generational shift brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, a crash in oil prices, and an energy transformation that's changing how we power our economy and given that these challenges have highlighted the need to build a more resilient and diversified economy – we need to set the right conditions in order to compete in this highly competitive market – given that this government has cut several programs designed to support our tech sector, causing us to lose ground to other provinces, if this government won't support the bill, will they at least reverse their decision to cancel the investor tax credit and the digital media tax credit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the member's efforts and interest in positioning the province for growth in the tech sector. We talk about energy in this province, the importance of energy, and there is an energy transition taking place, but I need to underline today the importance of Alberta's traditional oil and gas industry. It's never been more important as we consider North American energy security. It's never been more important as we consider what we can do to get LNG into Europe to our geopolitical allies.

Mr. Bilous: Given that technology underpins every sector, including oil and gas, and given that the bill will also create an

advisory council to provide advice and research to the minister on innovation and technology as well as support crossgovernment initiatives related to innovation and given that this idea, just like the venture fund, the investor tax credit, and the digital media tax credit, came from industry and has support from venture capitalists to private-sector organizations like the Council of Canadian Innovators, will the government finally listen to the tech sector and support the idea of an advisory council?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're working hard to ensure that we have a very attractive business environment for venture capital, for growth in the tech sector. Something that we did early days: we brought in the innovation employment grant, which is a grant that ultimately rewards incremental research and development activity. There has been a great response to that grant, but we're not done yet. As I noted, we've announced \$90 million in this budget, Budget 2022, for additional initiatives. These initiatives will be targeted at AI, machine learning, and quantum computing. The tech sector is important to this province, and we're acting.

Election Recall, Citizen Initiative, and Labour Relations Legislation

Mr. Barnes: The Premier campaigned on strengthening grassroots democracy. One of this government's key initiatives was MLA recall. The Premier even stated, and I quote: Albertans should be able to hold their officials accountable throughout their term. This bill received royal assent 273 days ago, yet the bill has still not been proclaimed into law. To the Premier: why has your government chosen to disregard the will of this Assembly by refusing to enact Bill 52, the Recall Act?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As everyone in this House knows, we passed the Recall Act to ensure Albertans could hold officials accountable throughout their term, not just at election time. It will allow voters to petition to remove elected officials from office, including MLAs, mayors, municipal councillors, and school board trustees. We are committed to strengthening democracy in Alberta and making sure Albertans have an even more powerful voice when it comes to matters that impact their lives. We've made a commitment that we would pass this legislation and will put it in place, and we are doing so. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I can think of two UCP nomination candidates, Jodie Gateman and Tim Hoven, who might dispute the idea that this government cares about grassroots democracy and given that Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act, received royal assent exactly eight months ago, can the Premier explain why his government has ignored the will of this Assembly again and failed to enact into law the Citizen Initiative Act?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We make no apology for vetting candidates through the nomination process. We believe it's important that candidates are able to uphold a certain acceptable bar and hold views that are consistent with the views of Albertans. Again, we make no apology. We will continue to vet nomination candidates.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that this government wants to campaign on grassroots democracy but not provide it, given that there's a third example of grassroots manipulation, the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, with its raved-about provision to opt union members out of political spending, and given that this bill received royal assent 626 days ago yet union dues won't be opt-in until July 31, 2022, again to the Premier: if you won't respect the wishes of grassroots Albertans, UCP members, or even this Assembly, why should we trust you?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am proud... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

2:20

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of Bill 32. It will actually restore balance in Alberta's labour legislation. I can assure that hon. member that there's a time frame legislated for that particular bill to take its course, and I am confident that before the end of the year that would happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very concerned about the pending decision from CP Rail to lock out 3,000 conductors and locomotive engineers. The impact for the agricultural industry could be catastrophic, so I sincerely hope there is a resolution. Farmers have had to navigate through a global pandemic, a scorching drought, floods in B.C., illegal blockades on Alberta's only 24/7 border crossing, skyrocketing inflation, and now the uncertainty of the invasion of Ukraine. Why aren't the UCP doing anything to support the agriculture sector through our supply chain disruption?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know what that member is talking about. Our government, like every other prairie province government, has done everything that they can to help their farmers and ranchers through the current drought, whether it's through our robust business risk management strategies, the AgriRecovery program, or us advocating for the CP lockout to end quickly, whether that's with binding arbitration or back-to-work legislation. Where does that member stand on that?

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of fertilizer was skyrocketing before the invasion of Ukraine and continues to increase and that many producers do not have the upfront capital to afford to buy fertilizer early and given that livestock producers have become reliant on American feed due to the shortage in Alberta and given that in the midst of these cost pressures and uncertainty the UCP wants to balance their no-help budget on the backs of farmers and increase crop and livestock insurance by 10 per cent, why is the minister still going through with this?

Mr. Horner: Two-thirds of all nitrogen-based fertilizers made in Canada are made in Alberta. When I meet with the fertilizer companies, they say: "We would love to come here. We love your APiP program, we love the cheap natural gas feedstock availability,

but we can't because of the carbon tax, so we're going to build the plants in the U.S., and we're going to freight them across the border." We're lucky we have enough fertilizer in Alberta for the spring plant.

Ms Sweet: No, we don't.

Mr. Horner: Yes, we do. The price will rise. We'll get it in the ground.

The Speaker: I might remind the minister that perhaps if he was answering through the Speaker, it would make for a much smoother transition.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the pandemic, a global conflict, and a national labour dispute are out of the control of the provincial government but given that the UCP are, however, in control of how much they charge farmers to access insurance and that it is going up under this government and given that the UCP are also ignoring the request of producer groups to access tens of millions of dollars available through the federal government – again, no surprise that the UCP are ignoring the sector – and given that farmers are facing so much pressure right now and they want to plant seed and they have enough issues with trying to access feed, why is the UCP so committed to making life harder for farmers by jacking up the premiums?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the formula that sets the premiums for our great insurance program is based on your regional risk, your farming history risk, the value of the commodity, and the premium rate. The premium rate is increasing. It's capped at a 10 per cent increase to rebuild the fund because we paid out \$2.8 billion from the fund. The fund did its job. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I couldn't hear the last 10 seconds of your answer. Please feel free to deliver it to me.

Mr. Horner: I just said that if there are any crayons left over there, I'll take it offline and show them how the formula works. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Premier's Office Renovations

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this government has had two separate occasions to report to this House on how much the work done for the Premier's office cost Alberta taxpayers. At the Infrastructure budget debate the minister said that he did not have the cost handy, and the Premier was also unable to give the total cost at the Executive Council budget debate. Since so many Albertans are asking and since he's had over a week to get that number, will the Infrastructure minister share the total cost that went into renovating and upgrading the Premier's office at the Legislature, and if he can't, could he explain what he's trying to hide?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, not only on the floor of this House but also during budget estimates I told him I'm not hiding anything. In fact, I showed him everything and would like to show him everything. On Twitter my office has posted how much it cost to move the Premier's office due to the work being done at the Legislature office. I'm sure the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can vouch for it. Right now there is work going on at her office, and she has been asking me the last few days: how long will it take? She's looking for, actually, a temporary move.

Member Loyola: Given that Albertans are living through an affordability crisis right now – and that is the sole fault of this government, that piled on costs and removed protections for families – and given that while I appreciate the need to maintain and protect Alberta’s history, including the people’s Legislature, Albertans should be assured that while they are being told to pay more, this government isn’t attempting any luxurious upgrades or improvements, as were seen under the former PCs, will the minister table today a full list of all improvements or alterations done to the Premier’s office in addition to the full cost?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this member opposite is trying to create a story that doesn’t exist. It was clarified time and again. We would rather focus on issues that matter for economic recovery and growth, but these socialists will never get that. Like the minister of social services said the other day, we have to create wealth to spend on things. This guy is looking for stories that don’t exist, unfortunately.

Member Loyola: Given that sitting on the government benches is a minister who served in a cabinet trying to build a luxury penthouse on top of the Edmonton Federal Building and given that Albertans lost trust with that government after this revelation and given that in order to build trust with Albertans, this government should be up front with taxpayers about how their money is being spent, will the minister agree that any money spent on upgrading, improving the offices of highly paid government officials, including the Premier and his staff, should be publicly disclosed and approved by a committee of this Legislature? Surely, this minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, since the member opposite will try to twist things anyway, I would ask you to accompany me on a tour of that place the government is using.

To be specific about the expenditure: electrical expenses were \$1,968; plumbing was \$565; electronics, \$807; movers, \$4,106; painting, \$800; carpentry, \$250. If the member can’t add, the total is \$8,946, which is in the public domain. It’s posted on Twitter.

United States Oil Imports

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the Russian government’s budget is funded by oil, making them a true petrostate. As Putin continues his war on Ukraine, any continued reliance by NATO allies on Russian oil and gas is directly financing his invasion. I’m grateful that North America has banned imports, but the world needs to do more. I also understand that our Premier and the Energy minister went to Houston last week to represent Alberta’s energy industry on the international stage. To the Minister of Energy: in Texas what was your message to the global energy and political leaders?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, there were a number of us that were representing Alberta and Alberta energy on the global stage last week. Our Finance minister was in New York talking with major investors and fund managers to tell Alberta’s story and to talk about the importance of our energy sector. The Premier and I were in Houston to talk about the importance of our energy sector to North American energy security. We have to weed out Russian barrels from not only North America but from global supply. It’s conflict oil. It’s unconscionable to be buying it, and

that’s what we were talking about. We were talking about Alberta as the solution.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the United States and European countries seem to recognize the importance of ending their reliance on Russian oil and gas imports but they’re struggling to permanently do so given that previous attempts to secure energy security in North America have failed at the hands of short-sighted political decisions, to the same minister: what progress was made in Texas, and how was Alberta’s message received?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout my trip to Texas I heard from leaders and energy leaders and CEOs from around the world who want to see Alberta continue to be a key player to answering global energy issues. We’ve now run headfirst into the fact that, over the last several years, Canada’s and the United States’ federal governments have put energy security on the back burner. What that’s allowed is for Russia, places like Russia to ramp up their production while we have been unable to build ours. It’s a reminder of the importance . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that President Biden is so desperately on the hunt to secure gaps in his oil imports that Russia once filled that he is now conversing with and considering travelling to countries like Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, with whom his country originally imposed oil sanctions on years ago because of their poor human rights standards, yet the same President rejected Alberta’s own Keystone XL pipeline on his very first day in office, which would have enabled their trusted Canadian ally to meet United States’ demand, to the same minister: what do you think that this says about the priorities of President Biden at this time, and what needs to change?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s terribly frustrating to see the U.S. government now scrambling to increase supply from some of the world’s worst regimes, places like Iran, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, when we’re right next door and we’re already the largest supplier of energy to the United States. We sit on top of the third-largest reserves in oil, and we are proud of it. It’s time that we start treating our oil reserves as a strategic asset to be proud of, not a liability to demonize, and that requires a rebalancing of an energy security discussion, and that’s what we’re doing.

Culture and Status of Women Budget 2022-2023

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, during estimates with the Culture and Status of Women ministry the minister was asked about the lack of increase in his budget to meet the targets set out by this ministry. It was clear when the budget was released that what was allocated was insufficient to meet those goals. In fact, the minister indicated that he asked for more money, advocated for more money, and was denied by his own government, so my question is for the Finance minister. Why doesn’t he feel that supporting women or Alberta’s Culture ministry are important?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I did advocate for more money, and I got it, \$268 million. They like to string a story that isn't true. I got substantially more money. I look forward to the days when I'll be able to increase the grants to nonprofits and civil societies, the ones who actually do real work and aren't involved in identity politics and trying to create trouble.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Given that the minister clearly cannot get adequate funding from this government to meet the needs of Albertans he represents and given this budget comes after a time when those represented by this ministry were hit the hardest – the arts and culture industry saw the biggest reduction in revenue due to the pandemic – and we know that women were disproportionately affected by job loss and economic downturn and given that this minister claims he advocated to the government to support these areas properly, my question is simple: where exactly do women and culture fall on the Finance minister's priority list? We're talking about half of the population.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm not going to take any advice from the members across about how much they care about women because I'll tell you about another industry that's dominated by women. That's the tourism industry. Those members opposite stood up last night and voted no to the government motion to remove federal restrictions on travel, which are keeping that industry down and keeping women unemployed. If they care about women, they've got to care about them in every industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Goehring: Given that this government has failed to get Albertans back to work at the rate they promised – they're 130,000 jobs short, Mr. Speaker – and given they're now moving to slash the wages of front-line health care workers in fields with far more women than men and given those health care heroes were on the front lines of the pandemic every day while UCP ministers and caucus members flew off to Hawaii, hosted drunken white tablecloth dinners, and held Christmas parties literally hours after telling all Albertans to cancel theirs, is anyone in this government really going to claim they've checked into reality and that they understand the many challenges facing women?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot in that question, but we're positioning this province for opportunity for every Albertan, including all Alberta women and Alberta families. That's why we supported businesses, businesses in the service sector disproportionately, at levels not supported by any other government across the country. That's why we're positioning this province for disproportionate investment attraction, job creation, and economic growth. All Albertans are important, including women.

Education Concerns in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood

Member Irwin: Delton school is in my riding. It's a lovely school, but it needs replacing, and the students in our community would be better served with a new school. It was at the top of Edmonton public's priority list, but the Minister of Education, who thinks she knows better than community members, refuses to fund it or any public school in Edmonton. Minister, good news: it's not too late to

do the right thing and support Edmonton public schools like Delton. Will she join me and our Education critic for a tour of Delton school to see just how short-sighted her decision is not to replace it? And, please, just say yes.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a process, a very defensible data-based process when we approve capital projects in this province. With respect to education, we actually take priorities that school boards deliver through the Ministry of Education, and then after that the ministry writes those requests and provides a priority. With respect to the Delton school, it has a utilization rate of only 69 per cent, with no health and safety concerns.

Member Irwin: Given that I hope that was a yes and that the minister will join us to hear the concerns of my constituents who've been left behind by this no-help budget and given that my constituents also feel ignored by this government when it comes to the discredited, the disgraced, the inappropriate, the racist curriculum, and if the minister is actually interested in what Albertans think, she'll go back to the drawing board and she'll consult with my constituents, Indigenous groups, francophone communities, and more, and she'll make a curriculum that we can be proud of, not one that she has to force onto teachers and students. Will the minister take this feedback from me, or does she think that she still knows better than the people I represent?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, every member of the government caucus, every cabinet minister, and certainly the Minister of Education is taking feedback on the curriculum. We're listening to the feedback of all Albertans, including education stakeholders, francophone groups, and Indigenous communities. We've given out a million dollars in grants to education and community partners so they can provide their detailed feedback. We are listening.

Member Irwin: Given that if the minister was actually interested in listening to the people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, she would be investing in public education, not trying to undercut it as this budget does and given that she and others are using technicalities to deny my constituents, in the fastest growing school division, the school that they deserve, it's clear that the minister or all of the ministers have been spending too much time in their offices and not enough time with the people of our province. I've got some constituents who have some thoughts on how this minister and government are faring. I would love to set up a meeting with them. Will she attend, or is the only voice that she serves . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I outright reject the assertion that we, in fact, have cut Education. That is simply not the truth. We've maintained Education funding throughout the plan, this year increasing it by 1.7 per cent, at the same time bringing forward a more efficient formula that brings resources right into the classroom. We are delivering world-class education, with more bang for our buck, and, in fact, this year increased the budget by 1.7 per cent.

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

Highway 28 and 881 Capital Plan

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned about the condition of roads that connect us to neighbouring communities and to the capital region. They rely on these roads on a daily basis to go to work, school, or even to access emergency services, not to mention the huge benefit to the economy this corridor provides. In 2018 the previous government recognized the need to assess these roads and conducted a highway corridor study from Edmonton to Cold Lake for highway 28. To the Minister of Transportation: what did this report indicate, and how are we acting on these results?

2:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, a safe and reliable highway network across the province is critically important to Alberta's economic recovery, which is why in Budget 2022 we are investing \$7.29 billion over three years in Transportation's capital plan. The report the member is referencing recommended several improvements to the highway, including intersection upgrades, curve reconstruction, and passing lanes. Many of those factors are taken into consideration when assessing all Alberta roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Highway 28 is a core route in Alberta's northeast. It connects Edmonton, Gibbons, Smoky Lake, Bonnyville, and ends at Cold Lake. My constituents are constantly travelling on this highway. Some travel this road to Edmonton to deliver babies since we do not have that service available in our area. Highway 28 connecting Edmonton to Gibbons recently saw \$43 million of upgrades, but the Smoky Lake to Cold Lake section has not seen upgrades in many years. To the Minister of Transportation: can you let us know what work is currently being done on highway 28 between Smoky Lake and Cold Lake?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation is currently monitoring and assessing traffic volumes and the condition of highway 28. My department will use the data collected to determine if any passing or climbing lanes need to be built. At the moment there are no projects planned for highway 28 in the department's three-year provincial construction plan; however, ongoing maintenance like pothole repair is taking place. In fact, we have an additional \$30 million for highway maintenance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that the northern section of highway 881 is another extremely key route in the northeast and given that this highway is filled with potholes and frost heaves – and I thank the minister for coming for a ride with me when she came out to visit our area – and given that the Ministry of Transportation just released the 2022 capital construction program, which indicates major capital projects, and given that in this program the Minister of Transportation recognizes that 881 needs significant work to improve safety, to the Minister of Transportation: what is the future plan for 881?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, the condition of all Alberta highways, including highway 881, is constantly monitored by maintenance contractors and department staff to ensure safety-related issues such as potholes and pavement repairs are addressed in a timely manner. Highway 881 is an important route for those Albertans who rely on it to get to

work and to school, and many have told us that they want the road widened. Currently highway 881 is not in the department's three-year construction program, but the road will continue to receive ongoing maintenance, and we'll continue to have conversations.

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

In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

School Construction Capital Plan and St. Albert

Ms Renaud: I value the importance of education. My constituents in the beautiful constituency of St. Albert value the importance of education. A strong education system that invests in students, in communities will yield untold returns for the future of this province. The fact is as simple as: one plus one equals two. Apparently, this is a fact the government just cannot seem to grasp as they failed to make the needed investments for the students of St. Albert.

St. Albert public needs the creation of a high school in St. Albert. St. Albert Catholic requested the modernization or replacement of Legal school and the replacement of l'école Father Jan, a K to 9 school. And which of these critically needed projects for St. Albert did this government deliver on? Not a single one. Just like Edmonton, Lethbridge, and more, my constituents were told that their education priorities are not this government's priorities. Disappointing but not surprising for a government that has never ever considered education a priority.

This Premier and Education minister, who cruelly fired tens of thousands of educational assistants in the first wave of the pandemic, hurting students with special needs; who underspent the Education budget rather than investing to make sure schools would remain safe and open; who, rather than listening to teachers, parents, students, and experts, is still driving a curriculum that will set our students backwards. This government, no friend of education, clearly has its own priorities, which include gambling a billion dollars on Donald Trump, a war room that has done nothing but embarrass Albertans, taking a billion dollars from Alberta families through bracket creep, and making life harder and more expensive for Albertans with disabilities. Albertans have had three long years to get a glimpse of the UCP priorities. They see precisely that this government is not focused on them, their children, or their communities. It's disgraceful. But, thankfully, Albertans will get to elect a government that actually shares their values; 2023 is coming. Change is coming.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to put a motion on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, 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 acknowledge that (a) Statistics Canada announced yesterday that the national consumer price index for February 2022 had increased to 5.7 per cent, year over year, being the highest rate of inflation within the last three decades, due to current price pressures on consumer goods and services, and (b) the government's proposed Budget 2022-23 is based on an expectation that the consumer price index for 2022 will increase by only 3.2 per cent, a full percentage point below the Bank of Canada's latest monetary policy report issued in January of 2022.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government to revise and amend its expectations in respect of the rate of inflation set out in its proposed Budget 2022-23.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government to implement strategies within its jurisdiction to reverse anticipated inflationary price increases for goods and services.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Ammolite is a beautiful gemstone as unique as Alberta is. The iridescent gemstone comes from ammonite, the fossilized shell of mollusks that lived in an inland sea that is now southern Alberta. Plains First Nations have collected ammonite shell for millennia and continue to do so today. Ammolite is also part of Alberta's economy, mined and used in jewellery for more than a century. Currently there is no official provincial gemstone. Bill 6 will designate ammolite as an official emblem alongside 11 others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Bill 203

Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce a bill, the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act.

This bill is an idea that comes from entrepreneurs and would help Alberta build a world-class innovation environment. Bill 203 would invite all Albertans to invest in Alberta's future and in companies in our own backyard. It would provide Albertans the opportunity to earn returns themselves and support economic growth, diversification, the creation of jobs, and the long-term economic well-being of the province.

History tells us that when Albertans are given the opportunity to bet on themselves, great things are possible; in fact, this venture fund is inspired by examples in Alberta's history that helped build our oil sands into the economic driver they are today. Based on Alberta's long history of entrepreneurship and innovation, I'm confident that Alberta can grow an environment for technology and AI that will attract and grow our innovative companies and make Alberta a leader in the new innovation and knowledge economy. I hope that all members of the House will support this major diversification effort and the growth of our technology and innovation across Alberta by supporting Bill 203.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

2:50

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: At the appropriate time the Opposition House Leader rose and moved a Standing Order 42.

Budget 2022 and Inflation

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've already read the motion, I will not reread it, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the urgency of this debate within the Assembly today. I am asking, pursuant to Standing Order 42, that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate this motion because of its urgent and pressing nature. It has been distributed to the members, and while Standing Order 42 requires no notice, my office did provide advance notice to the Speaker of my intention to introduce this motion under the appropriate standing orders. As well, we sent advance copies of the language of this motion to the Speaker, the government, and the independent members of this Assembly. As my colleagues have frequently pointed out, Standing Order 42 is an important opportunity for all members of this Assembly, specifically private members, to ensure that matters that are important to our constituents and of an urgent nature are debated in this House. I'll briefly outline this motion and its urgency today.

We have reached generational levels of inflation. Statistics Canada reported yesterday that inflation is running at 5.7 per cent, the highest in 30 years. This is deeply concerning for Albertans. Buying power is being eroded as we speak. Specifically, everything is getting more expensive, and that is what inflation is doing to Alberta families, families who are already struggling to make ends meet with soaring costs left, right, and centre. This becomes a matter of urgency because understanding and correctly forecasting inflation is an essential part of provincial budgeting. Expectations of inflation affect every program, every service, every benefit, every capital project, and every decision the government makes.

Today is meant to be the final day of the estimates process. What we've learned so far is that the government has deeply miscalculated. In January the Bank of Canada released its Monetary Policy Report indicating that inflation was expected to be 4.4 per cent for 2022. In late February the government tabled its budget and lowballed the expectations for inflation, putting them at only 3.2 per cent and coming in a full point below that bank. Yesterday with the release of Statistics Canada data we learned that the inflation is even worse than even the Bank of Canada projected, and we learned that the government was out by nearly a factor of two.

This motion, if adopted by the Assembly, would send a clear signal to the government that they need to adjust. They need to take inflation seriously, and I would call on the government to revise and amend its inflation expectations and budget and, accordingly, implement strategies to help deal with that lived reality. Without accurately projecting inflation, government fails to account for so many factors.

Now, to further speak to the urgency, Mr. Speaker, two quick scenarios or examples. First, based on Budget 2022 assumptions, a person living on AISH will lose over \$1,000 of purchasing power this year because the government deindexed benefits from inflation. With inflation running much higher, AISH recipients, the most vulnerable in our society, will be pushed further into poverty. It's clear the government has not accounted for this because the inflation is so much higher than estimated in Budget 2022.

The second example, Mr. Speaker, is that Statistics Canada has told us that food costs increased by 7.4 per cent. Now, one may ask: how does that affect Budget 2022? Well, in the Ministry of Justice

and Solicitor General they have a budget specifically to feed prisoners. There are basic caloric and nutritional requirements the government must meet, so with rising food inflation, that is an unavoidable and rising cost for this ministry that hasn't been accounted for.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other examples. I only wanted to raise a few to speak to the urgency and why we believe this is worthy of debate in the Assembly right now. Certainly, there are a number of articles being written. Constituents are reaching out to me about this inflation increase, about the rising cost of food and services. Certainly, it is urgent in nature to those Albertans. I won't provide any further examples, but I will say that the budget is deeply miscalculated. The timing right now for us to adjust the budget is perfect, making this Standing Order 42 really urgent at this point. Albertans will pay the price if we do not course correct.

As we come to the close of estimates, it's clear, in our view, that generational levels of inflation have not been accounted for in the budget. That makes this an urgent and pressing concern that should be addressed. I hope all members of this Assembly will support this motion so that we can ensure to Albertans that all Members of this Legislative Assembly understand the impact inflation is having, how expensive things are getting, and that we are taking it seriously and debating that here in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42 a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond to the request for unanimous consent. I see the hon. Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak in opposition to this motion. I certainly acknowledge that we are in a time of inflation, as the member opposite rightly points out, but I do want to note that Budget 2022 does consider the specific cost pressures that we're going to be experiencing in the upcoming year. We do that within each ministry.

I do want to point out as well that while there is, no doubt, some uncertainty around where inflation will truly land, inflation rates in Alberta have been below the national average throughout this last year. Last year, in 2021, inflation came in at 3.2 per cent. That was back-loaded, Mr. Speaker, so inflation rates were higher in the latter months than in the former, and we're expecting at this point that inflation will be higher in the earlier months of 2022, declining into the later months.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that we've identified and in fact have included in our appropriation bill contingencies of \$750 million for Health to deal with any COVID pandemic pressures as well as \$1 billion in disaster contingencies that can be used for unexpected eventualities, so we do have contingencies in this budget.

I do want to also point out that we inherited a government that spent \$10 billion more than comparator provinces on a per capita basis. Mr. Speaker, that spend trajectory was going up 4 per cent per year. It was simply unsustainable. If left on that trajectory, we would simply be robbing future generations of their prosperity, and that is completely unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, over the last three years, beginning in Budget 2019, we have done the heavy lifting, Albertans have done the heavy lifting, to bring our spending back to sustainable levels. We simply have to remain fiscally disciplined. We have to continue to bring discipline to every spending decision. That will mean that ministries will have to continue to be innovative and creative when they experience cost pressures throughout the year that perhaps were unanticipated.

I do want to talk a little bit as well about the fiscal anchors that really informed our fiscal decisions over the course of the last three years. We identified the importance, in fact the anchor, of keeping our net debt to GDP below 30 per cent – very critical – to ensure that we would maintain a strong balance sheet relative to the size of our economy. Mr. Speaker, that's really a picture of our ability to service debt and ultimately recover fiscally after the pandemic. I believe the most important fiscal anchor that we identified was in fact to bring our spending to sustainable levels, to bring our spending in line with similar provinces, and I'm very pleased to again report today that in the upcoming budget year, in '22-23, we will have arrived. To continue on a sustainable trajectory, we will need to exercise fiscal discipline. That is a must for all members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, to that end, I encourage all members to vote against this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 is a request for unanimous consent to put aside the regular, ordinary business of the afternoon and proceed immediately to the motion as proposed by the Opposition House Leader.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I've received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Hon. members, please be seated.

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates along with an update to the 2021-22 fiscal plan, as required by the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

Russia's war of aggression started the very day I tabled the 2022 budget. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support of Ukraine, \$10.4 million of which will be supported by this bill. This is now captured in the supplementary estimates and the fiscal plan update that I'm tabling today. The documents I'm tabling today also show a spending increase under Alberta Energy to provide electricity rebates and offer real relief to Albertans struggling with high utility costs.

Mr. Speaker, in total the supplementary supply estimates will allow additional spending by five government departments as well as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in expense funding and \$1 million in capital investment funding for the government. Of this funding, the two highest

expenses are \$726 million for health, primarily for the pandemic response, and \$231 million in federal funding for the Canada community-building fund, which Municipal Affairs will redistribute to municipalities.

Thank you.

Government Motions

13. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 13 is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(i). Are there any members wishing to speak? The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to debate Government Motion 13. This motion is asking us to expedite estimates on supplementary supply to committee. The Official Opposition would like to ensure that the estimates reflect the priorities of Albertans through this process, so we have asked the government to provide six hours of debate on these estimates, which we believe is more appropriate for the expenditure of such a substantial amount of public money. As the Minister of Finance has just outlined, it is \$1.2 billion of expense funding as well as \$1 million of capital funding going to five government departments as well as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

We have seen, time and time again, government budgets that do not match Albertans' expectations. Albertans have asked the government to listen to them at this point, specifically around relief to make ends meet right now. This year particularly, while bills are unmanageable – in fact, we were just speaking in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, about the rising cost of inflation, rising costs of food, rising costs on all Alberta families. It is the Official Opposition's position that the Legislature deserves the time to scrutinize government spending to see if it reflects the priority of Albertans right now. There are a lot of actions that we believe the UCP could be taking in supplementary supply to help Albertans, but there's certainly a deficit of trust at this point, and that's where the Official Opposition believes more time is necessary.

Certainly, the Finance minister has referred to some of the supplementary estimates reflecting rising utility costs. It is the Official Opposition's strong position that immediate utility relief is necessary and has not been adequately included within this estimates process as well as considerations like capping auto insurance increases, reindexing AISH and seniors' benefits to reflect the current fiscal situation here in the province. We believe that the estimates should be evaluated against these priorities.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As well, given the concern that we have with the amount of time that will be allocated for the debate of this, given that deficit of trust that I have referred to, I believe that it's prudent on behalf of all members of the Official Opposition that we will not be supporting rushing through inadequate measures with inadequate oversight. We would be happy to work with the government to get this work right and to continue to support Albertans. I appreciate the opportunity to enter into debate on Government Motion 13 at this time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question. However, I will give the opportunity, should they so choose, to the hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Toews: Waived.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for three hours on Monday, March 21, 2022.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to – this is actually under, I believe, Standing Order 61(2). This is actually not debatable.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

The Acting Speaker: Are there any – I see the hon. Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act.

Over the past few years and through the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen Albertans step up by volunteering and giving back to their communities in so many ways. From grocery deliveries to those in isolation, virtual events to keep the loneliness at bay, and the dedication of front-line workers, countless everyday heroes have gone above and beyond to help out. I continue to be inspired by the community spirit and leadership that Albertans show every day.

On the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee we have the opportunity to celebrate her legacy and the efforts of Albertans across this province. Mr. Speaker, I am again asking all members of this House for their support of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. The platinum jubilee is a celebration of all the extraordinary progress we have experienced during the 70 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign. From technological advancement to social development and cultural growth, Albertans have led the way into the future.

This legislation's greatest impact would be on the young leaders who are making a difference across Alberta. Increasing the monetary value of the Queen's jubilee awards and scholarships from \$5,000 to \$7,000 will help students who are demonstrating excellence in leadership, community spirit, and the arts pursue those opportunities. This legislation will also help recognize the efforts and achievements of Albertans more broadly through the brand new Queen's platinum jubilee medal, of which 7,000 will be minted and awarded.

In addition, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act will recognize the great public service of past, present, and future cabinet ministers. Allowing them to continue to use the honorific "The Honourable" is but a small gesture of recognition for the role they have played in shaping Alberta, no matter which party they have served under. It comes with no financial benefit or authority; it is simply an honour of recognition. However, it does align with the spirit of celebrating public service and community

spirit in the recognition of the Queen's platinum jubilee. Her Majesty the Queen has served as an incredible example of steadfast leadership in the face of challenge and change for over 70 years.

3:10

If I might digress just a little bit, it's just like our province's namesake. The province is named after the ancestor of the Queen Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, who was, in fact, an artist, a professional sculptor. She made her own jewellery. She was not somebody who thought that she should be treated differently just because she was the daughter of a queen. In fact, her father made a point of training his children in farming and practical skills. Quite frankly, here in Alberta we often say: it doesn't matter where you come from or who your father is; it matters how hard you work. She had a reputation of being unconventional and determined, in many ways the perfect namesake for a province like Alberta.

Returning to Queen Elizabeth II, this legislation will acknowledge how she has inspired generations of Albertans to become leaders in their own right, just like our namesake and her aunt, while giving the many people who have helped shape this province the recognition that they deserve.

Thank you to all members of the Assembly for the debate on Bill 1 up to this point. I encourage all members once again to support this legislation so that we are able to fully recognize the incredible achievements and efforts of so many Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for introducing this bill in third reading. This is my first opportunity and will be my last opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. As I believe has been said by my colleagues in the House, we do support this bill. We understand that it establishes, of course, the Queen's platinum jubilee medal being awarded to 7,000 worthy Albertans as well as the establishment of a number of awards and scholarships: the Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion; the Queen's platinum jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts, which I believe is a scholarship up to the amount of \$7,000; as well as the Premier's citizenship award in recognition of the Queen's platinum jubilee.

In my time, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA I've had an opportunity in the past to meet with constituents who have received similar recognition through the Queen's jubilee awards, and it's been an honour to learn about the work that they have done and that they are being recognized for. I certainly welcome the opportunity to recognize the great Albertans in our communities who are doing this remarkable work and to recognize, of course, the Queen as well for her long service as the Queen for us. I do appreciate that, and I'm certain that members of this side of the House will be supporting this bill.

However, I do feel it's important for me to note that there is one provision of the bill that, you know, I'm a little bit troubled by – that this is identified in Bill 1 seems a little bit out of place with respect to the rest of the bill – and that is, of course, the granting of the honorary honorific to any present or past member of Executive Council. While that sounds, I guess, pretty generic, it really sounds like the government caucus is more interested in sort of pumping their own tires and giving themselves pats on the back, which is not really the mood of a lot of Albertans right now.

Certainly, when I look at Bill 1, we've had the first throne speech, last month, in a while from this government, and to see as their priority Bill 1, which usually is the bill that establishes what the government's top priority is for the months and session ahead – I'm quite shocked to see that this is the government's priority, granting themselves the honorary term to the members of their Executive Council for life, when that's certainly not what I'm hearing is the top priority from Albertans in my constituency but across the province. When they think of what their top priority is for this year coming ahead, right now it's really just making ends meet. It's really being able to afford the costs of their insurance and their property taxes and their rising utility costs and school fees and tuition and all the various things that have become more expensive for them.

Getting through the pandemic and getting on to the next stages of our growth certainly is – diversifying our economy is certainly the top priority for our government. It's about making sure that all Albertans are elevated and have an opportunity to succeed, not a race to the bottom but elevating all Albertans. That's certainly our caucus's position and priority for this year ahead.

Certainly, rebuilding our education system and the reputation that we had for so many years, that has been undermined by this government with respect to our public education system, and the curriculum that used to be world renowned and is now being shunned and is an embarrassment and unfortunately is going to be partially imposed on students come this fall: that's certainly a priority when I talk to the constituents in my riding. They're certainly concerned about the fact that they have no school space. South Edmonton is certainly an area of the city that has been growing exponentially for quite some time. We will be completely out of high school space in Edmonton public schools in 2027. That's five years from now. I have constituents who are concerned that they can't send their children to the high school across the street because they're going to a lottery because they're at capacity.

These are the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents, and it's not reflected in Bill 1. I certainly don't hear my constituents saying: I really hope that the current members of this cabinet get to call themselves honorary for some time going forward, forever going forward. That's certainly not something that anybody has raised to me as their top priority. I certainly think it's coming at an interesting time, considering that there are a number of members of the current cabinet who are having their qualifications and their expertise and their temperament questioned, certainly their judgment. Certainly, the minister of labour has recently been found to have attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, and now we know that this government's priority is to make sure that that minister gets to be called honorary from this time going forward. I think that's at odds with what most Albertans believe in terms of what honorary means, and it's an interesting timing on this government's part.

I certainly do support the idea of recognizing the Queen's platinum jubilee with these medals – I certainly take no issue with that – but certainly the timing and the priorities of this government seem to be grossly at odds with the priorities and concerns of Albertans at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on this? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise today in support of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. You know, some of us in this

room probably are old enough to remember singing *God Save the Queen* in our schools, and I'm so glad to see that practice and that habit back here in the Chamber, because it does remind us of the honour and the service that the Queen has given to us as our monarch.

The Queen's reign has been truly historic. She is the first British monarch and, I suspect, one of the first in history to celebrate 70 years on the throne. For many Albertans, she is the only monarch we have known – in fact, I would say for most in this room – in our adult lives most certainly, and during her reign she's been a constant in service, grace, decorum, and humility in an ever-changing world.

In her 70 years on the throne she has seen wars, recessions, and pandemics while also celebrating personal joy and suffering personal loss. Commercial television was first broadcast in the U.K., humans landed on the moon, the Berlin Wall came down, the computer was invented, the European Union was created and, in some cases, pulled apart, and social media, which has changed the world for anyone in the public eye, has certainly emerged during this latter part of her reign as well. She has reigned through 13 Canadian Prime Ministers and has visited our great province five times, and I remember many of them myself as both a child and as an adult.

On her 21st birthday she addressed the Commonwealth and dedicated her life, whether it be long or short, to the service of others. Ever since she has been steadfast in keeping her promise, a promise valued by Canada as a constitutional monarchy and the entire Commonwealth in an ever-changing and evolving world. Her Majesty is a patron of more than 600 charities and organizations world-wide – thirty-six of these are in Canada – and we see that service also in her offspring. On top of this, the Queen continues to champion public and voluntary service with grace and global leadership in the farthest reaches and most rural and remote regions of the planet.

In 2002 the government of Alberta passed the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act, recognizing the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. We mark the occasion by designating special awards and scholarships that honour Alberta youth who demonstrate excellence in citizenship through leadership, community service, and volunteerism and who demonstrate outstanding ability in the visual and performing arts.

That act, back in the 50th jubilee, established three awards and scholarships: the Queen's jubilee citizenship medal, which was rebranded as an award in 2021; the Premier's citizenship award in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee; and the Queen's golden jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts. Currently the government provides \$50,000 – fifty years – through this program, which consists of eight citizenship awards and two scholarships valued at \$5,000 each.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, under the proposed legislation the government will increase the amount and provide \$70,000 through this program for eight citizenship awards and two scholarships valued at \$7,000 each, with their longevity now also being reflected in addressing the associated inflation that keeps these financial awards both meaningful in their impact and in supporting the awardees' academic pursuits. What better way for Alberta to celebrate her remarkable 70-year reign than to honour this historic milestone by recognizing Albertans who have helped change their province for the better through volunteerism, public service, and community leadership.

This is what Bill 1 achieves, Mr. Speaker. Bill 1 will establish the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee awards and scholarships, which

will recognize young Albertans who are leaders in their communities and in the arts. The Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship awards and scholarships would include a medallion and \$7,000 in appreciation of their contributions, an increase of \$2,000 from the jubilee awards. It is expected that 10 Albertans would receive these awards or scholarships each year, for a total of \$70,000, in recognition of 70 remarkable years of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

Bill 1 will also create a one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medal, which will recognize 7,000 worthy and dedicated Albertans who have given back to our province throughout 2022. The recipients of these awards and scholarships are everyday Albertans, hard-working individuals who go above and beyond to make our province a better place through their service.

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this House have heard many good-news stories of young people in our ridings who have worked hard to make our communities a better place. These young people exemplify the spirit of Her Majesty, and these scholarships and awards will reward their initiatives and will help these young individuals achieve their goals and inspire them on to bigger and better things and inspire those around them.

For these reasons, I will be voting in favour of Bill 1 in honour of the Queen's platinum jubilee and to recognize and reward hard-working Albertans who go above and beyond each and every day. Mr. Speaker, I would further encourage all members of this House to do the same in recognition of a most incredible reign and longevity, and as the song and Albertans' wishes go, long live our noble Queen.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join in? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 1. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is the Commonwealth's longest serving monarch, and as Albertans and Canadians so many of us have a strong respect for the Crown. I'd like to just take a few minutes and thank the member opposite for what he recognized during the Queen's reign, the changes that we've seen over the 70 years since she ascended the throne.

I'm very pleased to say that I have really enjoyed the current series out there called *The Crown*, where it articles and describes much of the Queen's life and what she's had to bear over these 70 years. I think it speaks very directly to the character, the role, the responsibility, and the weight put on her shoulders as a young woman of only 25, when she received that responsibility after the passing of her father. I think it is amazing to me that around the world she is as dearly loved today, after 70 years, as she was when she first ascended the throne.

Her Majesty's platinum jubilee is a perfect opportunity to recognize Albertans who contribute so much to their communities as they emulate the service that she has done for so much of the globe. I think it's only fitting that we recognize those accomplishments. The Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion creates a great opportunity for recognizing outstanding community service. I can think of several people in my constituency of Lethbridge-East who would be great candidates for this prestigious honour. Mr. Speaker, I feel confident when I say that all my colleagues in this Chamber, regardless of what side of the floor we are on, can think of deserving individuals who are pillars in our various communities.

Something that excites me is that a student who receives the Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion would be awarded \$7,000. I think that this money would go a long way in allowing them to continue their education, and I appreciate how the

opportunity for this type of recognition would encourage students to get more involved in their communities. Leaders are not born. They are made through their experiences and their selfless contribution to their communities. I, for one, think it is great to offer this kind of opportunity to recognize those that go above and beyond to make their communities better, to reward those that seek to serve their community and to give them the benefit of their efforts to further those, and to set them above others as an example to many others for the work that they could do and achieve as they give back.

Mr. Speaker, I also support the creation of the Queen's platinum jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts. The recipients would also be awarded \$7,000. This government has shown its support for the arts. Through this legislation we are training the next generation of great artists right here in Alberta. I also strongly believe that this will encourage more young Albertans to get involved in the blossoming visual and performing arts industry throughout our province.

Under this act the Premier's citizenship award will be granted each year to one high school student. Mr. Speaker, I know I sound like a broken record, but like the other points I've made before, this will continue to encourage more students to get involved in their communities. Our communities are as strong as the people who live in them, and this will inspire the leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that these awards are in recognition of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee. In her 20s, following the tragic passing of King George VI, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth rose to the challenge, that would be difficult at any age, let alone the tender age of 25. Seventy years later here we are recognizing the longest serving monarch in the Commonwealth. I feel it is very appropriate to tie youth accomplishments to Her Majesty's platinum jubilee.

The Queen has also taught us that when it comes to public service, age is only a number. Her Majesty will turn 96 in a little over a month and continues her service to the Commonwealth with an infinite amount of wisdom and grace. She continues to live a life of service each and every one in this Chamber can look up to. Given the age that we live in now of social media and other scrutinies of those who are in positions of influence and authority, especially the Royal Family, to have looked over those 70 years and hardly a speck or a blemish on her character or her record is uncommon, and I think it should be highly regarded and seriously respected by everyone in this Chamber and in every Chamber across our fine country.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, my message of support for Bill 1 is that it recognizes the importance of selfless service to one's community. From when the Queen ascended the throne all the way to today, I think we can all agree that the world has changed significantly. Again I thank the member opposite for his comments earlier noting many of those changes. She has met every challenge with civility and with humility, and we can all admire and call her our Queen. I also believe that the link between the recognition of the platinum jubilee and the recognizing of the service and community achievements of Albertans is a great way to recognize this momentous occasion. I encourage all of my colleagues to support Bill 1. May God save the Queen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand and speak in support of Bill 1. All of us have been inspired to be better by unselfish, good men and women. With growing challenges, we all benefit from seeing good examples. All of us need that. This bill recognizes those who have rendered great service: outstanding young men and

young women, our sons and our daughters, and other Albertans who have made significant contributions to society. I support that.

When I think about the spirit of this bill, I reflect upon a scripture that I was taught as a young person. It says, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Now, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that not everyone in this Chamber and this Legislature is a person of faith, but I hope that we can all appreciate the principle that this scripture expresses much better than I can. All of us are better as we seek to remember that principle, that the value of a person or their contribution is not a function of their position or title; it is a function of their heart and their conduct. Often politics or the world does look on the outward appearance, but the Lord's way is different. A person's conduct in public and in private is a manifestation of their heart.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, think for a moment about your own life. Who is it that has made the most significant contribution to you? Where did it start? Your mother was first. The vast majority of mothers will never be recognized with a Queen's platinum medal, but they do not care. They serve out of love. When I think of significant contributions to society, I think of mothers, many of them, including and often especially single mothers, who are also heroes. While I appreciate those men and women who receive the Queen's platinum jubilee medal, I wish to close with a short statement honouring mothers for their significant contribution to society, that the Lord both sees and honours.

Mr. Speaker, families are a fundamental unit of society, and it is our mothers who are on the front line for families, unselfishly loving and serving their spouses and their children, that hold families and communities together. Too often mothers love and serve their children alone, without fathers. What makes a hero? Does one's position or job confer hero status? No. In a final analysis, it is less important what a person's work is and more important how a person does their work. Mothers are not paid for their work, often receiving little or no formal recognition for it, but mothers serve for a higher and better purpose. The motivating force of a mother's work is love. What is more noble, more heroic than the selfless love a devoted mother has for her child? Some women are not mothers. Nevertheless, many of these women demonstrate innate strengths and gifts as they unselfishly serve and love others and our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I began with a scripture, and I will end with one.

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

The unselfish sacrifice of our mothers humbles me. We love our mothers, and we revere them. Without mothers there is no society. I want to thank all Albertans who make great contributions to our society, including our mothers. Thank you for your unselfish, significant contributions.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to offer the Minister of Culture the opportunity to close debate on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Orr: I will take that – thank you, Mr. Speaker – briefly. I'd just like to, in final conclusion here, point out what is the priority of this bill and why this bill expresses the priority of our government. It's

so that we will recognize the great work of the Queen and the Commonwealth heritage that we share with 160-some nations around the world. It's so that we will be positive and move forward in a celebration of who we are and what we have become and what we can be. It's so that we will celebrate all good work and inspire the next generation to a life of the same thing. It's so that we will be proud Albertans not ashamed of good service.

I ask everyone in this House to join this government and start a tidal wave of goodwill so that we shall be united, free, and strong to carry us through the next 70 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Rutherford]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: It threw me, too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have this opportunity to speak to the recently presented Speech from the Throne. The last few years have been particularly stressful for many Albertans, and many of us will be living with the consequences for years into the future. Alberta has experienced some of the worst unemployment levels in the country, and significant numbers among us who have maintained their jobs have experienced disruption in their employment and career paths. Students have lost the experience of gathering to learn with the support of peers and the personal touch of face-to-face instruction. Families have missed important milestones such as celebrating a birth or mourning the death of a loved one. Thousands of surgeries have been delayed, resulting in extended suffering, and the sense of general dis-ease weighs heavy on us all.

Yet Albertans have demonstrated qualities of strength and compassion. The vast majority of us have participated in a great social demonstration of our commitment to each other. We have, most of us, taken to wearing masks, washing our hands, standing at a social distance, and taking a vaccine to keep ourselves and our neighbours safe from a devastating pandemic. No one welcomes the intrusion in our lives, but we reach for a greater good. We understand that citizenship is like adulthood. You don't get to do everything you want to do. You don't get to have your way and ignore the needs of others. You cannot twist the expectations placed on you as unreasonable just because it gives you difficult feelings. The world has invited from us the best that we can offer, and it calls upon governments to lead us with a vision of how we as a community can survive that which has been thrust upon us with thoughtfulness, proficiency, and empathy. Unfortunately, we have not had a government that was willing or capable of rising to the challenge.

Right from the beginning this UCP government has acted last and acted least to protect the citizens of this province. When calls were

put out to protect the children in our schools, this government did nothing. Worse than nothing; they fired thousands of teachers' aides in an effort to profit off the pandemic and to this day have failed to ensure appropriate protections such as air filtration systems in the schools. Rather than work closely with teachers to build a wall of security around our school-aged children, they continued a legacy of vilifying the very public servants who are most knowledgeable and most engaged in providing our children the tools for a successful life. This government attacked teachers through their pensions, through their professional association, and through the media.

Indeed, the government has been employing countless strategies to undermine the very nature of public education, shifting dollars from the public system to private schools, introducing a destructive, politicized curriculum that has been rejected by over 95 per cent of the school boards, and reducing the rate of school construction by 75 per cent from the pace of the last government. To this day we see a stressed and demoralized school system beleaguered by an ideological and uninformed government.

What we have seen in the education system has been repeated and magnified in the health system. At a time when we have been most dependent on the highly skilled and hard-working medical experts and staff of our universal health care system to keep us safe from a virus that has killed over 4,000 Albertans and has left thousands more with lifelong health complications, we see this government repeatedly attack the very people we should be honouring as heroes in this time of need. Just as with education, this government has pursued an agenda of undermining our public system at exactly the time we need it most. This government fought the wages of nurses and had to be forced to arbitration to recognize their worth. This government single-handedly cancelled the contract with doctors and has led an abusive public campaign against them, which has led to hundreds of doctors making plans to leave the province. This government has begun the slow process of shifting medical care away from our public institutions to the beginning of an American-style, pay-as-you-go medical model that will leave thousands of Albertans subject to a less accessible and less resourced secondary health system.

3:40

At the same time as this government has undermined our schools and our health care, so too have they undermined our postsecondary institutions with deep cuts, politically motivated attacks on university independence, and the reckless disregard for the role of our advanced education system as a driver of our future, both socially and economically. Under this government we have lost hundreds of the best researchers and instructors, who were devoted to enhance the knowledge we need to create a better world. With tuition increases up to 100 per cent and significant increases in class sizes, Alberta students face a reality of paying more and receiving less.

It is clear that what this government is doing is undermining the very structures of our society that have over the last 100 years raised millions of Canadians out of daily misery to one of the best places in the world to live, but not only are they destroying the legacy of our past; they are limiting our future. At a time when we should be reading the trends and setting ourselves to be in the right place at the right time in industry and civil society, this government is doing all it can to resist the global movement toward a cleaner environment, a compassionate economic system, and a society built on fairness and opportunity for all.

From their first bill the UCP have sought to slow down investment in clean energy and have been determined to remove incentives for diversification, which was motivating record-setting

growth. In failing to legislatively protect our eastern slopes, they have failed to protect the headwaters of the rivers from which we drink. In the tech industry this government killed the very programs, such as the digital tax credit and the investor tax credit, that would have enabled our province to get in front of the most significant economic driver of the future.

At the same time, the UCP have been making life hard for everyday Albertans, who saw their insurance rates double and triple when the cap on insurance was removed. Tuition rates and school fees rise with the UCP's systematic defunding, and the cost of enjoying our parks and natural areas increase. When the UCP killed the cap on electricity prices, many people suddenly found themselves in significant debt that could take years to repay. At the same time, the government has deindexed personal income tax, resulting in a billion dollars of increased taxes on Albertans, and people depending on AISH have been pushed farther into poverty. In many areas of the province citizens will also see dramatic increases in property taxes because of downloading fees and reducing grants from the provincial government.

Life under this Conservative government is harder, more expensive, and less hopeful. Albertans simply cannot trust this government to keep their best interests at heart. Time and time again we have seen the polls that reveal a deep dissatisfaction with the action of the UCP. While record profits are flowing to major international corporations, everyday people are falling behind. Windfall profits are accumulating in the hands of the few while most of us have had little progress in our personal wages and wealth over many years.

We do not and cannot trust this government. They continually seek to destroy the public good that we and our ancestors have created because of a right-wing ideological model that has repeatedly been shown to fail the average citizen. Under this government we live precarious economic lives in a culture of disrespect and disregard for the lives of the majority of us and our children. I look forward to a day when we have a new government in place that will prioritize people over elitist wealth accumulation, a government that ensures our health system and our education system are focused on the goals of enhancing the well-being of all citizens, a government led by a leader who is passionate, thoughtful, dedicated, and empathetic, a government led by Rachel Notley.

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I will ask you to withdraw and apologize for the use of a proper name.

Mr. Feehan: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: I do consider the matter to be closed.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I have quite a bit I'd like to say today, so I'll just let my colleagues know in advance that I will not be taking interventions so that I have the opportunity to see my thoughts through.

You know, a Speech from the Throne is a grand narrative, a story that a government gets to tell about its vision for the province. Indeed, it reveals much about how a particular government sees the province and its people. A Speech from the Throne delivered

towards the end of a government's mandate in particular is often used to present how a government views how things have gone and the decisions they've made, and we certainly see both here. In this speech we see the UCP government acknowledging these significant challenges that our province has faced but also working very hard, I think, to avoid any discussion of the quality of their response to those challenges and to claim that those challenges are largely behind us. I'm not sure that a majority of Albertans would agree.

You know, the speech begins. They talk about our lives having been disrupted in ways large and small, how the people of the province have risen to the challenge time and again, proving what it means to be Alberta strong, and talk about how, as restrictions ease, there are signs of economic renewal and hope for a sense of the beginning of an Alberta spring, and talk about how Albertans deserve a province that's just as resilient as they are.

The speech pivots then to the most significant challenge of the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on our health care system. It talks about how during that pandemic our health care system was under great stress and speaks of our brilliant front-line health care workers, who've gone above and beyond the call of duty over the past two years, and how we owe them a debt of gratitude. Now, certainly, I agree, Mr. Speaker, that our front-line health care workers deserve our thanks. They've shown incredible commitment and sacrifice. They went above and beyond. They risked their own health and lives. They sacrificed time with their families.

But let's not forget that so much of what they endured, so much extra strain, stress, chaos, anxiety, was a result of this UCP government, that repeatedly chose to push those workers to their limits and beyond for the sake of ideology and politics. Let's not forget the multiple UCP MLAs who called to end all public health measures even as the third wave was rising in our province, a wave that cost hundreds of Albertans their lives. Let's not forget that that was followed by this Premier's best summer ever, an attempt to end even the most basic measures – testing, tracing, and isolation – even as the fourth wave was beginning to rise, or that as it did, this government went radio silent, politically paralyzed, and refused to act as they fought amongst themselves behind closed doors.

In the words of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, they "clearly had 30 days notice that a crisis was looming . . . [and] nothing was done while we lacked any leadership at the helm." He warned that it would cost lives and said that he was gutted by the lack of responsiveness to unequivocal advocacy and clear warning signals, advocacy and warning signals that came from the same health care workers this government purports to thank, who they ignored and who were then left to deal with the resulting crisis: hospitals and ICUs that were overwhelmed; over 20,000 surgeries cancelled; over a thousand lives lost.

Let's not forget that going into that fourth wave, they demanded a wage rollback for nurses, about 5 per cent, and only backed down in the face of public outrage. But somehow they failed to learn their lesson as now, as the fifth wave fades, the UCP is trying to push for rollbacks as high as 11 per cent from other health care workers.

The speech goes on to talk about how despite having one of the best funded health care systems in the world, COVID revealed shortcomings that must be addressed. They talk about building greater capacity while getting more value for our immense health care spending. Mr. Speaker, if Albertans got anywhere near the value from the work of this government as they had from those public health care workers in our public health care system, we'd be in a much better place. But as I've just abundantly made clear, our health care didn't fail Albertans; this government did. Albertans have good reason to question whether a government who has so

badly abused our health care system can be trusted to improve it, let alone repair the incredible damage they've done to it.

Now, as the speech noted, Albertans are incredibly resilient, and certainly no one has demonstrated that as vividly as our front-line health care workers. But, Mr. Speaker, they are tired and exhausted after repeated waves where this government pushed them to their limits by acting last, acting least, and putting politics ahead of public health. Sadly, the message this government chooses to send as they race to attempt to put that abominable record behind them is one of disrespect for the value of the work these Albertans do, by calling for many of them to take such a significant wage rollback even as these health care workers don't get to go back to normal or celebrate better days because they're left to deal with the fallout of the pandemic, a massive wave of deferred care, the new chronic illness of long COVID, a significant backlog of surgeries, all of which have been made worse by this government's decisions.

3:50

While we do see that this government is using the good fortune that they've stumbled into in resource revenues to make some investments in health care capacity, it's mainly focused on areas like orthopaedic surgery, EMS, and ICU capacity, that have rightfully, in many cases, been areas of very public criticism and indeed are worthy of investment. But we see next to no additional investment in crucial areas of support like acute care or family physicians, this despite the fact that many hospitals continue to face serious pressure. Talking to doctors at the Royal Alexandra hospital about how acute care has been at 130 per cent capacity for the past week, or the fact that tens if not hundreds of thousands of Albertans have no family doctor, Albertans have good reason to question whether this UCP government is using the damage they've caused as grounds to accelerate their drive to force more private profit into our public health care system.

Ultimately, this Speech from the Throne seems to have a clear intent to declare its view of what it means to be Albertan. They talk about end-of-life decisions, and they talk about how patients must know that there are life-affirming options to physician-assisted suicide and talk about investments being made in palliative care. You know, Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to hear this government, particularly one that so frequently claims to be an ardent supporter of personal choice, to use condescending, moralistic language like this. I've had a number of Albertans who've heard it write to me to express the same. Medical assistance in dying is no less life-affirming a choice than any other. Many have chosen to affirm the worth and value of their life by choosing to end it on their own terms, with dignity and with their loved ones by their side.

I support and I applaud investment in palliative care, and I manage to do so without denigrating anyone else's choice. But I would note that when this government first launched its war on Alberta doctors, in 2020, I heard from a number of physicians who provide palliative care, largely in rural areas, about how the changes this government intended to force through would have hurt their ability to do so. Indeed, this use of language by the government flies in the face of its own statement in the speech that "Alberta is a pluralistic society, united in its diversity." But I do believe that is largely the case. There's work to do.

But on that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to some of the speech's commitments regarding the statement "All Albertans deserve to live free of fear and prejudice" and acknowledging that too often we see people from minority communities targeted by acts of hatred. Now, I certainly welcome any support for groups that are facing acts of hatred. I recognize that there is much more work for us to do, and improving security for buildings is a valuable but single step.

This speech declares a renewed commitment to tell Alberta's story to the world, highlighting the many reasons why there is simply no better place on Earth to pursue a dream, raise a family, build a life. It contends that this is a space for big dreams where opportunities are limitless and everyone's full potential can be achieved. Well, Mr. Speaker, we need to take every step that we can to ensure that's true for every Albertan, and that means we need to address the inequities we know exist and that have been acknowledged by members on both sides of this House.

There are many opportunities to take additional substantive action to support Albertans from racialized communities and address both the roots and the impacts of racism in all its forms, whether it's that which flows from overt and intentional words and actions of individuals or that which is baked into policies and processes in our systems and institutions. Now, many of those steps are laid out in the recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, which remain available on all of the government ministers' desks, and it's my hope that we will eventually see some action. Indeed, it's those recommendations that inform my own private member's bill, the antiracism act, that I'm looking forward to introducing next week.

The speech goes on to say that this government intends to embark on a renewed effort to tell Alberta's story to the world, highlighting the many reasons why there is simply no better place on Earth to pursue a dream, raise a family, and build a life. But, Mr. Speaker, there are so many Albertans whose stories this government continues and chooses to ignore, like those struggling to get by as so many essential costs rise with inflation. Here in my constituency I continue to hear from seniors, folks who depend on social supports like AISH and income supports about the challenges they face with the rising costs of food, utilities, other essentials while this government refuses to reindex those supports to the cost of living, leaving those Albertans, many already living in poverty, with as much as \$1,000 less buying power every year. Those struggling with substance use and those who love them, the communities around them as members of this government continue to use toxic rhetoric about harm reduction supports that help those struggling stay alive until they're ready and able to seek help even as this government undermines supports that were already in place.

But nowhere is this government's ideological drive to impose their vision of what it means to be Albertan clearer than in their highly ideological curriculum, that a vast majority of Albertans have clearly stated does not include or represent them or what they want to see for their children. First Nations and Métis groups, francophones, members of Black communities and LGBTQ2S communities, and many others have made it clear this curriculum does not tell their stories or represent them as Albertans.

But much as with the majority of Albertans who oppose this government's plans and efforts to allow coal mining in the eastern slopes or impose an Alberta provincial police force or continue considering forcing them out of the CPP into an Alberta pension plan, their voices are simply ignored and, in fact, not only ignored but openly mocked and attacked, even by the Premier himself on the floor of the Legislature, on social media, by other ministers of government, by UCP MLAs, and endlessly by staff in the Premier's office and employed by the government caucus. Indeed, I don't think our province has ever seen a government that has gone so far out of its way to attack, demean, and insult Albertans that they were elected to represent or being so aggressive at attempting to impose its will, to demoralize its critics, or intimidate them into silence. This from a Premier who repeatedly claimed as recently as in estimates yesterday that he wants to improve the decorum and the quality of debate in our province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, despite all this, I do see some hope for our province, for the many, many Albertans who do not feel represented

or heard by this government, and it flows from the quote that's provided at the end of the Speech from the Throne, where it says, "Winston Churchill once said, 'Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in.'" Now, that's only a partial quote. The full quote was, in fact:

Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force.

Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

Now, to be clear, while I absolutely believe that in so many areas of policy this government is not acting in the best interests of Albertans, I don't view them as an enemy of myself or the people of Alberta. I certainly don't encourage anyone else to do so either, but the essence of that quote rings true. I truly believe the majority of Albertans are people of honourable conviction and good sense and that that is what lies behind their frustrations with and opposition to so many of the policies, decisions, and behaviours of this government, and to them I echo the heart of Churchill's words. Never yield to the political forces brought to bear to make you feel small and unheard, to feel your voice doesn't matter, to feel that you are alone. Never yield to the feeling of hopelessness they try to make you feel, that there's no hope for change or for a government that truly represents your values and your voice.

To every one of those Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I say: you deserve better, much better, and you can have it despite what this government and some of its supporters may want you to believe. We're here to help you fight for it. We're here to bring that back in 2023.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there any members wishing to join debate?
Seeing none.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions *(continued)*

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. government whip has risen.

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

15. Ms Issik moved on behalf of Mr. Kenney:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the hon. Premier to move Government Motion 15.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Are there any members wishing to join debate?
Seeing none.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Acting Speaker: I believe I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen again.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 21, 2022. [some applause]

The Acting Speaker: Order.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:01 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, March 17, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 163-177 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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