



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 21, 2022

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
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Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 21, 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 our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon we have our very first in-person, post-COVID School at the Legislature group joining us. They are from the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, Rideau Park elementary school. Also joining us in the gallery today are two guests of the hon. Member for Highwood, Pat and Kim McCarthy. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore is first.

Walmart Fulfillment Centre in Rocky View County

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, thank you so much for your resilience and optimism. Today Walmart Canada announced a new 430,000 square-foot fulfillment centre in beautiful Rocky View county. This landmark \$120 million project will create hundreds of goods, construction, and engineering jobs through the course of the building phase and will support 325 full-time positions once it opens. This modern facility is capable of shipping up to 20 million items to Canadians every single year and will be powered by cutting-edge logistics and robotics technology, diversification at its finest.

This is good news for Alberta workers and Alberta producers. Walmart produces more than \$1.3 billion worth of products from suppliers based in western Canada every year, including approximately \$200 million worth of products from 47 Alberta-based suppliers. Walmart is also growing its focus on local goods, as they should. In 2021 Walmart added more than 100 new

Canadian suppliers, including a 9 per cent increase in Alberta-based suppliers. This will get more Alberta-made products into the homes of Albertans and Canadians in the years to come, and that's great news for everyone.

In their announcement this morning, I was so proud to hear Walmart cite the competitive advantages of doing business in Alberta. This landmark investment follows similar major investments from companies like Amazon, HBO, Dow Chemical, Air Products, and Northern Petrochemical. With our budget balanced and the lowest taxes in Canada, Albertans are our advantage and our most beautiful resource, and investors are taking notice. We should feel so optimistic. Thanks to you, our province continues to be a top destination for private-sector investment. Alberta is the heartbeat of diversification, and Walmart's investment and others show that our province now wears many hats and will continue to compete in the economies of the future.

Thank you so much to all Albertans. Happy International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and happy Nowruz. Thank you to all Albertans. Our best days are ahead.

Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, today marks the 55th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day was proclaimed in 1966, following the Sharpeville massacre, where peaceful protesters protesting against racist laws in apartheid South Africa were fired upon, leaving hundreds killed and injured. Every year on this tragic anniversary we must commit ourselves to taking action to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination in our society.

Tragically, we have seen growing instances of hate crimes here in Alberta: racist language being thrown at racialized Albertans, people being assaulted in the streets in broad daylight, religious communities being threatened. In a racist society it is not enough to be nonracist; we must be antiracist. In order to ensure that we fulfill our mission to eliminate racial discrimination, we need proactive action, not words.

My colleagues and I have heard loudly and clearly the concerns of racialized Albertans, who are worried that this critical priority is being missed by this government. Even though the throne speech acknowledged this increased trend of hate crimes in Alberta, the budget fails to invest in tackling the cause of racism. Our caucus is hard at work proposing policies and actually consulting with the communities to hear what they are feeling and what they need. I'm proud that our caucus will table important legislation later this week that will take real action to combat racism. We will still have a long way to go to ensure that we live in a province and a country that is totally free from all forms of racism, discrimination, and intolerance.

Thank you.

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

Country Music Alberta Awards

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just this very weekend I was invited to the 11th annual Country Music Alberta awards to support some of the incredible musical talent we have from Lesser Slave Lake. It was wonderful to see so many folks living their passion and expressing it through music gather to recognize the distinction of their peers across Alberta. The show was amazing, with musicians performing multiple genres of country and even yodelling. Musical romantics certainly would have found their niche last night with the performance of the song *Looking For A Lockdown With You*.

I would like to congratulate Berlyn Broadhead. She is a young woman from Slave Lake that has had a passion for singing since she was nine years old. She was nominated for the youth horizon award and the fans' choice award at the 11th annual Country Music Alberta awards and is a fantastic and refined vocalist. I hope that she keeps up the awesome work. I wish her well and good luck in her bright future ahead.

I would also like to congratulate Mat Cardinal from Wabasca. He has an amazing voice and is the lead singer for the band The Prairie States, who ended up winning the group of the year and also album of the year. Without a doubt, despite being a sparsely populated constituency, Lesser Slave Lake packs a big punch in the Alberta musical scene. I'm truly honoured to represent such a strong constituency, that loves to support local talent with amazing turnouts at every local event.

The Alberta Country Music awards continues to support Alberta and its musicians. I would like to encourage all of my colleagues here and also all fellow Albertans to get a membership to support such a great organization. Then, hopefully, next year I can give them a warning that all of my rowdy friends are coming over tonight.

Thank you.

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

Utility Costs

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working around the clock to convince Albertans that they are taking action on the cost-of-living crisis facing them, but Albertans see this government's words and claims for exactly what they are: empty, hollow, and meaningless. I along with my colleagues have been hearing the concerns of those who are finding life unaffordable for weeks and months: Calgarians who are now forced to choose between groceries and turning the lights on, between medical treatments and keeping the heat on; small businesses who, after two years of the pandemic, are finding that these bills are driving them further into debt and forcing them to lay off employees.

This government's solution to these skyrocketing bills? A fake natural gas rebate – it won't even come into effect till next fall and comes in at a level that means that most Albertans won't qualify – and a \$50 cheque to off-set electricity bills in the hundreds of dollars. This isn't support; it's an insult to those who are struggling to feed their families and pay their bills, and that's it.

1:40

Alberta's NDP has been raising these concerns with the government, only to be dismissed at every turn. Instead, Alberta's out-of-touch Premier is touring this province bragging about the historic support to Albertan families. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity proudly boasted to this House that their plan to deal with the huge increase in utilities was to do nothing. My constituents, my fellow Calgarians need real support and a government that understands their needs.

That's why I was proud to join our leader and my Calgary colleagues on Friday to commit that we will put money back into the pockets of Albertans. An NDP government would undo the UCP's billion-dollar tax grab, and we would ensure that critical programs like AISH and seniors' benefits keep pace with inflation. Mr. Speaker, it's simple. This side of the House doesn't look at the rising cost of living as an opportunity to take more from Albertans; we see it as an opportunity to help. Friends, colleagues, and fellow Albertans, help is on the way. A government in waiting is on this side. We're going to be here for you.

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

Alberta Voters and Government Policies

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Who's the boss? Some political leaders think that they're the boss. Many think that the Prime Minister or the Premiers are the boss. Some leaders and Premiers in the past were convinced of that. The last PC Premier – may he rest in peace – and his party thought he was the boss. In May 2015 we found out that that was not the case. In May 2015 the NDP leader and her party thought she was the boss. In April 2019 we again found out otherwise.

So who really is the boss here in Alberta? Mr. Speaker, it's Alberta voters. The voters were angry at the PCs in 2015, and, believe me, I heard it loud and clear at the doors. On May 5 their voices were heard. On April 16, 2019, the real boss spoke again, giving the new UCP a resounding victory. The boss passed out pink slips to some and bonuses to others.

Unfortunately, our boss, the voters, is angry again, as angry or more than I remember them in 2015 and 2019. They are angry about access to health care, and they don't want it blamed on COVID; it's been an issue for decades. In 2016 my own mom spent five days in an ER waiting for a bed to open up. They are very angry over ever-increasing utility costs, that are forcing seniors from their homes because they can no longer afford to live there on fixed incomes. Tenants are angry because rent keeps increasing to keep up with the rising cost of utilities.

I've suggested using our fantastic royalty surplus, that belongs to Albertans, to pay for mistakes of previous governments that have resulted in these increases. Let's reduce the burden on all of our consumers, stop making them pay for the mistakes of others. I would suggest that the leaders in the province on all sides better pay attention to the real boss, the voters in this province, or prepare to follow the exit signs.

Supply Chain Capacity

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the past two years have been extremely hard on Alberta producers and industry, from the supply chain disruptions that came as a result of COVID-19 to massive heat waves, prolonged cold fronts, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the illegal Coutts border blockade. Barely a week goes by when producers aren't grappling with challenges caused by issues well beyond their control, and now there is much uncertainty with the CP Rail labour dispute. These disruptions have been global, and I will not blame the UCP for them.

However, in the last two years there have been challenges. I've never seen the UCP proactively plan for addressing future problems and increasing supply chain capacity and making the economy more resilient. In fact, I've seen the opposite. When Alberta's only 24/7 border crossing was being illegally blockaded, the UCP actually cheered them on. When agriculture industry groups were stating their concerns on the devastating impact of the Coutts blockade, the UCP did nothing.

Now, today, the CP Rail dispute: we see them demanding federal back-to-work legislation despite knowing clearly that one of the sources of contention is the amount of rest time for CP Rail employees. We need to keep Canadian rail lines open – there's no doubt – but we also need them to be safe. These workers have served Albertans and Canadians throughout the pandemic and helped fill our grocery stores with food, gotten fuel to businesses, and taken our grain and feed to market.

Let's work on solutions, let's push for a fast settlement, and let's go back beyond that to look at bigger challenges that we face. I stand in this House today calling on the UCP government to strike a bipartisan committee to study the way that Alberta can increase supply chain capacity and hear directly from Albertans on what they want to see. There's no reason not to do this. This isn't a political stunt; this is a real proposal to develop best practices and provide real supports. If the UCP won't accept it, it'll be clear that they don't actually care about Alberta workers who rely on our supply chain to make a living. It'll be clear that this is all about politics for them and about saving their own jobs. I'm here today to try to save the jobs of Albertans. The government needs to get onboard with this, because there's no excuse not to.

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

Winston Churchill High School Girls' Basketball Team

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled to rise today and tell the House about an extraordinary accomplishment in Lethbridge. For the first time since 2012, the Winston Churchill high school girls' basketball team made it all the way to the 3A provincial tournament in Red Deer, finishing in third place. The Griffins showed championship spirit this entire season. These young women stepped up with a 13 and 6 record in the 3A deep south division.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the pandemic created extremely challenging circumstances for everyone, but our students and young athletes were directly impacted, with less practice time and the cancellation of games. These young women showed something I like to refer to as the Alberta spirit. I define the Alberta spirit as using our skills that we develop and learn over time combined with the grit and passion to accomplish something great. The Winston Churchill Griffins and the coaching staff are prime examples of the Alberta spirit. They faced challenges both on and off the court, but they never wavered in their dedication to winning a championship and going to the provincials.

I want to recognize the coaching staff – Omar Kadir, Aaron Becking, and Kacie Bosch – and the parents and volunteers who helped put the games together. I also want to congratulate the athletes: Nataeya Black Water, Rylen Bowes, Phoenix Clarke, Abigail Crown, Tamara Joseph, Dawson Lashley, Brooklyn Lesko, Morgan McLaren, Jayda Morrison, Olivia Needham, Jenna Nilsson, and Didi Zuidema. Teamwork, hard work, and a never-say-die attitude led them this far, and I believe it will serve them well in their future endeavours, whether they be athletic, academic, or whatever possibilities and opportunities they decide to pursue in their bright futures.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I feel confident when I say that all of us in Lethbridge are Griffins fans. Go, Griffins, go.

Utility Costs

Mr. Nielsen: Yesterday the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction bragged on social media about how this government is handling the utility crisis, and for a moment I thought she was joking. This government has done less than the bare minimum to address the cost-of-living crisis they've created. Ask the families who expected the natural gas rebate that the Premier promised, only to get a fake program. Ask the businesses who are seeing their bills climb in the thousands and are being told that \$50 is all the help that they're going to get. They'd think this was a joke if it wasn't their livelihoods on the line.

Albertans deserve better than this government. My constituents, all Albertans are being hammered with the outrageous cost-of-living increases. These are real people with real stories dealing with real consequences of a government that simply does not care about what they are going through. Mr. Speaker, in my entire life I've never ever seen a government so unwilling to step up and support Albertans during a crisis. I've never seen a government so proud of doing nothing while families are slowly being costed out of basic necessities like heat and power.

This government has tried constantly to shut down our calls to support these struggling Alberta families and businesses, so I have a message for the members opposite and the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, who claim to be fiscal masterminds while Albertans pile on debt just to heat their houses. Helping people is not red tape. Supporting families during an affordability crisis is not a red tape burden. Doing the right thing for the constituents you claim to represent is not red tape. It's actually your job.

We are in this Chamber to listen and to address the concerns of Albertans, not come up with excuses to ignore them, as this government is so willing to do. That's why Albertans are looking for a change, and in 2023 they'll have an opportunity to vote out this self-centred government that does not care about making life easier for any of them.

Oral Question Period

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

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are seeing their costs rising while their paycheques stay the same. Last week StatsCan reported that inflation will be even higher than predicted, 5.7 per cent, the highest since 1991. This means that the Premier's billion-dollar tax on inflation, his bracket creep, will get even worse. Now, we reran the numbers, and by 2025 families will be losing \$500 every year. Why doesn't the Premier fix his bracket-creep budget to put more money back in the pockets of Albertans?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government is acting with much greater ambition than any in Canada to address the cost of living, particularly fuel inflation. That's why on April 1 we are eliminating Alberta's fuel tax. It's why we're providing a \$150 rebate for electricity prices this winter. It's why we've capped gas taxes at \$6.50, with a rebate if it exceeds that level. But at the same time, the NDP is cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax on April 1 and then to triple it from \$50 to \$170 a tonne to drive hundreds of thousands of Albertans into energy poverty.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, 50 bucks for power and a fake gas rebate is not a plan. It's a pittance. It's a disappointment.

Let's talk about the gas tax. The Premier claims it will cost \$1.3 billion, but that means that he expects WTI to stay above \$90 all year long, and that's billions and billions of dollars of extra revenue. So the Premier is actually making the case for me: he doesn't need to keep taxing inflation; at this point it appears that he's doing it just for fun. Will the Premier give this House time to debate and change that plan?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP came in with their hidden agenda to impose the biggest tax hike in Alberta history, the job-killing carbon tax. In its first year they were taking \$1.3 billion of revenue. In one fell swoop this government, to address cost-of-

living issues, has eliminated the gas tax. If gas prices stay high, that would be an annualized savings of \$1.4 billion. How can the NDP possibly stand up here and talk about the cost of living when they want to increase it further by more than tripling the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is and the Premier knows that that particular program comes with a real rebate, unlike the false one in his budget.

Now, while the Premier is taking \$500 more from Alberta families, he's also giving many of them less in benefits. For Albertans on fixed incomes, it adds up fast. By 2025, in real terms a senior couple will lose \$750 per year while Albertans living on AISH will lose nearly \$3,000. Why doesn't the Premier take action today to fight the growing cost of living by reindexing these important benefits?

Mr. Kenney: Another opportunity to talk about the NDP's phony fiscal policy, Mr. Speaker. They talk about indexing AISH, but they were elected in 2015: no indexation of AISH; 2016, no indexation of AISH; 2017, no indexation of AISH; 2019, no indexation of AISH. They didn't do it until they were leaving office. What a phony fiscal policy from the same government that raised income taxes, raised business taxes, and imposed the job-killing carbon tax on Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Ms Notley: Everything the Premier just said is absolutely wrong.

Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile not only does he have more important priorities than getting the facts right; he also has more important priorities than the rising costs facing Albertans, like, say, what they are instead: surviving his leadership review. Let's talk about who in this House is working for Albertans. Last week we presented draft legislation to prevent utility shut-offs for Albertans who are struggling to pay their bills. The UCP? Their staff are punching out at 4 o'clock so they can campaign for the boss. Why is the Premier more concerned with saving his own job than standing up for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, she just denied the facts. I just looked it up. Their so-called indexation of AISH started on January 1, 2019, after they had been in office for three and a half years. And now they're shedding crocodile tears about the cost of fuel when the NDP's desired outcome is to make fuel unaffordable. That's why they want to triple the carbon tax. Will she stand in her place this week to vote with us on a forthcoming motion calling on Justin Trudeau not to raise the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, in fact, when we reindexed, we reindexed retroactively to 2015. Do your homework.

Now, last week, more recent history, what we did was that we presented an Alberta venture fund that would allow Albertans to invest in themselves and their neighbours. It would exclusively support Alberta early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Last week what did they do? Well, at the end of the day, they took Friday off, the entire Premier's office staff, to campaign for their boss. Why does the Premier have his staff working for him instead of Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it was such a priority for them to index AISH that they didn't get around to it until the dying days of their

government. Once again, why won't the NDP just fess up that their entire desired policy is to make gas more expensive, to make home heating more expensive, to make electricity more expensive, to make the transportation of goods and therefore food more expensive? Why won't they admit that that is exactly why they want to get back into power, to cheer on Justin Trudeau in more than tripling the punishing carbon tax at the worst possible time?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a reason right there why Albertans do not trust a word coming out of the mouth of that Premier. There could not be a clearer difference in priorities between that side and this side. We put forward ideas to help people with their bills, to protect their mountains, to lower tuition, to grow our economy, to protect them from inflation. All these things would make life better. Meanwhile the Premier's chief of staff is out campaigning. His director of communications is out campaigning. His staff clock out early so they can go campaigning for the Premier. Why does the Premier think Albertans deserve part-time government?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I go to Washington, DC, to fight to lift the trucker vax mandate, to fight for Alberta fuel energy exports, what is the NDP leader doing? Campaigning for the NDP. When I go to Texas with the Minister of Energy to fight for North American energy security, what is the NDP leader doing? Campaigning for the NDP. She's right about the difference in priorities. This government eliminated the carbon tax, and that party wants to more than triple it because they want to punish people for filling up their gas tanks, heating their homes, and driving to work. Shame on the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation (continued)

Ms Phillips: Insidious, pernicious: those are the words this Premier used to describe deindexation. One of the first acts of this UCP government was to introduce a new tax on inflation. That plan sucked more than a billion dollars out of the pockets of hard-working Alberta taxpayers even as they struggled to make ends meet. Today this House will vote on a motion calling on the government to end this insidious and pernicious policy, so to the Premier. Let me quote the Premier when he asked verbatim in the 1990s: "When will [this government] stop this destructive tax on inflation, or [are they going to] continue to be known . . . as the bracket creeps?"

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the reality. The NDP created an economic and jobs crisis in this province unlike any we've seen in our modern history. The NDP created a fiscal crisis that this government inherited, an \$8 billion structural deficit. Thanks to difficult but necessary decisions made by this government and, yes, some modest sacrifices by Albertans, we now have brought order back to Alberta's finances . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West asked a question. I think it's reasonable for the House to hear the answer.

The hon. the Premier has 10 seconds remaining.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we have now brought Alberta's finances back under control with the first balanced budget tabled in 14 years, and that means we can further cut taxes as Alberta's economy takes off, leading Canada and Europe.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we just heard that a billion dollars in new personal income taxes and \$2,000 a year in real buying power for AISH recipients is just a modest sacrifice, according to this Premier. Now, that is what I call a pernicious and insidious policy agenda, so to this Premier: why did this government bring in such a regressive and repulsive plan that targets the most vulnerable in society?

Mr. Kenney: You know, Mr. Speaker, the most important social program is a job. Last year 130,000 net new jobs were created in this province, and just this morning in Calgary I was happy to announce 325 new permanent jobs being created by Walmart, on top of 15,000 jobs created in Alberta already this year, and do you know why? Because this province is open for business. They raised business taxes. We cut business taxes. They raised fuel taxes. We cut fuel taxes. They created a huge deficit, and we balanced the budget.

2:00

Ms Phillips: Inflation is at a 30-year high. Albertans are feeling the pain, but trust in this Premier and his popularity: never so low. Now, under this government's pernicious and insidious attacks on inflation, the average two-income family will lose \$500 a year just because our taxes aren't rising with inflation on top of skyrocketing utility costs, insurance costs, tuition fees. Those continue to hit the family budget hard. This Premier doesn't care. No wonder Albertans don't trust him. Simple question: will the Premier end his bracket creep?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, subtle as always, coming from that member. You know something? Forty per cent of Albertans, thankfully, do not pay any provincial income tax, but for the 60 per cent that do, they ended up having to pay more under the NDP when they increased income taxes. Now, you know what? The balanced budget offers us the opportunity. If the economy continues to grow ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I have terrible news for the NDP. If the economy continues to grow, we may be in the position – I don't know; no decision is made yet – to reverse the NDP's income tax increases and let Albertans keep more of their own money. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I was proud to stand with my colleagues in Red Deer this morning in support of Alberta families. We've seen the UCP's harmful policy decisions hammer household budgets. We know the devastating impact that this has on families and children, record-high inflation and UCP policy decisions that make matters much, much worse. Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids says that it's anticipating much greater need among students looking for a nutritious meal in the months ahead. Food bank use is already rising. Can the Premier tell this House why Alberta families and children have to literally pay for his bad choices?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid I couldn't hear the question. If the member is talking about children, for example, I can advise her that the budget for the Department of Children's Services has increased by 18 per cent since 2018. Particularly, for children in care has had a funding increase well above both inflation and population growth. This government has prioritized the vulnerable while at the same time bringing overall government costs under control to balance the budget so that programs like that are sustainable in our long-term future.

Ms Pancholi: I think Albertans would appreciate if the Premier actually listened to the questions that they're asking rather than just spouting out answers without doing that.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier hopes that Albertans will blame somebody else other than him for all of the costs that they are now facing. Let me run down some of the figures for him. Because of the UCP's decisions families will pay \$500 more on their taxes alone. Due to deindexation a low-income senior will lose out on \$750 per year. A vulnerable Albertan relying on AISH could be out \$3,000 per year. It gets worse from there. With this government the cost of school fees has shot up, car insurance has gone up, the cost of tuition will more than double. I could go on. Will the Premier stand in this House for Alberta families ...

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Again, there's so much there, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what to unpack from that waterfall of words except this, that the NDP made life more expensive for parents with kids. [interjections] The NDP made it more expensive for parents to drive their kids to hockey practice.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: The NDP made it more expensive to buy groceries for families with kids. The NDP made it more expensive to heat homes for families with kids. The NDP made everything more expensive with their carbon tax, but they're not satisfied with that. They want to more than triple the carbon tax on families with kids. We won't let them, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:03.

Ms Pancholi: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the Premier, this morning our side of the House committed to real support for Albertans. We were joined by Red Deer resident Joanne Buehler. She was injured severely in a workplace accident six years ago and relies on AISH. The huge increase in the cost of living and the UCP's decision to deindex AISH have forced her back to work while in excruciating pain. Even then, she can't make ends meet. Joanne said this morning, quote: I feel like I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't; put simply, I need more help from my provincial government. Why won't this Premier stand in this House right now and actually help Albertans like Joanne?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if she's asking about AISH, that benefit is 40 per cent higher than the average of other provinces, \$400 a month higher than in other provinces, and in Alberta our cost of living is substantially lower. For example, cost of housing. [interjections] Many of those other provinces that provide less generous benefits in the same respect ...

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's becoming increasingly difficult to hear the Premier. He has the right to the floor.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we also have the most generous tax treatment for low-income families. Forty per cent of Alberta families pay no income tax. We have the most generous social benefits broadly, and we're delivering all of that in the context of a balanced budget and a growing economy.

CP Rail Work Stoppage

Mr. Sigurdson: At the worst time possible a CP Rail labour dispute has turned into a back-and-forth blaming game with the company and union pointing fingers at each other for causing the strike and subsequent lockout. CP Rail is an essential service. Albertans,

Canadians, and our entire economy will suffer if CP trains continue to sit idle. The pressure is on the federal government to find a solution. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the Alberta government doing to urge the federal government to immediately get the trains back on track?

Mrs. Sawhney: The CP Rail labour unrest is deeply concerning and will have a major impact on the movement of goods in and out of Alberta. On the weekend I sent a letter to the federal ministers of Transport and Labour with support from my government colleagues. We are calling on Ottawa to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport as an essential service in hopes that any damage to our economy is minimal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we cannot allow our province's economic recovery to be interrupted by union politics and given that we've already dealt with everything from supply chain disruptions, B.C. floods, illegal blockades, port congestion delays, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to the minister: can you update the House on the importance of Alberta rail transport and what the possible impact of this strike will be on our economy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. the Minister of Transportation is the only one with the call.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, rail transport is critically important infrastructure that supports Alberta's economic recovery. Many industries rely on CP railcars to ship their goods to market, including oil, petrochemicals, plastics, and wood. Agricultural products, machinery parts, iron, and steel are also imported by rail. This work stoppage is undermining Alberta and Canada's economic competitiveness. I fear that the impacts will be devastating.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and once again thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta farmers and producers should be focused on getting ready for spring seeding and given that, unfortunately, many of them are fearful of what might happen since farming heavily relies on CP Rail for essentials like fertilizer and feed shipments, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what impact can we expect this labour dispute to have on agriculture?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Transportation clearly outlined, this is impacting many sectors and industries across the province. It's having a profound potential impact on the ag sector. Central southern Alberta relies on CP Rail for movement of goods both in and out in a very severe way. For example, our cattle feeding industry right now is heavily reliant on U.S. corn. After the drought, you know, the bins are empty. There isn't an alternative right now in the south. We're doing everything we can to make sure it's addressed.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the response of so many Albertans who stood up to support their friends, neighbours, and even strangers during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that sadly took the lives of over 4,000 Albertans. Their compassion, however,

contrasts with the Premier's indifference when asked this weekend if he took any responsibility for his catastrophic response during the fourth wave. He said, and I quote: I don't feel responsibility for the fact that COVID has been circulating around the world. End quote. Today would the Premier perhaps like to try again, show some sign of actual compassion and humility, or does he really believe he has no responsibility for his failure?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our government has reacted throughout the entire pandemic to be able to put measures in place to be able to protect Albertans to the greatest extent possible. We spoke before in this House that we didn't get it perfectly right. We moved to the endemic phase too early during the summer, but we reacted, we put measures in place during the fourth wave, and then we saw the numbers coming down. We reacted again for dealing with the fifth wave, and we're seeing the numbers coming down. I'm pleased we're moving to the endemic phase. We're continuing to protect Albertans and provide services . . .

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

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that during the fourth wave the Premier and this minister and all the other members of the government vanished, refused to communicate with Albertans as case numbers rose, our ICUs filled beyond capacity, and hundreds lost their lives and given that even the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was apologetic to Albertans, admitting that Alberta lacked leadership from this government, and given that when given the same opportunity to make an admission on his radio show, the Premier chose an indifferent response, deflecting any responsibility for his catastrophic failure, why doesn't the Premier have the same respect for Albertans that some of his members do? Will he take this chance to apologize . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has reacted to the pandemic. We moved quickly in September to be able to put in measures, and I want to thank all of our health care professionals for stepping up. We were able during the fourth wave to significantly increase our ICU capacity, and we met the demands, not having to send anyone out of province, and again during the fifth wave, when non-ICU was being hit hard, our AHS responded and all of our front-line health care workers. I want to thank them for the tremendous work that they're doing. I'm pleased we're now moving into the endemic phase.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that those very health care workers were pushed to their limits because of the lack of leadership from that minister and this government and given that there are Albertans who lost family members or friends due to COVID and given that there are countless others suffering from long COVID and given that there are tens of thousands whose life-saving surgeries were cancelled and postponed, many who still haven't gotten the care they need, is this Premier, this minister really going to stand in this House for a third time and refuse to apologize to Albertans for their marked failure, the worst pandemic response in Canada?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to all Albertans who have been impacted by COVID or got COVID, long COVID, who had their surgeries postponed, but our government is focused on

responding to COVID and the pandemic. We are focused on building capacity within our health care system, and I am personally focused on ensuring that we can get caught up on surgeries. Albertans deserve the best health care in the world, and we are investing to be able to deliver that.

Opioid-related Deaths

Ms Sigurdson: One thousand seven hundred and fifty-eight Albertans died due to drug poisoning in 2021. It's the deadliest year on record. On average five Albertans were taken from their family and their community every single day. Each one of those deaths was preventable, but instead of working to keep people safe, the UCP has reduced access to life-saving health care for Albertans who use substances. Will the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions take responsibility for the appalling loss of life that is happening under his watch?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, each life lost to addiction is one too many. My heart goes out to all families who have lost loved ones or have been impacted by this disease. As the hon. member knows across the way, our government is taking this seriously. We are investing in additional resources for mental health. We're making significant investment over the last two years, \$140 million. Over this year, in this Budget 2022, we are investing an additional \$20 million, over 8,000 new annual spaces, the removal of user fees, the expansion of the virtual opioid dependency program, that allows any Albertan anywhere in the province to get the same-day access to medication-based treatment . . .

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

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we all know people with substance use may continue to use before they're ready or willing to enter treatment and given that relapse is an extremely common occurrence to people who use substances and given that there are numerous health care interventions that are proven to keep people alive until they are ready to go for treatment, why is the government intent on making substance use a death sentence for so many by denying them these life-saving services?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on addressing this opioid crisis. I've already indicated that we've already invested \$140 million over the last two years. We're investing another \$20 million this year. We are focused. We are increasing access to treatment while removing barriers such as user fees. Alberta is the first province to completely eliminate user fees for all funded treatment spaces. Addiction costs all families, and we are focusing on supporting Albertans to be able to recover from this terrible disease.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the number of lives lost in the drug poisoning crisis has more than doubled since 2019 and given that the crisis in Alberta is getting worse and that each of the last four months we have data for has set a new record for the loss of life, I ask the associate minister again: will he stop his self-congratulatory talking points, confront the sheer number of Albertans who have died on his watch, and admit his approach is a catastrophic failure?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our \$53 million COVID mental health action plan is actually helping to address people who have been impacted. We know that the opioid crisis has been made worse due to COVID, and that's why we're investing and we continue to invest additional dollars to support the mental health of Albertans, \$140 million over the last two years, an additional \$20 million. We are actually putting in a range of supports to be able to support

Albertans throughout their entire process to try to deal with this serious issue and help Albertans recover.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Loewen: Influence peddling is a Criminal Code violation. I published my letter to the RCMP to make it clear that activities of the Premier's office in advance of the UCP's fall AGM warranted investigation. The Premier's office didn't get the memo. Leaks this weekend make it clear that Secure Energy, who is allegedly seeking \$1 billion in government favour, is pressuring their employees to come out for the Premier at the SGM. There is a line between communicating with government officials, as permitted by the Lobbyists Act, versus selling influence by government officials, prohibited by the Criminal Code. To the Premier: is influence peddling becoming government policy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that it's government policy that somebody is taking a position in a public electoral process. There's no surprise there. There's a public electoral process. Some people are on one side; some are on the other; some won't participate. The member is treating this like news. People taking a position in an electoral contest: it's interesting; it's important. I'm not sure it's shocking.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I hope the RCMP will find the facts, because it might be tough to find them here, and given that this weekend a spreadsheet was exposed by journalist Janet French tracking senior staff's weekday volunteer commitments to the Premier's leadership review and given that this spreadsheet is owned by an employee of the lobbying firm Wellington Advocacy and given that this lobbying firm boasts of close connections to the Premier's office and given that it appears that the spreadsheet being used to track how committed senior ministry staff are to the Premier's success in the leadership review was filled out during government office hours, to the Premier: is it government policy for lobbyists to run this province or just current practice?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you would agree with me, if I was to remind the member, that the question wasn't about government policy, as it's required to be.

But, Mr. Speaker, no one should be surprised that in a political contest people take a position: some for, some against; some are indifferent; some will stay home. Now, if the hon. member really thinks that something is wrong, he should call the RCMP. He's mentioned them twice. It's not government policy. There's a political contest, and people are participating.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I can't seem to get a straight answer today, I'll try it one more time. Given that the only pipeline this government is focused on is the pipeline between jobs in the Premier's office and jobs at the Premier's favoured lobbying firms and that Albertans are left wondering who runs this government, the Premier or his favourite lobbyists, and given the huge number of staff taking leave from ministries, as made evident by the lobbyist's own spreadsheet, all to save the Premier's failed job, to the Premier: is focusing this government's energy on the leadership review government policy or just current practice?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to set the record straight. This government is solely focused on jobs for the benefit of Albertans. We look back at the last year. There have been over 130,000 jobs created. We have thousands more jobs available for Albertans today than we did pre-COVID. We're seeing billions of dollars of investment come into this province, creating opportunities for Alberta entrepreneurs, opportunities for Albertans needing a job, expanding our fiscal capacity, leading to a balanced budget.

Education Policies

Ms Hoffman: Alberta had a reputation as one of the best public education systems in the world, but this UCP government is determined to sabotage public education in Alberta by refusing to fund desperately needed schools in Edmonton and Calgary. When we were in government, we didn't ignore the fastest growing districts in the province. We built and modernized about 60 schools a year. This year under the UCP: only 11. Will the Education minister tell Albertans why her government is ignoring families in Edmonton and Calgary? There are students in south Edmonton – some are sitting in the gallery – who desperately need a high school on the south side. Why won't you fund it, Minister?

2:20

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer that question. I had a very good meeting with the board chair and the superintendent of the Edmonton public school division, reinforced the gated process that the Auditor General themselves approved. It's a 10-step process, and when those school authorities put those priorities at the top of the list, they rise higher. We get just about 400 requests a year for new schools and major modernizations, and Edmonton public now understands how they go through that proper list.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister is taking no responsibility for her failure to meet the needs of Calgary and Edmonton families and given that the heartless UCP government displayed its disrespect for disabled children when they cut PUF funding and given that the government's no-help budget, with record revenues, ignores the needs of these children and refuses to reverse the cruel cuts brought in under the UCP, will the Minister of Education explain to the parents of three-, four-, and five-year-olds who have disabilities why she continues to cut funding for kids when they rightfully need it?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again I want to draw to your attention that Edmonton public schools has, actually, six new projects on the go right now to address concerns. They have so many more spaces than actual students, and I'm really confident that, having had that meeting with them last week, they are actually going to prioritize their list and make sure that growing areas are at the top of their list.

In terms of PUF funding we have addressed PUF funding. We have modified that program. We've tiered it, and in fact we added a new code.

Ms Hoffman: Given that when we were in government, there were a thousand more teachers in Alberta schools than there are today and given that the UCP's mission to sabotage public education has a third of Alberta teachers planning on either leaving the province or the profession and given that this government's lack of respect for teachers and the work that they do is clearly reflected in the wide rejection of the curriculum that the UCP is trying to force on Alberta

schools, will the minister admit that the biggest problem facing education is the UCP government? It's clear you can't trust the UCP with public education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, there's a reason that the voters of Alberta fired the members opposite, and it's because they knew we needed responsible government. In fact, we are going to have 160 more teachers and staff next year in the classroom as per the statistic. I don't know why it's so difficult that they can't actually look up the numbers. They're online. They're there. They can look at them. In fact, they would have me go against an Auditor General's request and advice in terms of putting forward capital. [interjections]

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

Utility Costs

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, last month callers phoned in and jammed lines during a radio talk show I was on about the rising cost of utilities in Alberta. A caller told me that after calling for help, a service provider told him that perhaps instead of using heat, he could wear a hoodie. This government's policies have made costs unaffordable, and their fake rebate is not helping Albertans under stress. Will the associate minister stop bragging about doing nothing and commit to helping my constituents who are being told their only solution is to turn their heat off and put on more clothing?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After four years of NDP malaise on the electricity system, all Albertans are paying more for their electricity. Now, the historical revisionists on the other side of the House would have us believe that they're not to blame, but those are the members that got rid of the cheapest form of electricity, spent \$7.5 billion on transmission at a time when we could barely afford it. We are bringing immediate relief to Albertans at a time when they need it while we look for longer term solutions to get rid of the NDP hangover.

Mr. Deol: Given that this government is to blame for this affordability crisis and given that last week the associate minister blocked debate on a motion to ensure that people suffering from these high utility prices did not have their power cut off and given that an Albertan who was told to wear a hoodie instead of using heat stated that his bills were so high that he couldn't pay and that even his credit cards were full, why is this government okay with these constituents and so many other Albertans drowning in credit card debt while they sit on their hands doing nothing?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP experience on the electricity grid is littered with unintended consequences. They got rid of the cheapest form of electricity, and the prices went up. They brought their ideological agenda to the Balancing Pool . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: . . . and prices went up. They implemented the carbon tax, and prices went up on everything. Now, this is just one more example of unintended consequences, because the Energy critic, who, by the way, doesn't understand the price of electricity, actually would raise the price . . .

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

Mr. Deol: Given that this government's so-called relief is a sham and that it won't help anyone and given that they are refusing to act during this crisis, which is harming the physical, mental, and financial health of the people they are pretending to represent, and given that no one in this province should be in a situation where they can't afford to heat their homes, will the associate minister commit to sitting down with my constituents, listening to their concerns, and then taking emergency action to prevent utility shut-offs and provide real rebates to help with skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Nally: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's a case of unintended consequences by a caucus that doesn't even know what the price of electricity is in this province. If we would have accepted the NDP solution, all that bad debt would get put back into rate, and they would raise the price of electricity for every single ratepayer in this province. Now, my question is: why would we come out with a government solution when industry has already resolved the issue? Industry has told me that they will work with any ratepayer that works with them. They will come out with flexible payment plans for all ratepayers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Seniors' Supports in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our seniors have contributed so much to our society and economy throughout the decades. They deserve a restful and fulfilling retirement, but with rising costs caused by inflation and other pressures, this is becoming more difficult. We have incredible seniors' housing in my riding, with the Meridian foundation, St. Michael's, Copper Sky, and others. Despite this, more spaces are needed and long overdue. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what are you doing to support future housing initiatives and funding in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In Budget 2022 we committed \$118 million over three years to fund various projects across the province. Our communities' needs assessments identified communities' individual needs for developing seniors' affordable housing. I thank the member for his advocacy, and I look forward to working with him to bring the necessary housing for seniors.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Meridian foundation is actively looking for a new location to build a larger facility and given that St. Michael's is also planning to expand their facility to address this growing need and given that my riding is identified as a high-priority area for seniors' housing, with demands only increasing, and given that population growth in Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Parkland county remains high and that additional units will be needed in the future, can the same minister please let us know: what is being done to encourage more nonprofits to invest in seniors' housing?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the wonderful questions. The stronger foundations strategy depends significantly on partnerships with major organizations like nonprofit organizations. We are working on a comprehensive

partnership framework that will attract more partners by enabling innovative funding and delivery models. We will increase the supply of affordable housing, and this 10-year framework will achieve that target.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that many seniors in my riding are dealing with mental health and social struggles and given that many require assistance when it comes to accessing mental health supports and programs and given that we want to provide support for our seniors who have called this area home for many years, if not decades, to the Minister of Health: can you please let my constituents know what programs and services they can access if they require additional assistance?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are always striving to improve access to resources that help seniors improve their mental wellness in the community. One of the initiatives that our government is working on and being led by my colleague the minister of mental health and addictions is a province-wide, home-based support program for seniors that will deliver a range of mental health supports to seniors when and where they need them. This is one of the initiatives we're moving forward with to improve access to care for seniors in Alberta. We're investing in the mental health of Albertans: \$140 million over the last two years, another \$20 million this year for all Albertans, including seniors.

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: For over a year there has been chaos caused by illegal protests in Calgary's Beltline. Every Saturday protesters have disrupted the lives of residents and businesses in the area. In the past few weeks the protests have grown in intensity. It's gotten so bad that Calgarians were afraid to leave their houses out of fear of being verbally harassed by so-called freedom protesters, yet this UCP government has said and done nothing. The former and current Justice ministers are silent. The local MLA to the south of 17th Avenue, who is a minister, is silent. Why is this government nowhere to be seen and heard from when Calgarians and businesses . . .

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

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, the Calgary Police Service, like all police services in Alberta, makes operational decisions about deployment and about enforcement tactics. They make those decisions independently of governments. They are responsible and are accountable to the Calgary Police Commission in Calgary, who, in turn, are accountable to the Calgary city council. I encourage the member to speak to the Calgary Police Commission and Calgary city council.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has gone into hiding, refused to take a stand or offer support to the Beltline protests, just like they did with the illegal Coutts blockade, and given that, just like Coutts, the Beltline protests have hurt the local economy and that many businesses in the Beltline have reported being 50 per cent down in their revenues on that day and given that, just like Coutts,

this government has done nothing to help impacted businesses – once again they point the fingers instead of lifting a finger – will this government provide support to the city, to businesses, and to residents impacted by these protests?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of that is true at all. We trust our law enforcement agencies throughout the province to exercise their authority lawfully and to take action when they have evidence and reasonable grounds to do so. We trust them to be able to do that. We know that they can do that. I understand, from previous questions as well as today, that the hon. member has advocated for imprudent actions to politically intervene at the Coutts border crossing instead of the prudent support and deference to our law enforcement that the acting minister provided to our law enforcement agencies at that time.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has done nothing to support the residents and businesses in the Beltline and given that members of their caucus likely support the protesters, who are disrupting the lives of Calgarians and hurting local businesses – after all, they had members in their caucus join the illegal Coutts blockade with zero repercussions – and given that this government has been silent about these protests, if they won't stand up and help those who are impacted, will they at least stand up and denounce these protests, or does the Premier need the people involved in these illegal acts to vote for him in his leadership review?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has said himself, everybody in Alberta has the right to participate in a democratic and peaceful protest. We are respectful of that. As the Premier has said, when somebody is doing that illegally, though, then that is a concern. I understand that arrests were made this past weekend and that this matter is a priority for the police service in Calgary. I encourage them to continue to do their work.

Francophone Education

Ms Renaud: Yesterday was Journée internationale de la Francophonie. With that in mind, all my questions today relate to our Charter responsibilities as clarified by a recent Supreme Court decision on the right to a francophone education. There are students in the Edmonton catchment area who have to travel two and a half hours per day to their designated French public school, which is overcrowded. The UCP capital plan failed to address this significant need, and as a result families are forced to make decisions that force assimilation. Is that the plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 our government has invested in six new capital school projects for the francophone school authorities right across this province. We continue to recognize the need for a new school project across Alberta, and the projects that were not approved for funding in Budget 2022 will be considered again in subsequent years. We get roughly 400 asks a year, and we can only do so many with the dollars that we have.

Ms Renaud: Given that what francophone families need are schools but the only thing this UCP government has announced for Gabrielle-Roy and Michaëlle-Jean students is a delayed plan for a plan, given that the Premier left these families, who have a Charter right to equal access to education in a minority language, to fight in court instead of sit in a classroom, M. le Président, est-ce que le gouvernement pense que c'est normal de non financer ni les plans

ni les écoles? Les étudiants et les familles ont besoin des écoles dans leurs communautés, pas à deux heures de chez eux. Expliquez-ça, s'il vous plaît.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take our section 23 obligations very, very seriously. Last year I announced three new schools across Alberta for francophone communities, six in total since 2019, 20 in the last decade. We always take this very seriously, and we will make sure that those students have good new spaces to learn in.

Ms Renaud: Given that the funding formula for education in Alberta is broken, le Conseil scolaire Centre-nord is growing and opening new programs, but because the UCP insists on using weighted moving averages, they're projecting a million-dollar deficit. C'est pas durable, M. le Président. Cette formule ne marche pas pour les écoles francophones. Given that it is starting to look like the true goal of the UCP government is to force assimilation on francophone families, please explain how this disastrous Education budget does anything but force assimilation?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is just absurd. I've never heard anything so absurd in my whole, entire life. In fact, we have added an additional \$700 million over three years to increase funding for education . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. You had your opportunity to ask a question. If you want another opportunity, perhaps that will come later, but for now the Minister of Education has the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seven hundred million dollars over three years to add to all of education right across the province. We were the ones that introduced the Choice in Education Act so that parents can choose the type of education that they want for their children, including francophone education. The fastest growing francophone community in all of Canada. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Energy Industry Opposition

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the tool identified in the Allan inquiry involves activist groups litigating organizations to tie up their assets. This tactic is called lawfare. The Minister of Energy knows all too well how lawfare works, facing it a multitude of times when fighting for the Gateway pipeline, a pipeline that, if operational today, would help displace Russian oil that is currently being used to fund Putin's war on Ukraine. To the Minister of Energy: are we seeing lawfare play out against the energy sector in an effort to distract companies from their core business by tying up their assets?

Mrs. Savage: Well, Mr. Speaker, what these types of activist campaigns have done is to make it difficult to grow energy production here, and it made it almost impossible to build infrastructure to get our resources to market. Their goal is to lock our resources in the ground, which allows places like Russia to get more out of the ground there. Energy resources account for approximately 43 per cent of the Russians' economy, and it's being used to fund their war while places like Canada have been unfairly targeted by environmental activism. Does anybody think even for

one minute that Russian state-owned companies like Gazprom and Rosneft . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that lawfare is becoming commonplace amongst activists and given that these frivolous anti-Alberta pursuits will continue from far-left organizations like Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion and given that this damages the livelihoods of hard-working Alberta families and entrepreneurs, to the Minister of Energy: is there any regulation or legislation that your department could consider to discourage activists and support companies who find themselves a victim of this tactic?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. As I was noting before, does anybody here think for even one minute that Russian state-owned companies like Rosneft and Gazprom have to contend for a single minute with the type of environmental litigation, fossil fuel divestment, clogged regulatory processes, and environmental activism that we contend with here? Mr. Speaker, we sit on top of the third-largest reserves of oil in the world, 166 billion barrels, and it accounts for 25 per cent of the free-world, non state-controlled production. This is a large part of why Alberta is targeted, so, yes, we are taking steps to counter these activists' campaigns.

2:40

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you again, Minister. Given that Albertans are tired of ideological groups like Extinction Rebellion trying to destroy our resource sectors and given that this government is committed to the fight against nefarious activists and their shameful attacks such as what took place at Coastal GasLink Pipeline and given that last October in this House the minister and I discussed the possibility of forming a special committee to subpoena and question those named in the Allan report, to the minister: will you commit today to an investigative committee of the Legislature to continue the work that Steve Allan began?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we now know is that what happens when we can't get our resources to market – it means that other jurisdictions like Russia are able to leverage this dysfunction in Canada. Every barrel of oil left in the ground here is taken out of the ground in some place like Russia. I can hear the NDP cheering on Russian energy production right now. That's shameful because that's not only a transfer of production to places like Russia; it's a transfer of wealth and it's a transfer of GHG emissions. We will always continue ways to fight this, and, yes, there is merit in another . . .

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

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has a statement to make.

Métis Jigging Dance Event in Calgary-Cross

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to highlight an amazing event that took place in my constituency last week. Last Friday the Marlborough community association held a Métis jig dance session. This session was put on by the Métis community leaders looking to highlight and share the beautiful and rich culture of Métis people in Alberta with their neighbours. Métis jigging originated in Red River, Manitoba, where the influence of Indigenous, Scottish, and French-Canadian cultures helped shape this festive dance, which is done at nearly all Métis events. Jigging is a key cultural pillar within the Métis community, and I was both honoured and excited to see this traditional dance being celebrated within my constituency of Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Speaker, this event not only showcased Métis culture, but it was also meant to draw attention to the serious and tragic discovery of increasing numbers of unmarked graves of residential school victims. It is important to recognize the atrocities of the past so that we can learn and we can heal together as a community. The residential school system continues to be one of the blackest marks in Canadian history, and its impacts are still obvious to this day. I would like to thank the Marlborough community association for helping organize this event. It is key for community associations to ensure that various cultures have the space and the resources to celebrate and engage with the community at large.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues in this House and all Albertans to learn about Métis culture as it is a rich and vibrant one and should be celebrated every day, not only in my constituency but across Alberta.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced, which I will sponsor, that being Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Central Peace-Notley has a tabling.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings to do. The first tabling is the article from Janet French expressing the pressure put on government staff to take leave to save the Premier.

The second one is the volunteer – or I should say volun-told – spreadsheet for the leadership review owned by a Wellington employee, with proof it was filled out during office hours.

Number 3, a list of lobby firm Wellington Advocacy employees, including Brittany Baltimore, owner of the spreadsheet used by staff.

And, number 4, the post exposing Secure Energy putting pressure on staff to attend the SGM to support the Premier.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. The point of order at 2:03 has been withdrawn.

Ms Gray: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is called by the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Rules and Practices of the Assembly

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I called this point of order because I was so looking forward to debating the point of order that was called earlier, and it was withdrawn. I think that's unparliamentary, and I was quite disappointed that I didn't have that opportunity. I had excellent arguments prepared, and I would appreciate you ruling on this.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I've got to give credit where credit is due, Mr. Speaker. That was a smooth move. But I don't find that this is a point of order, and I'd like to move on to the daily Routine. I'm very anxious to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West's speech on Motion 503. You're lucky.

The Speaker: I think I've provided lots of commentary around extending debate through the use of points of order. I think that's a very clear example of what ought not be done. It's not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Indexing Taxes and Benefits

503. Ms Phillips moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation may result in Albertans collectively paying approximately \$1 billion more in additional income tax between 2019 and 2025 than they would have paid if this decision had not been made,
- (b) acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the Alberta seniors' benefit, benefits provided under the assured income for the severely handicapped program, and other benefits and income support programs to account for inflation significantly reduced their purchasing power, and
- (c) urge the government to immediately reverse these decisions by
 - (i) re-establishing the indexing of the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation and
 - (ii) re-establishing the indexing of benefits and income support programs to account for inflation.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to join the House from some long driving this morning. I am here to propose that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation may result in Albertans collectively paying more than a billion dollars over the

course of the government's fiscal plan, between 2019 and 2025, than they would have paid if this decision had not been made.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The motion goes on, Mr. Speaker, to call for the government to reindex the seniors' benefit and the assured income for the severely handicapped program, ensuring that those benefits account for inflation, and re-establish those benefits' ability to keep pace with the cost-of-living increases and re-establish their purchasing power with those benefits.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that we proposed this motion because indeed the cost of living is the number one issue on Albertans' minds right now. The number one issue on Albertans' minds is not the internal palace intrigue of the UCP leadership. The number one issue on people's minds is not whether the leadership is going to be moved from the Cambridge Hotel to the Westerner and not about in-person voting. People are worried about their bills. People were significantly challenged by their January and February electricity and natural gas bills – there were significant increases, particularly on the electricity side, given that the pool price spiked considerably for people after the removal of the cap – because they came on top of a number of other challenges to people's cost of living.

Now, there is no question that anyone who has darkened the door of a grocery store recently has seen that the price of everything has gone up, and there's no question that we are seeing these inflationary pressures across the industrialized world and pretty much everywhere as the world exits from the pandemic and supply chain challenges, particularly in auto parts and other raw materials, that are experienced everywhere. However, the fact of the matter is that for every single spot where this government could use the levers of public policy to make life more affordable for Albertans, they have chosen not to do so and, in fact, done the opposite.

2:50

There are a significant number of things that they could do to make life more affordable for people. The fact that they haven't I think speaks volumes about why Albertans do not trust this government to be able to look out for them. They do not trust them to put people first. They certainly cannot trust them to rebuild the health care system after the pandemic, and they do not trust them on the cost-of-living increases either.

Now, one of the first acts of this government after the 2019 election was to deindex our income tax system and benefits from inflation. That means that every year people are paying more income tax and seeing their benefits reduced. The UCP is taxing inflation, plain and simple. Now, this had been described in the House of Commons throughout the 1990s as bracket creep, a "pernicious [and insidious] tax grab." Those are quotes, and they are quotes from the Premier, who in the 1990s objected strenuously to this tax increase, but one of the first things he did in his first budget was to deindex those brackets.

With inflation hitting a 30-year high, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are seeing their hard-earned income not going as far as it used to as people struggle to make ends meet. It is not just electricity bills and natural gas heating bills that have spiked through January and February. Albertans are also seeing a number of changes as a result of the rising cost of insurance, because this government chose to listen to lobbyists rather than ordinary people trying to pay the bills, and people's insurance has gone up for their vehicles by about 20 and 30 per cent. A clean driving record: no changes there, yet their policies are going up considerably. People are also getting larger bills for school fees for the simple act of sending their children into

the public school system. Student loan interest and tuition are also going up.

But the destructive impact of inflation on the tax system and benefits cannot go unremarked, and that is why it is important for this Legislature to signal to the people of Alberta that they either care and are going to reverse this considerable challenge to our cost of living or that they are going to continue to thumb their noses at Albertans' number one priority and indeed continue to tax inflation and, effectively, ensure that more and more of our income goes towards personal income taxes because of the sneaky, pernicious, and insidious bracket creep that this government has brought in.

Now, what does that mean, actually, for people? Well, the basic personal exemption in 2019 was \$19,369. That's the amount of money that we don't pay taxes on. Then we pay taxes in brackets according to our income at certain percentages after that. Now, the basic personal exemption in 2025 under the UCP government is \$19,369. That's what you get in terms of your nontaxable income: \$19,000, the same in 2025 as 2019. Now, if that amount was indexed to inflation, it would be \$22,219 of tax-free income. So every single one of us, regardless of how much money we make, is paying more money in taxes than we would have otherwise. We are paying taxes on \$3,000 more a year in income.

You know, it's complicated, and that's why this government did it, because they expect that people won't notice. But here's the thing. No one trusts this government to stand up for their cost of living, so it does not come as any surprise to any ordinary Albertan when there's a sneaky and complicated way that this government has also put their hand in people's pockets. No one doubts that this is the case.

I just spent eight or nine hours on the doorstep over the weekend, Mr. Speaker. I can reliably report to this Chamber that people are very, very worried about their rising cost of living. They are very, very worried, from the hours of canvassing I did on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, about how they are going to make ends meet after those massive bills that they received for January's and February's utilities, after the increases in insurance, after the increases in school fees, in tuition, and so on.

Layer on top of that the fact that it does not matter: on the left, on the right, in the exhausted middle no one trusts this government to do the right thing. People are exhausted with the chaos, with the uncaring, with the disconnection, with the idea that this government would just focus on themselves and their own problems to the detriment of leading this province for a post-COVID recovery, towards economic diversification, towards rebuilding our health care system after the massive challenges and chipping away at the public education system and chipping away at the respect for our public-sector workers over the last two years. No one actually expects this government to reverse some of these decisions that they have made, particularly around reindexing the personal income tax system, but the government should. If they understood what was actually happening out there, they would take this action as a good-faith indication that they're thinking about someone other than themselves.

Now, they can start that by passing this motion, Mr. Speaker, and it will be instructive, to coin a phrase, when and if this government does not support this motion. They should. It should be obvious that we're putting money back in people's pockets. It should be obvious that we are not scooping thousands of dollars a year out of AISH incomes. That should be a very clear public policy position of this government, particularly after the UCP caucus supported the 2018 legislation that actually indexed these benefits in a retroactive fashion, just to, you know, provide a little fact-checked footnote on what happened in question period today. It should be obvious to just, you know, go back and do what the stated intent was and

actually do something for a change that is on the level in this Chamber and that actually helps people for a change. They could do that by supporting this motion, and it'll be really interesting to see if the government actually takes this as a priority.

There is no question that people have suffered a lot over the last couple of years, there is no question that people have seen the chaos in the pandemic response, the chaos that has been created in the education system in particular. That was considerable. And there's no question that people want to see action. This government could take that action today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in opposition to Motion 503. I think what Albertans need to understand is that our government inherited a fiscal train wreck. Had we not taken action on a whole number of fronts, we would have robbed subsequent generations of the prosperity that we enjoy today.

I want to digress just a little bit. I want to talk a bit about what we inherited. Mr. Speaker, we inherited a government that was spending \$10 billion more per year than comparable or similar governments on a per capita basis, and that trajectory was going up by 4 per cent per year. Had we continued on that trajectory, we would not be projecting a \$500 million surplus, but we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit. Let me tell you why that matters. This matters to the next generation of Albertans. This matters to our children and our grandchildren. We simply cannot place irresponsible fiscal decisions today and burden the next generation with the results of those decisions.

So, yes, Mr. Speaker, we as a government had to take some serious action. As we in Treasury Board considered in 2019 our approach to a four-year fiscal plan that would bring responsibility back to the province's finances, we were guided by this principle, that Alberta can no longer afford to be an outlier, because we had been a high-spending province brought on by high revenues in the past. But decisions taken during those years of surplus revenues resulted in the province's finances being wholly unsustainable going forward.

Mr. Speaker, as we considered the principle of ensuring that we were no longer an outlier, ensuring that we could live within our means, we made a series of decisions. One thing I can say is that while the personal income tax exemption is deindexed at this point in time, Albertans will not pay any more personal income tax this year than they would have last year. I need to set the record straight. We have not raised taxes.

3:00

Another important fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta has by far and away the largest personal exemption with respect to our personal tax system. Alberta's exemption is \$19,369, meaning that 40 per cent of Albertans pay no income tax at all. When we were considering our options that first year, in 2019, we chose not to reduce that personal exemption. We chose to maintain it even though we were an outlier, ensuring that low-income Albertans would continue to not pay any tax at all. The next-closest province with respect to their personal exemption is Saskatchewan, and they're over \$3,000 lower than Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about affordability because it's very important that this House, all members of this House, and all Albertans know some of the background, some of the systemic issues that are creating very high utility costs. Utility

costs are going up and have been going up. While we hear from the members opposite their concern about affordability, I would suggest that the most significant reason for increased utility costs, electricity costs today is bad policy when the members opposite were in government. They overbuilt our distribution system, our transmission system to the tune of \$8 billion. Who pays for that? Consumers today.

Mr. Speaker, they hastily – hastily – moved from coal to gas, a transition that we were going to make, but they did it hastily. Who pays? Alberta consumers, Alberta households, Alberta seniors. That irresponsible move cost Alberta consumers \$1.4 billion. Moreover, they added a carbon tax that increased electricity charges, increased utility costs, increased food costs, the cost to heat their homes, the cost to drive their cars. Who did that? The members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately, we've been focused on ensuring that Albertans have more opportunities. We've been focusing on the economy, ensuring that we have a very competitive business environment, an environment that will result in increased investment attraction, increased job opportunities, and that is happening today. That is happening today. Tens of thousands of Albertans have been able to find a good job. Tens of thousands of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, who were underemployed are able to find a new job in perhaps an occupation that didn't even exist 10 years ago.

All the while we're focused on affordability. That's why on April 1, as energy prices are high, we will be eliminating our fuel tax – that's 13 cents a litre on every litre of gasoline and diesel fuel purchased by Albertans, purchased by Alberta businesses – because, Mr. Speaker, I'm convinced that the best thing governments can do during times of inflation is spend responsibly, borrow less, and tax less, and we're following through with that measure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say that in 2019, when we paused indexing, we were clear and explicit that when we improved our fiscal house, when we ensured that responsible decisions have led to a stronger, healthy balance sheet and a sustainable fiscal trajectory, we will begin reindexing. I can commit to this House, as I have committed to Albertans, that as we see our economic and commodity price assumptions that we identified in Budget 2022 realized, we will reconsider whether it's time to reindex. I make that commitment to members of this House; I make this commitment to Albertans.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude with this, where I began: this government inherited a fiscal train wreck. This government inherited a fiscal scenario that was completely unsustainable, a scenario that would have burdened future generations with billions and billions of dollars of debt for services that they did not appreciate, that did not benefit them. I find that wholly unacceptable.

We've made hard decisions to bring our fiscal house in order. The good news is that we're reporting a balanced budget this year and for the following two fiscal years, and that gives us options. That gives us options to make strategic reinvestments in our health care system to expand capacity. That gives us options to ensure that future generations of Albertans can reskill, pursue an education in occupations that matter, in professions where there's great demand. Mr. Speaker, that's why we're adding \$600 million to the fiscal plan over the next three years to reskill Albertans, to provide additional opportunities for Albertans to move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to oppose this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The next member I see is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very important motion because, as we all know, life under this Conservative government has become harder, more expensive, and less hopeful because of these types of strategies. I'm very interested to hear the Minister of Finance actually publicly admit that he understands that the deindexing is a hit on the people, so much so that he has just promised, minutes ago in this House, to re-examine it when he feels like doing it. But he is promising to re-examine this reindexing in the future. That means that he understands that it indeed is a tax increase, no matter what else he says. He has just stood up in this House and made our point for us.

This is an over \$1 billion hit on the people in this province who can least afford it. The people that are being affected by this are the people who are receiving AISH, the people who are on the seniors' benefit, and, of course, all the people in this province who pay personal income taxes. If this government had not made this choice, all of these people would see a minor increase in their disposable income.

Now, you ask: why should they get an increase in disposable income? I can tell you that part of the reason why is that there is money available in the system in many other ways, in many other places. We know, for example, that government revenues are significantly up. This government got lucky. The international price of oil, over which they have no control, has increased significantly the revenues in this province, and they pretend that somehow that's allowed them to balance the budget, because they were somehow magic. Well, it turns out that the revenues are increasing in every other state, not just this state.

They didn't plan for it. We know they didn't plan for it because the amount of money that they were predicting to come in in their past budget was not the same as the amount of money that actually did come in, so we know that it was a lucky windfall. This government, if they had the integrity to tie those things together, would be able to say that no matter which government was in, they would have gotten that same lucky windfall. Of course, what they do is that they constantly repeat that somehow if the NDP government had been in, we would have a greater deficit. The only way they can do that is that they can ignore the truth of what they just said. They say one thing; then they ignore it and say the opposite thing, because they have no internal consistency in their planning. They got lucky, and they're using it as a chance to kind of pull the wool over the eyes of the people in this country.

We know that government revenue is up. We also know that corporate profits are dramatically up over the last little while, and we know that CEO compensation is up. All we're asking is that somehow the rest of Albertans be able to gain some of the benefits from all of this largesse that we are experiencing in this province. Again, this government doesn't really care for the average person in the province. They have a very small, narrow group of people who they are very concerned about, and we know that because of the fact that we do see that government revenues are up; we do see that corporate profits are up; we do see that CEO compensation is up.

3:10

In fact, this government, at the same time that they're asking for up to 10 per cent back in terms of wages from some of the people who took care of us during the pandemic, like respiratory therapists and social workers and so on, is agreeing to give up to 39 per cent increases to people in AIMCo who, in fact, lost significant amounts of money for us. It's not based on integrity. It's not based on

performance. It's based on who this government likes and who this government doesn't like, and I can tell you that they do not like you if you are not rich in this province. That's the underlying truth here.

What we have is a situation where people who rely on government understanding their circumstances and taking care of them are not experiencing anything from this government that would come close to empathy or an understanding of the nature of economics for people who are not wealthy. It's really disconcerting to hear that, and we know that the minister has just admitted that he understands that, that he is making a hit on average people, because he just said: maybe later, when more rich people have gotten even richer, we'll consider the possibility of taking this hit back. He just admitted that in the House, that they're going to reconsider that.

So here we are. We have a government that got lucky and therefore is strutting around the barnyard like a rooster, pretending that somehow they've done something big when, in fact, it was just sheer chance that they happened to be in government at the time that the international price of oil went up so extremely high compared to what was predicted even by them in their own budget. They can't pretend that they knew the future, because they didn't put it in their budget. We have the numbers.

What we have is a government that has made life more difficult for every single person in this province. They have put in policies that have resulted in the increase in school fees. They put in policies that have resulted in dramatic increases to utilities, some people paying two or three times as much as they would have if the rate cap was on. They've put in policies that increased our insurance rates for our houses and our cars, people often seeing double or triple the rate that they were seeing when there was a rate cap on.

We see that this is a government that has started to increase postsecondary tuition costs, in some cases up over 100 per cent of the actual cost. I mean, this is a minister who just moments ago said that they would really like to see people retrain to get back into the economy – “reskill” I believe is the word he was using – yet he's actually making it more expensive, in some cases 100 per cent more expensive, than it was before this minister got in.

We have a minister who is taking advantage of extreme luck and the fact that there are some people that are doing really well and pretending that all Albertans are doing really well when, in fact, the evidence is that that is not true. This side of the House brought in a bill to try to protect people who were going to lose their benefits or lose their houses because of their inability to pay for the utility bills and to stop them from having the utilities shut off, and what did this government do? They said that, no, we can't even do that simple thing of just allowing them to continue to live in their own homes. This is a government that has really made absolutely no decision to act on behalf of average Albertans. As long as, you know, the group of oligarchs who are making lots of money at this time continues to make money and make more money, they say that Alberta is doing well. But Albertans are not doing well. A very small segment of the province is doing well.

We've seen what happens when this government engages in these types of policies. We saw it, for example, when they gave away \$4.7 billion to international corporations, some of whom actually used the money to move their headquarters, their head offices, out of Alberta into foreign countries. We see this kind of thing happen all the time, that the government makes a decision and all it benefits are these large corporations who are already profitable. It wasn't like they were even helping companies to make decisions to stay. In the example of the \$4.7 billion they did absolutely nothing to ensure that that would derive a benefit for the province of Alberta. They didn't say: would you please make sure that you hire people in the province of Alberta? In fact, they didn't. We saw job losses after they did that, 50,000 job losses in the province of Alberta, and

we're still behind in terms of full-time jobs three years later in this province. Now they put in a gas rebate, which they say is going to help Albertans, with absolutely no guarantee that that gas rebate will be passed on to the consumers. They've done nothing but make sure that the profitable corporations can take that extra 13 cents and tack it onto their profits, because there's nothing to actually require them to pass it on to citizens in this province. Again, what we have is this government who are constantly looking for ways to make the rich richer and to ignore the fact that the poor, by nature, are becoming poorer. That's what we see happening all the time.

A responsible, proper government would have a preferential option for the poor, always looking for ways they can shore them up and try to bring them back into the economy to make sure that they're doing well, but they have shut down the ways for people to get out of poverty and to move into a middle-class lifestyle by increasing tuition, by increasing other costs, and making it almost impossible for people. We see people who are on AISH, people who are reliant on the seniors' benefits and, of course, all Albertans, through their personal income tax, losing their money and losing their purchasing power.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be able to speak to this motion. I'd like to thank the member for proposing it; however, I am interested in understanding the rationale. That member was the environment minister when the carbon tax was introduced into this province. I remember. I was sitting as an opposition member at the time, thinking about the cost that will be bringing forward to every Albertan, whether it be through heating, through their gas, through their food prices. I guess it's a little rich coming from the member that actually brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history to be now talking about this issue. The hypocrisy in this House sometimes astounds me.

But I want to talk to you about: the last member that just spoke from the NDP talked about how this government is – basically, in my words, he said that this government is heartless, that we don't care. I want to remind the member of the history of conservatives in this province. I want to remind him that it was a Conservative government that made sure that AISH recipients received the highest in Canada out of all the provinces, in fact, to the point where we actually pay over \$400 more than the closest jurisdiction in Canada. Mr. Speaker, that was not an NDP government. If the member's assertion is that conservatives are heartless, it was not the NDP government that did that; it was a Conservative government that did that in the past.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to remind the member that in this province almost 40 per cent of those who could pay taxes don't pay provincial taxes in this province. Who did that? Was that an NDP government that actually did that, or was that heartless conservatives who did that? No, it was conservatives that did that. Conservatives actually recognized that this should be a place where people can come, work hard, get out of poverty, get themselves in a position where they can provide for their family, start a business, work hard for their future.

In this province Conservative governments of the past have done a great job of being able to provide for opportunities for Albertans, have done a great job of recognizing that people come here from other countries in abject poverty, come here with just an opportunity. They're just looking for an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and this is the place where they provided it. Past Conservative

governments did that, not the NDP; not a past socialist government but a Conservative government. So when the member stands up and says that we're heartless, conservatives are heartless, let's remember what history has shown us, that conservatives have actually done a fantastic job.

Now, remember, Mr. Speaker: how could we do this? Was it only because we had oil and gas? Well, there's actually oil and gas in Saskatchewan. There's oil and gas in other provinces as well. So why is it that Alberta did so well? It was because of the Alberta advantage. The Alberta advantage was low marginal tax rate, lower regulatory burden than other jurisdictions, and this is really how we were able to get to the point we're at right now, because we recognized that the best social program is a great job. The hon. Minister of Finance said that. I think that's absolutely true and sometimes lost on the NDP, that really there's no way that someone on a fixed income, someone on AISH is going to survive very well. Even in rich Alberta, in a place where we are giving the most that we can give, it's very, very difficult for them to be able to make ends meet. I get that.

3:20

But let's talk about another issue, the other issue of inflation. Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest drivers of inflation is the cost of goods going up. That cost of goods going up obviously is carbon tax. The NDP and their close ally Justin Trudeau want to take our carbon tax from \$50 a tonne to \$170 a tonne, a threefold increase. Do you think that that's not going to create inflation, that that's not going to create a burden on our vulnerable in our societies? Do you not think that the cost of that is going to be borne by the poorest of our societies? If the NDP took a look at their arguments and recognized that a tax is a tax wherever you are but that it's worse borne out on the poor, and a consumption tax, which is basically the carbon tax because it affects everything – let's be clear. You can't live anywhere in this province without having things trucked to you. It has to be trucked if it's going to be – your food or whatever you have, whatever you bought, it was trucked here, and that carbon tax is a price on that.

So when we add that cost to those who are poor in our society, that is not compassionate. How can the hon. members really believe that that is a compassionate approach? In our approach of past Conservative governments here we recognized that someone should not be taxed until just under \$20,000. Now, our federal counterparts, the Liberals, don't believe that. They're taxed at, I think, \$9,000. That's when they start being taxed. Mr. Speaker, I think that their close friends and allies the Liberals in Ottawa should recognize, if they're really compassionate, that they should choose to start taxing at just under \$20,000, but they don't.

This is why the hypocrisy of their argument is difficult to be able to swallow, and that's why most people in the province don't buy into this concept they have that they're the compassionate ones. They recognize that – you know what? – when it comes to government programs, there's always, always a scarcity, Mr. Speaker, and that scarcity is very difficult to be able to find a way to be able to get to everybody who needs it. We recognize it. That's why societies in the past that have thrived have recognized that that is not the solution. The solution is to be able to help businesses to prosper, to be successful so that they can actually pay their employees more, and we've done that. In fact, that is the reason why we have that Alberta advantage, because people can come to this province and get paid more.

Mr. Speaker, we give \$20 billion to Ottawa that doesn't come back every year. Where does most of that money come from? Not transfer payments. That comes from income tax. We are able to pay our people more in this province because we did something right

here historically. The NDP want to discount that, but it is because of that, because of that approach that we took in Conservative governments of the past, that we're in a position now.

Do you know that before the NDP got in, Mr. Speaker, we had no debt? We had no debt. We had the ability to provide so much more for our people. What was their strategy? Spend more; tax more. Then we got into a situation where it was \$60 billion, \$70 billion, \$80 billion of debt. They put us in a precarious situation. This is why we had to make the difficult decisions that we did. But the hon. member the Minister of Finance has said that this is a temporary fix. This is something that we need to be able to work through, and as we get ourselves in a better situation, we will work through it.

But, Mr. Speaker, this motion is virtue signalling. When the members opposite had the opportunity for four years to be able to get rid of deindexing, they didn't. That's the reality. Yes, they've said that it was retroactive, but what about those three years that it wasn't retroactive? What about those three years, three and a half years, where they didn't do it? The reality is that they had to live those three and a half years. If they were concerned so much about the issue of affordability, they would have done it on day one, wouldn't they have? But they didn't. They did it three and a half years later, and you can make that retroactive, but for those three and a half years they had no ability to be able to virtue signal that they were actually helping those people who are suffering, those who are poor and struggling in this province. They didn't do it until they were close to the election. This is the reason why people do not buy into the arguments that they've brought forward.

I want to just finish with this, Mr. Speaker. The real reality that the NDP are looking for is that they're looking for a universal income. They want to make sure that they actually bring forward as much as they can for everybody, and actually this is what they're really looking for, a universal income.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing the motion to the House and before us so that we could debate it. I have to say that it's displeasing to hear the members from the other side speak when it comes to actually working for Albertans. You know, day after day coming here into this House, into this Legislature during question period we see a Premier and his cabinet continuously just spin – spin – just full of rhetoric. We have absolutely no substance in terms of what this government is doing to actually work for Albertans and actually protect Albertans, right?

They continue to fail Albertans. They continue to fail Albertans, and a prime example of that, Mr. Speaker, is the \$1.3 billion gamble on the Keystone XL. Waste of money, just a complete waste of taxpayer dollars when it comes to – and that's what this government does. It's like gamble after gamble after gamble. Anything that they can do in order to pass the buck when it comes to actually protecting Albertans and making life more affordable for Albertans, this government just decides to pass the buck. The Premier continuously does that during question period, just passes the buck.

Now, you know, the members on the other side like to complain about the carbon tax. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? The carbon tax had a real rebate in it, not like what this government has decided to provide Albertans, which is a completely fake program that doesn't even come into effect until next year. Now, that is incredulous right there in terms of, like, the rhetoric that comes out of this government. They like to say that they're doing something,

that they're investing in Albertans, but the reality is that nothing could be farther from the truth.

Through the budget that we see before us, Mr. Speaker, we see nothing but cuts and more cuts and more cuts, but they have no problem giving \$4.7 billion to corporations in the province of Alberta. Some of these corporations actually just – you know, it's this whole outdated and antiquated economic approach known as trickle-down theory. Albertans are getting sick and tired of Conservatives in power presenting austerity budgets time and time again, austerity budget after austerity budget, which cut more and more programming that actually benefits Albertans, yet they provide large tax breaks to big corporations.

3:30

I find it absolutely shameful that the Premier would actually come into this House and boast about jobs at Walmart as his major accomplishment. Now, don't get me wrong, Walmart is fine, Mr. Speaker – Walmart is fine – but that's not full-time, mortgage-paying jobs that Albertans deserve. The Premier should be ashamed that that's all he can refer to when it comes to actually creating jobs here in the province of Alberta. Part-time jobs: that's what Albertans get out of this government and this austerity budget, yet another austerity budget for Albertans.

You know, the members on the other side of the House continue to chirp over there as I'm speaking, Mr. Speaker, because they can't take it. They can't take that I'm actually speaking the truth in this House when it comes to the type of government that they are and that they're not actually putting Albertans first.

Now, the other big gamble that this Premier and cabinet decided to take was the fact that they were going to take the whole concept of the carbon tax to the Supreme Court, and they lost, Mr. Speaker. You know, we took the approach that this carbon levy is going to come into effect whether we like it or not because we do need to address the whole issue of climate change. Unlike on that side of the House, where there are members who refuse to believe that climate change is real, we on this side of the House know it's real, know that we've got to do something about it and that we're actually protecting the lives of Albertans when we do so.

The members on the other side of the House: Mr. Speaker, you see, they fail to recognize that when it comes to economic decision-making, there are such things called externalities. And the thing is that down the road those things are going to impact and actually have a negative effect on the economy if they're not addressed right now. If we do not address climate change, the economic impact, we're going to feel it later, and that's what this government fails to realize. We're going to have to pay for it later.

Now, what did we decide to do, Mr. Speaker? We decided – you know what? – if the federal government is going to impose a carbon tax on Canadians, then we might as well implement a program that's going to benefit Albertans and put Albertans first. The federal government was going to do it anyways. So we created a program that actually had a real rebate in it. So, yeah, people were going to have to be paying a little bit more, but for those that were at a certain threshold, they were going to get a rebate. And that was over 65 per cent of Albertans that were actually getting a real rebate, unlike the fake program that this government is actually presenting to Albertans right now.

Now, on top of that, the gamble that this Premier and this here cabinet took, Mr. Speaker, was that they crushed the Alberta plan, and now we've got to pay that same carbon tax, but we've got to pay it over to the federal government whereas our program was actually reinvesting in Albertans. We were actually investing it, diversifying Alberta's economy, moving forward, because Albertans were asking

for that. [interjections] Chirp all you want. Chirp all you want. Go ahead. I'm actually speaking the truth here.

Now, they claim that everything is going up for Albertans. Well, everything was going up because of the carbon tax, but 65 per cent of Albertans were getting a rebate. Unlike with this government, Mr. Speaker, they decided to take the cap off insurance. A 30 per cent increase on insurance on Albertans. Utility fees: it was unbelievable. There are constituents that I have heard from, and when their utility bills came in, they're paying over \$800 when they were used to paying \$200. This is the reality that Albertans are experiencing under the poor and bad management of this here government.

They're failing Albertans, and here we are bringing a motion into this House that will at least try to rectify some of that, Mr. Speaker, especially when it comes to those who are most marginalized in our society. And, yes, I'm talking about seniors. I'm talking about people on AISH. That's the sad thing about all of this, that this government is actively debating in this House, where here we are being propositional, trying to bring in a positive piece of legislation, trying to bring positive debate into this House here so that we can actually stand up for Albertans, and the members on the other side are kiboshing the whole plan. They want to continue to make life less affordable for Albertans and especially those most marginalized.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next individual that I see is the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services, with in and around five minutes remaining in the allotted time.

Mr. Luan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to chip into the debate here. As the Minister of Community and Social Services the AISH program is directly under my ministry. I'd like to share some facts so that they can be contributing to the debate here. The Alberta government continues to help Albertans with permanent disabilities meet their daily needs and live independently and find employment at their first ability. The assured income for the severely handicapped program, AISH, that we often talk about, provides financial and health benefits to eligible adult Albertans with permanent medical conditions that prevent them from earning a living. AISH coverage may include a monthly living allowance, health benefits, personal benefits for the clients and spouses and partners and dependent children.

Let me share some facts here so that we can be on the same page. Mr. Speaker, with Budget 2022, we increased \$12 million into AISH to the point of \$1.4 billion. That is the highest in Alberta's history for AISH benefits. That's fact number 1.

Fact number 2 is that \$1,685 per month for the AISH benefit today remains the highest among the provinces in Canada. That's a fact.

Fact number 3, Mr. Speaker: just this month, as part of Alberta's recovery plan, the Premier and I announced an additional income support program for prenatal families where people are receiving AISH and income support. With an additional \$600 added to that, the total of \$856, that, again, is the highest prenatal benefit in the country.

Mr. Speaker, we work day in, day out with tangible actions and provide support services to Albertans, for those who are under my ministry. Oftentimes we call them the most vulnerable Albertans. We have actions followed with actions for tangible changes made to their lives. That is a fact. You know, I'm proud that my ministry provides the social safety net for our most vulnerable Albertans, as I stated in all those facts.

Not only for that part; in Budget 2022 we also added \$34 million to help people who can get a job to get the job. Those of you know that when you have the ability to reach your full potential to get a job, it's more than just finance. Your mental health, everything else, your condition increases significantly.

Those are the facts on the table that I want to contribute to the debate in the House. You know, the NDP can be good at playing all the political cheap shots, but it remains a fact that when they were in government, they didn't accomplish what we did. That is the reason that I want to urge all members in this House to vote against this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, with a very short amount of time.

Ms Sigurdson: A very short time. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'd like to speak, obviously, in favour of this motion. Certainly, you know, this Conservative government likes to say that the best social program is a job. But guess what? What if you're retired, if you're a senior living in this province on a fixed income? That program is not available to you, and that program is not for all Albertans either.

There are a few things government does, and I'll just help the members understand one aspect of that. One aspect of that is actually lifting the floor, that you support people who are vulnerable through public programs, and – guess what? – that redistributes the wealth, and that helps people who are pretty vulnerable. It seems like this UCP government doesn't get that. It doesn't understand what social programs are all about.

We know that there are so many things that they have cut. This \$1 billion that they're getting extra by not indexing the income tax system is just one of the many, many, many things that this UCP government has done. I want to talk about the Alberta seniors' benefit. The fact that that is not indexed – they wilfully stepped in and pulled that back. We know that there's a 5.7 per cent increase in the cost of living, I mean, that's extraordinary, and it's very difficult for seniors to be able to manage that. But guess what else they've done? They cut grants in the seniors ministry. We used to have \$2 million going out to community agencies to support seniors in their community.

They say that they want seniors to stay in their communities, but they're stripping those community supports. Now it's only \$900,000, and – guess what? – they have \$118 million in the capital housing plan, which is like a drop in the bucket. Our government had \$1.2 billion. It's appalling how much the UCP has cut back so many programs. They cut the Seniors Advocate completely. That's \$1 million. They said that it's all in the Health Advocate, but – guess what? – I asked in estimates, and there's no report.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; however, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would like to invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to do just that.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have heard that the government's stated intention is to move forward with an extra \$500 a year in personal income tax for an average family. We have heard this government say that they are going to move forward with taking \$500 a year out of people's child benefit. We have heard this government commit just now that it is A-okay by them that Alberta

seniors' benefits will be reduced by \$800 a year over the life of their fiscal plan. They have just committed that they are fine with taking \$3,000 a year away from people who are on AISH benefits.

Now, that is their commitment, to continue to far more than nickel and dime average taxpayers, to take money away from folks who are getting child benefits or seniors' benefits. That's their position, and that's their commitment to the people of Alberta, but – you know what, Mr. Speaker? – we have also made a commitment to the people of Alberta. We will stop this pernicious and insidious – and any other big word that the Premier might want to use to make himself sound smart – attempt to take money out of people's pockets and raise their taxes. We will stop this tax on inflation. We will reindex the tax system. We will make sure that all benefits keep pace with inflation because it is the right thing to do. That's our commitment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. We've also committed to making sure that we've got action on electricity rates, on car insurance, on school fees, on student loan interest, on tuition, on property taxes, by ensuring that we've got the right balance that puts people first. Here's the thing. Albertans trust this side of the House to do those things, to put them first.

This vote this afternoon on this motion, when this government rejects our offer to make sure that we are not raising people's personal income tax by 500 bucks a year, taking \$500 a year out of their child benefit, when they reject our offer to take simple, concrete actions to defend people's pocketbooks and to ensure that we are taking action on cost of living, will just be another indicator that people cannot trust this UCP government. They cannot trust them to take action on affordability. They cannot trust them to manage the health care system. They cannot trust them to put in place a reasonable curriculum for K to 12 education. They cannot trust them to ensure that we are attracting new investment and diversification and keeping pace with a 21st-century economy.

They cannot trust them to even tell the truth about what they might do in their budget given that these budget documents that we have before the House don't even accurately represent inflation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have asked us to exercise a lot of caution in the ways that we use the words "truth" and "lying" or getting around the truth or misrepresenting the truth. The Member for Lethbridge-West clearly just said that these members can't be trusted – you know, I don't have the benefit of the Blues – certainly was insinuating that we cannot tell the truth, that we were lying on this side of the House. I know that's unparliamentary, and I ask that member – I know she was on a roll with whatever that was, but certainly it's unparliamentary, and I ask her to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that nothing could be further from a point of order, what the Deputy Government House Leader suggested. The Member for Lethbridge-West was saying

that Albertans can't trust this government, and she listed a number of things. We have said that before. It's not a point of order at all.

The Speaker: Well, I'm prepared to rule. You're correct in your assertion that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West did provide a number of reasons why you can't trust this government, but the problem here is that she also made specific reference to them not being able to tell the truth, which, if attributed directly to an individual inside the Assembly, is definitely unparliamentary. A case could be made that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West did use unparliamentary language when referring to them as members, so I would caution her so. I've provided much commentary on this particular language inside the Assembly, and I expect that she will govern herself accordingly.

Debate Continued

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance. I mean, where I was getting to is that the fact of the matter is that these budget documents that we have before the House currently do not accurately represent the inflationary expectations of the Bank of Canada, and certainly that inflation has reached a 30-year high at 5.7 per cent on an annualized basis. Nowhere do we find that accurately represented in these budget documents, showing again that this government would prefer not to talk about the cost of living and inflationary pressures on ordinary people.

I think that what we can expect them to do is continue to oppose efforts to make life more affordable for Albertans. No one is surprised by this anymore, that they are singularly focused on their own internal drama and not on the drama of the kitchen table, of trying to pay bills and get ahead. That, Mr. Speaker, is what the government of Alberta should be focused on, and that is our commitment on this side of the House going forward.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

<p> Eggen Feehan Loyola </p>	<p> Nielsen Phillips Sabir </p>	<p> Schmidt Sigurdson, L. Sweet </p>
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Against the motion:

<p> Copping Fir Frey Getson Hanson Horner Hunter Issik Jones LaGrange Lovely Luan </p>	<p> Madu McIver Nally Neudorf Nicolaides Orr Pon Rosin Rutherford Savage Sawhney Schow </p>	<p> Shandro Singh Stephan Toews Toor Turton van Dijken Walker Williams Wilson Yaseen </p>
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Totals: For – 9 Against – 35

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation on behalf of the Government House Leader.

Canadian Pacific Railway Service

- Mrs. Sawhney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
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.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon. As you are aware, on March 16, 2022, CP issued a lockout notice to those employees represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference while TCRC provided a strike notice to CP. This weekend a work stoppage began, and CP moved to complete a safe and structured shutdown of its train operations. Alberta businesses rely on rail transportation, including services offered by CP, to ship their goods throughout the province, to the United States, and through gateways such as the port of Vancouver. This could not come at a worse time. Supply chains have already been disrupted by the pandemic, floods in British Columbia, cold weather, rail service issues, illegal blockades, and port congestion.

As Minister of Transportation one of my duties is to serve as the current chair of the Western Transportation Advisory Council, or WESTAC. WESTAC members represent the private sector, government, and labour and work collectively to resolve the constraints and inefficiencies that undermine the performance of western Canada's supply chain and transportation sector. At our recent conference in December the discussions reflected a range of dynamic factors that are influencing the transportation and logistics sector. We discussed the wide recognition that the goods movement sector must rethink how things are done from the planning stages, which need to be bold and reflect a range of pressing implications around emerging technologies as well as a focus on resilience and risk management. Resilience requires planning for extreme weather events, multifaceted cyberattacks, and the security of goods or means of conveyance. To quote from the meeting report: "factoring shifts in global trade and the flow of goods, the complexity facing transportation today is unparalleled."

Another duty of mine was to recently co-chair a meeting of the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety. To quote from my remarks delivered at that council meeting, like other jurisdictions, the efficient movement of exports to other markets is a priority of the government of Alberta. As a landlocked province Alberta depends on well-functioning infrastructure, carriers, and logistics both inside and outside the province to move its exports and bring products to Albertans. A common theme is the resilience of Canada's transportation infrastructure to events such as severe weather. Recent flood and wildfire events in British Columbia have shown how vulnerable our supply chain can really be.

Now our Alberta businesses are faced with a labour disruption at CP, which will disrupt the movement of a broad range of goods and likely lead to increased costs for many Alberta businesses. I have already heard concerns from several sectors such as grain, livestock, forestry, fertilizer, and oil and gas regarding a work stoppage at CP. Here are just a few samples of what we have heard from our stakeholders on this situation.

4:10

From the Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition: we have ascertained that collectively, revenue losses would be in the range of \$498M in the first week of a work stoppage or lock-out, \$1.05B for 2 weeks, and by week three, \$1.56B. It is also worth pointing out that for every one week of strike or lock-out action, there is a four-week recovery period.

The effects of a work stoppage or lock-out will reach beyond CP's network to other railways, because it will preclude the normal interchange of traffic between CP and other railways that is essential to the operation of the national transportation system.

From Purolator:

Should a work stoppage of any kind occur, the fundamental supply chain driving the Canadian economy will suffer adverse effects that will significantly impact all Canadians and international partners who rely on our vital transportation systems.

From the Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada, who copied me on their letter to the federal government:

We want to underline the need for a solution to this situation to avert the serious consequences that this strike could have.

We respectfully ask that you pursue all avenues within your authority to help bring the talks between Teamsters Canada Rail Conference and CP to a rapid successful conclusion. This includes strongly encouraging the two parties to enter into voluntary binding arbitration.

And from the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association: last year's drought resulted in a significant lack of feed grain in western Canada. As such, cattle feeders are relying heavily this winter on feed supplies from the U.S. Multiple supply chain issues with transportation have reduced feed availability, and farmers have been managing their animals' needs on a day-to-day, train-by-train basis. There's no buffer in the system. If strike action occurs, feed supplies will run out in one or two weeks, causing a serious animal welfare issue.

The labour disruption at CP could result in the shutdown of production facilities, which would impact workers, the economy, and the supply and demand for Canadian products. From an export perspective for Alberta, a rail stoppage means disruption to the movement of oil by rail to refineries in the United States. Producers of oil, natural gas, and petrochemicals may have to curtail some production if they cannot ship by rail and do not have sufficient capacity to store products on-site. The CP Rail movement stoppage, if it continues, will cause significant port backlogs, with additional costs for the manufacturing and food sectors.

As much of Alberta's southern agricultural production is exclusively served by CP, this shutdown in service will negatively affect our agricultural producers. It would impact spring crop and fertilizer planning and have immediate adverse impacts on Alberta's cattle-feeding industry. Alberta's cattle-feeding industry is currently reliant on imported feed corn and dried distiller grains from the United States to provide daily rations to over 1 million head of cattle in Alberta's Feedlot Alley. CP is the sole rail transporter of U.S. feed corn and dried distiller grains into southern Alberta, and any disruption to delivery would have serious consequences for Alberta's cattle feeders. This would adversely affect western Canada animal feed supplies, which are severely limited following drought during the 2021 crop growing season.

The effects of a work stoppage will reach beyond CP's network to other railways due to the normal interchange of traffic between CP and other railways. In the Vancouver area only CP can perform the final delivery of traffic originating on CN's network to many of the terminals on the south shore of Burrard Inlet while only CN can perform the final delivery of traffic originating on CP's network to terminals located on the north shore.

We know that CP is a federally regulated railway, and the government of Canada has exclusive purview over federal labour relations between class 1 railroads, like CP, and railway workers. My ministry monitors any developments regarding our transportation network, including railways, to assess the severity of the situation and impacts on Alberta's businesses. In light of recent supply chain challenges and the impacts that a CP work stoppage will have on Alberta businesses, our government is advocating to the federal government to take action to minimize the impacts of this labour disruption at CP. The federal government can implement back-to-work legislation, as they have in the past. In 2021 a strike at the port of Montreal was stopped when the federal government passed back-to-work legislation days after the strike began.

It is my view that given a disruption of this magnitude stacked on an already stressed system, it is imperative that the CP work stoppage end quickly. That is why we are calling on Ottawa to intervene. To avoid further aggravating an already suffering supply chain, we ask that the federal government take immediate and effective measures to ensure that service on CP's critical rail network resumes as quickly as possible.

The government of Canada should immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service to ensure that Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. The government of Canada should also consider implementing back-to-work legislation to bring an immediate end to this work stoppage. Inaction will lead to negative economic consequences for Alberta and Canada while damaging Alberta and Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier to international customers.

I have sent a letter to my federal counterpart, Transport Minister Alghabra, and to Labour Minister O'Regan outlining our concerns. I know my colleague at agriculture, forestry and rural development has also sent a letter to Ottawa. Allow me to quote from my letter, Mr. Speaker.

Dear Ministers Alghabra and O'Regan:

I am writing to raise concerns about the potential labour disruption at Canadian Pacific Railway (CP). On March 16, 2022, CP issued a lock-out notice to those employees represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), while TCRC provided a strike notice to CP. A labour disruption could take place at 12:01 a.m. ET on March 20, 2022 if CP and TCRC cannot come to a negotiated agreement or agree to binding arbitration.

Alberta businesses rely on rail transportation, including services offered by CP, to ship their goods throughout the province, to the United States (US), and through gateways such as the Port of Vancouver. Supply chains have been disrupted by the pandemic, floods in British Columbia, cold weather, rail service issues, illegal blockades, and port congestion. Alberta is now faced with the potential labour disruption at CP, which could shut down CP's network and disrupt the movement of a broad range of goods, while leading to increased costs for many Alberta businesses.

Alberta has already heard concerns from several sectors such as grain, livestock, forestry, fertilizer, and oil and gas regarding the potential impact of a strike or lock-out at CP. A disruption of this magnitude,

as I had mentioned earlier and will emphasize once again, stacked on an already stressed system, would be severe.

This is also a critical time of the year for crop producers and fertilizer shortages resulting from a strike or lock-out would jeopardize primary production. A rail disruption would also further stress livestock producers who are relying on imported feed from the US, as a result of the drought conditions experienced this past summer. Any of these additional adverse impacts on feed supplies would, in a matter of days, result in significant animal welfare issues, affecting millions of heads of

cattle across western Canada. Crop and livestock production and the associated value-added processing is critical to Alberta and other provinces.

To avoid further aggravating an already suffering supply chain, we ask that the federal government take immediate and effective measures to ensure that service on CP's critical rail network resumes as quickly as possible, if a lock-out or strike were to occur. The Government of Canada should immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. Inaction will lead to negative economic consequences for Alberta and Canada while damaging Alberta's and Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier to international customers.

That is an excerpt from the letter that I had sent.

Our Premier, along with his provincial colleagues Premier Moe from Saskatchewan and Premier Stefanson from Manitoba, has also shared concerns on this matter with the Prime Minister.

Let me assure you and all Alberta producers and businesses that we will continue to pressure Ottawa and urge that they take the appropriate action to ensure that goods continue to move. This is too important for all those involved to let it just play out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 16 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this afternoon to add some comments around Government Motion 16 and what it's proposing that we advocate for as a province. You know, I guess I'll start with that I would like to really, sincerely believe that this motion is about protecting the supply chain. The problem is – and I guess I should even add that I'd like to even think that it's about protecting the workers, the unionized workers, that are there, but I have a hard time believing that. The reason is that members of the UCP have made very, very clear their views about unionized workers and unions, so I doubt this is about potentially protecting the workers.

The reason I call into question whether they're looking to protect the supply chains: I would like to remind members of the House that, quite honestly, there really hasn't been anything done by this government in terms of supply chains and securing those supply chains. I would bring attention to the failed response to keep goods and services and cattle and things like that moving across the border for 18 days over at Coutts this winter. As a matter of fact, we've even had members of the UCP cheering them on not only in this House but on location as well. So if there is such a concern about the supply chain, why then those actions, those words which would be counterproductive to that?

There have been other causes for concern around protecting the supply chains here. I would certainly bring forward the example of the meat-packing plant. During, you know, one of the heights of one of the waves of COVID we had a meat-packing plant shut down because appropriate steps weren't taken to protect those workers in that plant, which thus protected the supply chain. Again, just one example. Obviously, we saw that meat wasn't able to be produced, which rolls down to the farmers, their cattle, and whatnot.

Fair enough. I mean, we've seen some very, very unpredictable situations that have disrupted things during the pandemic: for farmers, you know, severe drought in Alberta – I think that was even mentioned by the minister in the opening comments – the floods in B.C. wiping out key transportation, not only rail but roads as well, thus making it even harder. But, again, you know, we didn't see any real, concrete actions by the government to try to mitigate

those situations, which is why I'm standing up here saying that I'm doubting the intentions of this motion and what they're saying they're trying to achieve here.

If you're truly wanting to protect the supply chains, you also need to protect the workers as well, hence why we're seeing some head-butting here going on between the two. But I will point out, though, Mr. Speaker, that we are in a position of a lockout, okay? The company has locked out the workers. I noticed in the comments from the minister very carefully dancing around using the words "work stoppage" or "lock-out." At the heart of this motion it's about bringing in or advocating to be brought in back-to-work legislation. When you look historically at what back-to-work legislation is, it's about forcing the worker back despite any concerns they have. I've never actually seen one back-to-work legislation forcing the company back to the table to relook at things.

I find this motion to be quite counterproductive. You know, we hear the words from the minister about how they want to see an amicable agreement between the two parties, but amicable for who? I think there's a better way that we could be wording this motion to try to encourage both sides to come to an agreement that not only is in the best interests of all of the producers and businesses in Alberta to be able to get their goods and services moved across the country, bring in supplies so they can continue to do their business, but at the same time we need to protect the workers. When you have workers that are injured on the job, that ultimately affects the supply chain. When you have workers that are tired, that ultimately will lead to supply chain issues because they're not getting the job done. It's like asking a person to run a mile and then right after that mile you ask them to run that mile again, but you're not giving them any extra time because they're tired.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's a better way to do that. I think we can improve the language that's in the motion. Therefore, I do have an amendment to present to you. I will pass that up and await your instructions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 16 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation" and substituting "call on Canadian Pacific Railway and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to reach a negotiated settlement urgently to resolve the contract dispute" and then (b) by striking out "any disruption or CP work stoppage" and substituting "further work stoppage."

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is about trying to encourage both sides. Again, just levelling back-to-work legislation: historically this is always about forcing the worker back despite any of the concerns they might have. Everybody might remember that we recently had a CN strike that was going on. The number one concern that I kept hearing every single time from those workers was safety. I know the track record for the government has been, shall we say, a little spotty with regard to treating Alberta workers' safety with a higher level of concern.

Honestly, I have no idea what it would be like to try to work around some of those trains and the things that are involved, but certainly some of the things that I heard are very big causes for concern. The number one, I think, thing that I heard was the number of hours sometimes workers are having to put in. Again, as you get tired, you start to make potentially mistakes. It's not like you woke up in the morning and looked in the mirror and said: well, let's see

how many mistakes I can make on the job and make CP or CN's life miserable. I doubt that that conversation takes place. The reality is that as you get tired, the decisions you make maybe aren't quite as good as if you were fresh. What we're hearing around some of the concerns that members of the teamsters are saying about their work site is safety. We all know, at the end of the day, that when you have too many workers off that are injured or just simply burned out, that will affect our supply chain. If you are truly trying to advocate to protect the supply chain, the first easy place you can start is with the workers and protecting their safety and their ability to perform their jobs.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I would certainly advocate to all members of this House that they accept this amendment, and hopefully we will see the supply chain protected. We do want to see Alberta businesses get access to their supplies, the materials they need to move their business, to move their materials across the country, providing services to not only Albertans but all of Canada. Just simply dropping legislation to force them back I don't think is the best way to go, but I'm certainly, you know, waiting to hear some of the debate that will occur. Again, I hope that members will accept this amendment in good faith. This is about protecting the supply chains. This is about protecting the workers, and they will both help each other in complement with that happening.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Decore has moved amendment A1. Is there anyone that would like to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. Honoured to rise and give a little clarity to the House regarding this amendment. I think it's important to know that some of what the member opposite just said is untrue, unfortunately. We are looking at strike action that was taken. This was not a lockout.

For a bit more colour, the TCRC took strike action unilaterally and prematurely in advance of the deadline, 1 p.m. after midnight Sunday, March 20, as per their strike notice. To be clear, CP did not initiate a lockout of its employees, as stated in the newly released issue by the TCRC. In fact, CP was still at the negotiating table in Calgary with the federally appointed mediators, where we have been since March 11, 2022 – these are their words – awaiting TCRC's response to CP's last offer presented at 8:45.

I think that with that being known by this House, I would just like us to vote against this and get back on Motion 16. Thanks.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this very important amendment. I want to start by saying that supply chains are important. It's important to have those supply chains open and moving efficiently. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If members would like to have private conversations – or perhaps I think it would be valuable for them to join in the debate following the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. That's the great thing about the Chamber; everyone has equal opportunity to bring their points to the Assembly. I just ask that they do it when they're on their feet and not seated in their chair.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has the call.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this important caution. How much time do I now have left?

The Speaker: Well, I didn't take any of your time, because the clock stopped. You have 13 minutes and 40 seconds.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I was talking about the importance of supply chains and how it's important to keep them moving in an efficient way. I think what we have seen from this government is that they tend to pick and choose what suits their political needs, and that becomes the issue of the day, and for what doesn't, then they don't do anything. They don't care about supply chains.

The case in point is that the Coutts border was blockaded for 21 days. There were many things within the purview of this government. There were many things they could have done to disperse those blockaders, who were illegally blockading Alberta's only 24/7 border point, yet I didn't see the Minister of Transportation write a letter advocating anything on that one. I didn't see the minister of agriculture writing a letter that that's our only border that is used by the agriculture industry for livestock and all those things. I didn't see any letter. Instead, what they were doing was cheering on those blockaders, and some of them participated in that blockade, went there three times. That's what they were doing with that important supply chain corridor when that was illegally blockaded by this government's supporters and friends. That was squarely within the jurisdiction of this government to handle.

Earlier the Member for Calgary-Buffalo told the Minister of Justice that there are protesters who are disrupting lives and businesses in the Beltline and that they've been doing it for a while now. The answer from this government is that, no, they can't do anything; it's within the jurisdiction of the city and city police and all that. Again, businesses are getting disrupted, lives are getting disrupted, but the government so far has chosen to do nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Now that they see this as an opportunity to play politics and please their base, they come out swinging that the federal government needs to start with the most heavy-handed tool and most unconstitutional tool to end this dispute. Just as a reminder, the Supreme Court of Canada, in the Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. versus British Columbia, 2007, decision, Supreme Court of Canada number 27, recognized that collective bargaining is a constitutionally protected right under section 2(d) of the Charter. Any suggestion that the government should start with violating that Charter right with back-to-work legislation is prima facie unconstitutional unless it can be protected under section 1 of the Charter. The government suggesting to another level of government to, I guess, intervene by breaching the Constitution, the highest law of this land, is not helpful.

This amendment recognizes that there are two parties, important parties, to this dispute. One is Canadian Pacific Railway, and I do recognize the importance of Canadian Pacific Railway, the role it plays in our economy, the role it plays in the Canadian economy. That's one of the key players in this dispute, and the second one is Teamsters Canada. They are exercising their right as the bargaining unit, their constitutionally protected right. What this amendment is doing is essentially calling on both the parties, who should be working together, to make sure that there are no disruptions in the supply chain. They should be bargaining in good faith. They should be talking to each other, getting back to the table to make sure that this dispute can be resolved without resorting to unconstitutional back-to-work legislation and all those things.

4:40

I don't think that we can support this government in advocating to the federal government to use unconstitutional means to resolve

this dispute. We need to stay in the Constitution, we need to protect our rights under the Constitution, and both parties at the table need to understand that they need to work together in the interest of all involved to urgently resolve this dispute. We need these rail lines open. We need them safe. We need them staffed with skilled workers who are well trained and who have a decent amount of sleep so that they can keep them safe. All they're asking for are safe working conditions.

I know that rail lines have served the Canadian economy. I know that rail workers have served Albertans and Canadians throughout this pandemic and helped fill our groceries, get fuel to our businesses, and take our grain and crops to market. During this time . . . [interjection] I think I will utter the word "no" so that they may understand. During this time we also know that CP made significant profits, and those profits represent the collective hard work of those workers who keep these trains running, and all that those workers are asking for are stable jobs, adequate rest time, decent pensions so that they work long term at these jobs and keep taking goods to market and keep things going.

I will urge all members of this House to first urge their government to take things seriously which are in their jurisdiction. For instance, if I still ask them to do anything about the Beltline protest, they will read me the entire Charter about how protest is listed in the Charter, and then they will read me another section from the MGA about how municipalities are a separate creation who have separate jurisdiction and how the municipalities have acted and created the Police Commission and how the Police Commission hires police and how far removed this provincial government is from anything to do with the Beltline even though there are many things that they can do.

When it suits them, Mr. Speaker, they might even pick up the phone and call the police chief to discuss their own tickets. That's how far they can go. But when it comes to issues facing Albertans, whether it's in Beltline, whether it's at the Coutts border, you won't see any action. You will see just dithering, and even in the letter they will write later on, they will try to kind of wash that away: no, no, that was something different we were writing. They'll even try to hide that letter. In this case now they're playing politics and asking the federal government to do something completely unconstitutional.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, largely because if the member was speaking to the main motion, I would be happy to provide as much leniency as possible; however, over the last 10 minutes or so he hasn't made very many references or even tied his remarks back into the fact that we're speaking to amendment A1, which was moved by his colleague from Edmonton-Decore, that speaks more specifically to a number of issues that are contained within the motion. I might encourage him. He may have other opportunities to speak to the main motion, but if he wants to speak to the amendment now, that would be much more appropriate.

Mr. Sabir: Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just trying to bring back my remarks. Why I think this amendment is important is, one, that it is in line with what's needed to be done, that there are two parties that need to be at the table. They need to take this issue seriously, and they need to bargain in good faith. And it takes out any suggestion that this motion was initially making, that the federal government should engage in any unconstitutional activity or behaviour like back-to-work legislation. It takes that out. That's why it's important.

It respects collective bargaining rights as recognized by the Constitution of Canada. I think playing politics doesn't help, but if we call on these parties who actually can do something about it, that

would be more helpful. That's why I'm urging all members of this House to support this amendment. This amendment, I guess, is the right call for the parties who are involved to get back to the bargaining table and settle this dispute so that our rail line can keep going and so that workers can have stable jobs, safe working conditions, adequate rest time, better pensions so they can keep those trains running.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that members will vote in favour of this amendment and not in favour of any unconstitutional, heavy-handed action from the federal government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1 to Government Motion 16 is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I welcome an opportunity to speak to amendment A1 of Government Motion 16. I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing forward this amendment. I think it's useful in a couple of ways. You know, I think it speaks to not just a change in wording but back to the first principle of why and how important it is for us to maintain the integrity of our rail system generally in Canada and CP Rail's system specifically.

We all know how important it is to move goods and services. We've seen different versions of disruptions in supply chains, really, all around the world. I think it should be a way by which we can learn lessons to improve the efficiency and the integrity of those transportation systems that support our supply chains not just in Canada but around the world.

Looking at CP specifically – and some knowledge I have of the CN line as well, which runs through my constituency and has its western Canada headquarters just right in my constituency as well, is that for quite a number of years now these rail lines have been running very hot. There's a lot of demand on those rail systems, and the companies, Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Rail lines, have just been continuing to expand and build their capacity, which is fine, but not if you're doing it without supporting the workers who actually run the system and the infrastructure that you are relying on.

4:50

From time to time when you see a labour dispute like this one – right? – I think it is a point in time to learn lessons about: what is the state of function of CP right now? They're doing very well. You can see that they're making record profits and so forth, but are they making sure that they are maintaining the integrity of that system? Key to the integrity of that system are the workers and the conditions in which they run and work from day to day.

Clearly, there's something wrong – right? – at this moment with CP and their relationship with those workers, who are integral to the functioning of the rail system, so I would suggest that the amendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore brought forward here is very key to make sure that the collective bargaining process that is being engaged right now between the management of CP and the 3,000 or more workers at CP that are being affected here is taken very seriously.

Different issues at the table: I'm not privy to all of what they are debating and negotiating for, but key elements of it are around safety and capacity. I know – it's probably similar to CP – that at CN they certainly have a shortage of workers in the field. They're constantly being called for more work and overtime and whatnot, and sometimes, as the workers will point out, that comes at the expense of safety and so forth. To have something like that being

negotiated is absolutely essential to make sure that the trains are running, that the trains are running on time and they're running safely.

You know, I think we all can agree here that we want those things to happen and that we all depend on those things to happen for moving goods and services that we produce here in the province of Alberta to their markets and to make sure that we're getting the goods and services delivered that we depend on from elsewhere in the country and indeed elsewhere in the world. At the heart of that right now are two parties that need to negotiate in good faith and negotiate very aggressively to come to a resolution.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first time that we've seen this kind of thing while in the Assembly with a rail line, a rail company. You know, indeed, we can see it happening from time to time across this country. What we do not need to play into is the notion that our rail companies in Canada are building as part of their business plan the expectation that they will be ordering their workers back to work through legislation. We don't want that to be their de facto business plan for dealing with labour issues in their company. If we allow that to happen, then, of course, those other issues that I talked about before – the safety, the integrity of the system, ensuring that you have adequate workers, that you're attracting workers and that they're being fairly compensated and being given a safe circumstance in which to work – all of those things can be compromised if there is somehow an expectation by one or the other party that there will be back-to-work legislation any time there's a labour problem in the company, right?

That is, I think, pretty useful and specific to this amendment, but I think it's useful and specific to the spirit of at least part of what I heard from the other side in regard to making sure that the trains are running as part of a way to maintain and to help to build our economy and recover. I think the amendment serves a very useful function, right? I believe that it definitely is something that we can all agree on, that we want the trains there, we want the system to be working, we want our goods and services to be brought and sold in markets and things that we purchase as well, and we want that to be safe and sustainable in the broadest possible way.

I find it interesting. As the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had just pointed out, you know, it's interesting to see this provincial government making comment on a national issue, which is fine. You can urge the national government to do this and that. I mean, it's perfectly fine. But the absence of any action in a similar disruption of transportation and systems in our Coutts border crossing, which resulted in millions of dollars of lost goods and services trading – right? – caused lots of disruption and indeed lots of confusion around the integrity of our road transportation system: that was something that this UCP government could have acted on. You know, I just want to point that out because, of course, we're dealing with something that we're urging another level of government to do, and in fact when we did have something that was within our purview, there was a failure to act by this same government. I mean, just pointing that out.

Maybe that will help the members on the government side to endorse and support this amendment to Government Motion 16. I would strongly urge them to do so. I think we've convinced most or all of our members of the Official Opposition, and maybe we can get the government to see the light as well.

Based on those comments, Mr. Speaker, I cede the floor and look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Speaker: On amendment A1 are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this amendment, which I think is a great contribution to a very thoughtful and concerning situation that we have here in the House. I welcome the introduction of it by the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I appreciate some of the comments of the minister when they made the introduction of the initial motion as well in that we are in a very serious time where our economy has been significantly affected by a number of larger issues. Clearly, we've been through two years of a pandemic, which has caused disruption in supply chains and as well in business progress and planning and so on. As a result, many businesses in the province of Alberta have been under a great deal of stress over the last number of years. That would include, you know, almost every business that relies on the transportation of goods, and I would think the vast majority do.

Certainly, for those that are involved in important fields to our economy such as agriculture, where the transportation of agricultural goods is absolutely critical not only to this year's success but for future years' success for farmers who need to sell this year's crop in order to get next year's in and so on, a disruption now, we know, in this field tends to have an effect that's not just simply about the immediate but can actually have a consequence over a period of time. Of course, manufacturing has a very similar kind of experience of disruption through the COVID time. That has been very problematic.

We also know that we've had disruptions because of protests, particularly at the Coutts border crossing in the province of Alberta. It was very unfortunate that at that time there was, you know, some decision being made by this government not to take action, and indeed it did not do so for weeks while we saw the supply chains significantly affected in this province. Unfortunately, of course, we also saw some members of this House actually actively participate in supportive activities around these kinds of disruptions to business in this province. The whole thing around the Coutts border crossing was very problematic, of course, because some of the explicit intention behind the border crossing could be simply described as seditious in the sense that they were actually asking for the Prime Minister of the country to be set aside outside of the democratic processes of this country. Unfortunately, there's at least a segment of that group that was willing to do so in an armed way, apparently gathering significant amounts of arms, ammunitions with what I understand was an intention to actually assault members of the RCMP and other police forces. So it was very concerning that we saw any kind of level of support for something that had those edges to it.

5:00

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Warner – Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hunter: Taber-Warner, Mr. Speaker. I raise a point of order under 23(h) and (g). The hon. member basically made allegations against myself as a member. Now, that would be considered as a point of order.

- But, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to you that 23(g) says:
- refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination
 - (i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence . . .

If the member is correct about what he just said, then this would be before a court, but it isn't correct. I've never been approached by the RCMP in this matter, and the member knows full well, as I've stated in this House and many times before, that I never took part in any illegal blockade. As the member knows, I was never there when the border was closed. I made it very clear in my press releases that I would not be there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the two parts that I've just stated here – 23(h), makes allegations against another member. If he's doing that, it's a point of order. However, if he is stating that there should be criminal charges involved, then it's 23(g). Either way, the hon. member should withdraw and apologize for these comments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't think that this is relevant. Certainly, the member was pointing out, you know, comparing and contrasting the rail stoppage and the stoppage of flow of commercial traffic on the road to the Coutts border crossing. He made no other allegations besides making, I think, quite an apt comparison between the two and contrast as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions.

You know, members, as I provided caution earlier to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall with respect to amendment A1, I think it's important that I provide some additional context on debate inside the Assembly. If we were debating a piece of legislation, a bill inside the Assembly, the Speaker is much more inclined to provide the widest swath possible, particularly at second reading, with respect to comments towards the bill. This is why, largely speaking, the Speaker is not interventionist in any nature with respect to relevance.

Already, earlier, I provided caution about speaking to the amendment, which seems to be a significant language change to the original government motion and nothing to do with what the hon. member was speaking about. Given that this is a government motion, in the strongest terms possible I will remind the member that his comments should be specifically relevant to the amendment.

In addition to the comments made by the Member for Taber-Warner, I would say this: with respect to the principle of sub judice – and sub judice is a very complex principle because it is when charges have been laid or the matter has been set down before a court. While I don't know specifics on this case, I think it's unlikely that the rule that the Member for Taber-Warner has risen on would apply in this case. So it is unlikely that sub judice would apply here. As such, that would not be a point of order with respect to the point of it being before the courts.

Having said that, I would provide some caution to the member and all members, in fact, when speaking about potential charges being laid or other matters of a criminal nature, that we all have a certain responsibility with respect to the judicial system and ways our comments inside the Chamber may or may not prejudice a judicial proceeding. We all have an incredible amount of privilege that comes with being a member, but that privilege doesn't mean it comes without responsibility. I would encourage the member to be cautious when referring to matters of a criminal nature that may or may not be before the court, and as such I'm sure he wouldn't want to prejudice a proceeding of the court.

Now, lastly, and perhaps my ruling is more robust than it needs to be, but with respect to making allegations of another member, your Speaker has provided a lot of comments on this issue just a

couple of weeks ago, when the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was speaking. This is a very complex matter that is very difficult to rule as a point of order or not because the member didn't specifically refer to any particular member inside the Assembly and more broadly made statements about the government.

Now, while I appreciate that there are not that many members of the government who may have attended, so it's possible to narrow that down and make that feel as though the member is making a specific allegation, we need to provide lots of latitude with respect to the freedom of speech inside the Assembly. I know that members of the government also like to make allegations about people who have attended protests or otherwise in the past, be they oil and gas pipeline protests or otherwise, so there is a natural tit-for-tat that sometimes happens in the Assembly. I think that it's important that, very clearly, the language did cause disorder today. While I'm not going to rule it as a point of order, I want to provide some additional caution to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford with respect to potentially making allegations about members of the Assembly.

I will find a point of order on relevance because the member hasn't been speaking to the amendment. We're not at second reading of a bill. He needs to remain focused on the amendment that's before the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your advice and direction; it was very complete today. I will move back, if I have perhaps wandered off a little, to the amendment itself and to the request in the amendment to take the concerns that have been expressed in this House by myself and others about the seriousness of this situation, particularly in the context that I was providing of other situations here in this province of a threat to supply chain issues and how important it is that we actually reach out to try and ensure that the well-being of all Alberta citizens, whether they be employers or workers or people who are just in one way or another taking in the advantages of having a good supply chain in order to create good work opportunities and the chances for people to earn good income in this province.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Because of the importance of all of this, I think that we should be asking exactly what it is that it says in this amendment, that we should be immediately asking for, in this case, the workers and the employer to get together and to resolve these issues and to resolve them in a way that actually deals with the underlying concerns that have been brought forward by the workers and the need for the businesses to maintain their business. At the same time the two things are not incompatible at all. Simply, it's a matter of the businesses ensuring that the work that the workers are doing is within scope, is done in a safe way, and that they are adequately compensated. Pretty simple, straightforward requests.

5:10

I believe that this employer certainly has demonstrated they have the ability to raise the funds in their work in order to be able to meet those needs quite adequately given the profits that they have brought in over the last number of years. As a result, we would certainly like to encourage that they sit down at the table with the resources that they clearly have and resolve this issue so as to not negatively affect other Albertans who are depending on that work to be done in order for them to be able to maintain their own work or their own business and so on.

The second part of the amendment speaks particularly to the fact that there already is a work stoppage that has been instituted, and we know that that work stoppage was instituted by the employer, that it isn't a strike at this point; it is a lockout, and therefore the only action that's been taken to actually interfere with our supply chain has been taken by the employer at this particular time. So I think it would be very important for the government to work with that employer to make a new decision to stop locking out the workers so that they can get back to the table, so that they can make an early resolution. I certainly hope, whatever happens in this case, that it is done quickly and is done peaceably, and I think that the role of the government is to ensure that or to request that and to facilitate that appropriate resolution.

You know, I think that the wording changes that are suggested in this amendment are very clear, and that is to call on Canadian Pacific Railway and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to reach a negotiated settlement urgently to resolve the contract dispute. That seems like a very good thing for a government to do, something that would benefit all of us, that would address the needs that were outlined by the minister initially, when the initial bill was introduced and as such would lead to a satisfactory resolution.

I'm concerned, on the other hand, that if we get into an antagonistic dispute where workers' rights are subverted through some kind of process of forcing them back to work against their constitutional right to assembly and to strike, which has been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada on numerous occasions, that would actually lead to an elongation of the problems in this contractual situation such that the workers, while being forced back to the work site, simply do not do the things that they would do to make things run quickly and, instead, would do things to make sure that the contract negotiations had to come back to the table by acting in a way that is slower, for example, than they might do otherwise or not engaging in necessary activities that are outside of their legal scope or things of that nature.

You actually might be exacerbating the problem by actually forcing the workers back in because you take away their right to govern their own work integrity. The only way that they can then respond is by changing the nature of the work that they actually engage in. There's nothing left to them. They can't negotiate in any other way. So what you find is that you have workers engaging in work slowdowns or refusing to do things they would normally naturally do even if it really wasn't part of the job because it facilitated the good functioning of the business. They would do it anyways because workers often tend to do more than they're actually paid for and more than they're asked to do just because they're part of a system and they know how to make it work and function well because they're there every day, but they can choose to stop doing all of that.

What we might have is an elongated conflict between employer and employee rather than an abbreviated one if the bill were allowed to pass without this amendment. So I think it's really important that we as a government seek to bring this to closure as quickly as we possibly can, that we should act with good integrity, respecting the laws of the land about the right to collective association and collective bargaining and the right to strike, and instead seek to become a partner with all of the people involved in this dispute, that we're absolving this in a good way with the resources that are clearly available in this situation, already inherent in the company and the union services, and bring all of those good-working, successful people together to come to a resolution that will bring us to a better place more quickly and with more long-term positive benefits. If we force people back into a work situation, the consequences could be years in the making, because they would be going back to work upset, angry, and having had none of their

concerns addressed. If we instead have them come back to the negotiating table and have those concerns addressed, then we know that the work will move forward in a positive way, and that's, of course, what I think everyone on both sides of the House would like to see in this particular situation.

In fact, in all labour situations that should be our ultimate goal, not, you know, to use the strong arm of the law to shove people back into a place they do not wish to be but to entice them back into that place by ensuring that their livelihood and the livelihood of all of their fellow citizens will be improved if they sit at the table, if they have good, open conversations with their employer and come to a satisfactory mutual resolution. Clearly, I can't see that we would seek any other kind of outcome beyond that.

I'm afraid the original motion, without this amendment, was actually moving in that direction, moving to twisting the arm, pushing people in a direction that is not going to be perceived by them as in their best interests and therefore would create the factors for underlying mistrust of both government and of the employer for a significant length of time. If we live in a culture where workers continually find they have to mistrust government, where they continually find they have to mistrust their employer, we certainly are going to find more disruptions or other mechanisms to lead to exactly the opposite outcome than the one that we desire.

I guess, in conclusion, I would like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing forward this resolution and suggest that the government actually be consistent and not interfere in this case beyond being a positive contribution. We certainly know that in the past they have not jumped in to protect the supply chain readily, and, as such, it would seem somewhat ironic if they chose to do it in this particular case. We really should try to be a bit more consistent as government in order to ensure that the citizens of this province, you know, understand what the rules are, feel that the rules will be applied appropriately, and are happy to be part of a process in which their concerns, their rights are recognized, are responded to, and it leads to a better outcome for all citizens in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Thank you. We are on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to join debate? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are on the main motion. Are there any – I see the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to be back on the original motion. I'm standing in support of Government Motion 16, very similar to what our industry is standing in front of the House of Commons right now asking for, back-to-work legislation to save their industry at a critical time. It's imperative that this House declare rail transport an essential service and that the back-to-work legislation is implemented to maintain the integrity of our supply chain. This isn't something that we jumped to, folks. We've been doing this for weeks. The Transportation minister, the Premier, we've been asking for binding arbitration. We've been asking anyone that'll listen, right up to the Prime Minister's office. This isn't something that was jumped at.

5:20

This is specifically important to the agriculture industry. The strike action – and it is strike action – by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference presents the most recent in a series of challenges faced

by the sector, and, simply put, it's one that we cannot afford. In the lead-up to the strike decision our ministry was in constant conversation with industry and our provincial and federal counterparts to determine the impacts of a strike action and to determine how to mitigate what we could. Our strategy has been to keep the channels of communication open, particularly across the prairie provinces, and to provide a unified response that best serves western producers, because we're feeling this here. We have the processing capacity, we have the feeding capacity on behalf of Saskatchewan, on behalf of Manitoba, but we feel it here intimately.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin by stating that the industry that will be hardest hit by the suspension of rail transport will be the fed cattle sector. This industry is currently reliant on imported feed corn from the United States to provide daily rations to over a million head of cattle in Alberta's Feedlot Alley. Alberta imports an average of 57,000 tonnes of U.S. corn and almost 11,000 tonnes of U.S. dried distiller grains each week. However, there's a projected 400 per cent increase in corn imports to Alberta and Saskatchewan in 2021-2022. This is the highest on record since '02-03 – it should be no surprise – the last substantial drought that the province saw. This massive reliance on U.S. imports is a consequence of the prolonged dry conditions and the extreme heat experienced in 2021, and that's why this isn't a business-as-usual situation; this is a critical, timely situation.

We know the drought severely depleted available feedstock in our province, crop yields fell far below historical averages, and of the limited quantities produced, the majority of product was graded moderate to good and therefore shipped out of our borders for mailing and export. This left Alberta producers with severely limited access to domestic feed-grade product, and in many cases international markets became the sole source to secure feed. To compound this issue, CP is the only rail transporter of U.S. feed corn into southern Alberta. This means that many feeders are not only reliant on feed imports but on CP Rail imports more specifically. Mr. Speaker, for many feeders the suspension of CP Rail transport means the elimination of their sole source of feed. This places many producers in dire straits, and it's why we must pass this motion, hopefully unanimously, as one body, to show our support for this industry.

For the benefit of the House, to give a little context on the immediacy of the situation, you know, an animal consumes an average of 24 pounds of grain each day along with silage and supplements. You can play with those numbers a little bit when you take into account corn instead of barley, but it's close. One railcar feeds an estimated 8,000 head for a single day. That's one day. This means that our province requires 900 to 1,000 trains per week to sustain current cattle populations. I rise today to make it abundantly clear that feed supplies will run out in an estimated one to two weeks as a result of a CP Rail suspension. Simply put, in the not-so-distant future we will not be able to feed livestock and will be faced with an animal welfare crisis as a result of the strike.

I was in Picture Butte two weeks ago speaking to feeders about this very thing, and a gentleman grabbed me by the collar and said: you gotta let 'em know this leads to bullets and backhoes; they have to understand that. So I hope that when we're talking about this in this House, no one is playing politics with this, no one wants an unfair deal for anybody. We need this to move ahead because it's critical. The emergent nature of this situation cannot be overstated, and it requires the immediate attention of all members in this Chamber. Given the immediacy of this issue our government, along with our counterparts in other prairie provinces, has been investigating potential solutions to make up for lost imports. As I mentioned previously, we need about 900 to 1,000 trains per week of feed to sustain current feeder populations.

Although freighting supplies in by road seems like an obvious alternative, we know that this is not a viable solution. It's estimated that 1,000 to 1,500 super-B trucks would be needed per week to replace the volume of feed grain currently being brought in by CP trains; however, we simply do not have anywhere near this capacity with respect to both vehicles and drivers to meet the demand for Alberta feedstock. There is a current and increasing trucker shortage, not lost on anyone in this House, not only in Alberta but across Canada. Trucking HR Canada estimates that 18,000 truck driver jobs will be vacant by this month, so we know that trucking commodities across the border does not provide an alternate solution to lost rail capacity.

Culling is the last resort in a feed crisis; however, in the event that the sector is driven to this outcome, current processing capacity presents a challenge. Meat processors are at or near capacity, and product deliveries are nearly one month behind schedule. Packer utilization rates were around 95 per cent in 2021 compared to 2015. The western Canadian slaughter reached 2 and a half million head in 2021, which represents an 8 per cent increase over 2020. The year-to-date 2022 federally inspected western Canadian cattle slaughter is running about 2 per cent higher in 2021, with 49,000 head slaughtered per week.

I'm telling you this because we have still not worked through the glut in the supply that came from the first COVID shutdowns in 2020. We're getting close, we're working through it, but we haven't. There's no more capacity to be taken up. We can't meet the capacity of a potential surge in processing demand as a result of culling procedures. Alberta does have a small advantage with over three-quarters of Canadian beef processing occurring in western Canada and the vast majority concentrated in Alberta, but because products cannot be exported through rail, we may face a major bottleneck at the processing site resulting in a backlog of fed cattle like we saw as a result of the pandemic.

While this strike threatens the cattle sector most significantly, it also impacts Alberta's crop producers. Grain shipments have been challenged this winter with British Columbia mainland disruptions, cold weather events, and illegal blockades. CP order fulfillment versus hopper car demand in Alberta remains poor, and service has not recovered following the B.C. mainland disruptions in November '21. As a result, crop producers were already facing rail issues prior to the strike. However, the demand for rail capacity in the crop sector is much smaller compared to the import needs of the cattle industry.

The 2021 drought decreased crop yields, and many producers held moderate to low carry-over crop inventory. For instance, yields of the major crops of spring wheat, canola, and barley were 37 per cent below the five-year average. Midway through the 2021-2022 crop year, producer deliveries of crop to licensed elevators and processors were down 30 per cent from a year ago and Canadian crop exports down by 40 per cent. As a result, the CP Rail strike has a smaller impact on crop exports and elevator stocks. The demand for rail capacity is lessened by reduced crop export quantities, but concerns remain around the import of necessary seeding inputs like chemical and fertilizer.

Mr. Speaker, our government has worked hard to stem the impacts of this strike. On March 4, 2022, I sent a letter to the Hon. Seamus O'Regan, federal Minister of Labour, raising concerns with the CP labour dispute. To be clear, Minister O'Regan is still held up in Calgary. He's saying all the right things and working hard, and we are honestly very hopeful that they can come to some kind of amicable solution quickly with his help. The letter highlighted the immediate adverse impacts a strike would have on Alberta, specifically on the cattle feeding sector. It also requested that Minister O'Regan take immediate steps to ensure that a solution can

be reached between CP and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, namely, at the time, to push both parties into binding arbitration, as was asked by industry. This would keep the trains rolling while bargaining continued.

The Minister of Transportation and I sent a joint letter to the federal Minister of Transportation regarding the CP labour dispute, and my deputy minister has raised these concerns at all the FPT deputy minister calls. We've met with our provincial counterparts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to discuss the impacts of the strike and outline potential supports, and of course we've maintained constant communication with industry groups throughout the process to keep track of their concerns and to forecast emerging issues.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of feeding the world. This is a matter of protecting a very important industry. We must ensure that the agricultural supply chains remain intact in order to keep food on the shelves and on our tables. The ongoing geopolitical crisis in Ukraine points to the fragility of the global food system. Ukraine has about 18 million metric tons of wheat stocks available for export, but with Black Sea ports closed, these stocks won't reach the market.

The CP strike and rail movement stoppage will likely increase port backlogs, creating additional costs for manufacturing and food sectors, impact spring crop planning, and have immediate adverse impacts on Alberta's cattle feeding industry. More generally, it can mean empty shelves and tables in the near future. It could also mean devastation to our fed cattle sector, immediate animal welfare considerations, and it has the potential to delay much-needed relief for livestock producers by continuing to back up the system.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I support the motion to urge the government of Canada to declare rail transport an essential service. This is not an unconstitutional ask, as the opposition are claiming. Declare them an essential service, and implement back-to-work legislation to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. Or put them in binding arbitration. Just get it done. Much like the industry, we just need to see this happen.

To the members of this House, I urge you to do the same and to support Alberta's agriculture industry. You know, I had hoped that this would be a positive thing that the whole House could get behind, especially in lieu of the fact that our industry is in front of the House of Commons right now. I do not know if it's abstract when 95 per cent of your caucus lives within the Anthony Henday and you can't understand the seriousness of this, but when I listen to what I've heard for the last hour, I cannot believe what I've heard.

We need to support the industry. Of course, the union and the company are going to get through this and represent the needs of the workers. Nobody is saying that that shouldn't happen, but this needs to stop. It's too big, and it needs to stop. This isn't about a union or a company; this is about Alberta. I hope we can all support this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to, you know, ignore maybe some of the comments that the minister just made. I appreciate that he's frustrated. Generally speaking, though, I would like to think that both sides of this House work together quite well when it comes to the industry and that we're able to have a discussion that actually gets us to a place of mutual respect.

My concerns – and I hope I get as much latitude as the minister did when it comes to speaking to this motion, because I do have some thoughts and some concerns. Part of it is that I have serious concerns about the supply chain in this province. I have serious concerns about the supply chain across the whole nation and the impact that it's had on our economy since COVID, since the floods of B.C., since the droughts, all of those things. I've had serious concerns. I've had concerns to the point where even during estimates I asked the Minister of Transportation what the plan was going to be, because we knew this was coming. I asked the minister what the plan was going to be, because we knew this was coming. I asked the Minister of Finance the very same question, "What was the plan?" because we knew this was coming.

In January the freight car shortage that was occurring across the nation was the lowest since 2014. We were having issues in January getting product to market, and when this was brought up, when this was discussed with the government, the response I got was silence. There was no plan being created, being discussed to address these very issues that we're talking about today.

The fact is that the government is talking about this today only because of the fact that it will be something that will have a serious impact on the industry, but the reality of it is that we've had serious impacts on our supply chain for the industry for months that this government has refused to address.

The Coultts blockade would be an example of that. We had trucks that were stopped at the border with beef products, with feed that couldn't get across the border. The government didn't react to the extent that they are reacting right now to address those very stoppages. We have honey sitting in the Vancouver harbour right now that can't be exported because we can't seem to get our supply chain working internationally.

There is a serious issue with our supply chain in this province, and there is a serious issue with the supply chain across the whole country – I don't disagree – but when I asked the government to come up with a plan to look at how we're going to address these issues, why is today all of a sudden the day where it becomes the problem when we've seen the problem growing over months and months and months and yet silence?

So, again, I'll be clear what I asked the government for earlier. I sent a letter to the Minister of Transportation, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, as well as to the chair of our rural stewardship committee asking for us to come together and have a conversation about what is going on with our supply chain. Let's look at our strengths, let's look at our weaknesses, and let's look at how we get our product to market. That is collaboration. That is trying to work across the aisle. That is not about trying to abandon an industry, like the minister just likes to say.

What it is is that we should have been having this conversation a long time ago, and the problem is that our economy is taking a hit because of the lack of action that has been taken in regard to this. This is not a new issue. Rail capacity is not a new issue. But what it is becoming is the government trying to turn it into a labour issue, and it's not a labour issue. It is the fact that we can't get our product to market. It's the fact that we can't import and export the way that we should because we're a landlocked province that relies on these supply chains, and when they don't work, we're in trouble. Maybe let's focus on that. Let's create a solution to our supply chain. Let's be proactive, create a plan, and look at doing it. Let's work together on that. I have no problem with that.

I have a problem with this motion because of the fact that this is about federal jurisdiction. The province has a responsibility to fix some things in the province, and they've been silent on fixing

anything in the province. That's the fundamental issue with this. If the government wanted to put something forward today that read something along the lines of, "We have a supply chain issue in Alberta; as the government we should take some action because we're concerned about what's going on in the agriculture industry; we're concerned about what's going on in our pulp industry because they can't get their product to market," absolutely, let's have that conversation. But that's not what this is about. This is about injecting into a labour dispute.

Let's do something proactive, government. Let's do something proactive, ministers, and come up with a plan on how to actually get our imports and our exports happening, something that was identified months and months and months ago. I've been talking about feed shortages for months. I've been talking about rail access issues for months. I've been talking about the Coutts blockade and the long-term impacts it was going to have on our economy for months. Why is today the day? Today is the day because the government all of a sudden wants to make it not about their responsibility but about someone else's. Well, here's the reality. It is the government's responsibility to get our product to market in Alberta. Government, do your job. That's all I have left to say.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I enjoyed the exposé that the member across the way put forward, we also have to recognize that today is the day because today is the day that there is a lockout and strike action happening on our rail which is stopping the line at this time. We have to recognize that a lot of these other elements that the member is speaking towards are being worked on on a continual basis, but today is the day that we are discussing a work stoppage on a critical piece of infrastructure, on rail line. We have a limited amount of rail capacity to begin with, and now we have a work stoppage. We've just come out of a COVID pandemic, where we talked about essential workers and essential service workers. Whether they're health workers, whether they're farmers and transport agencies, whether they're in manufacturing, these are all essential services.

But the difference with this situation is that we have limited capacity to begin with. We have limited opportunity to actually continue with the movement of goods within this country when one out of the two line companies has essentially stopped working, and when that happens, we need to take action and try and find a solution that will be able to get the products moving and find the ability to actually have those conversations on how to rectify the work-stoppage issues.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of this motion. Motion 16 states:

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.

5:40

Now, if we have a work stoppage, a labour dispute, a strike, a lockout in an area of our economy where people that are in need, where stakeholders that are in need will be able to find the service elsewhere, then I would suggest we're not needing to – even though it is an essential service item, if they're able to find their service elsewhere, then we need to allow that to play itself out. In this instance we have an industry that is 10 days, two weeks away from essentially not being able to feed their animals. I have constituents that have contacted me that have 10 days' worth of storage of feed in their bins. We just finished a drought season on the prairies, the

first one since 2003. In 2003 we brought in 2.9 billion tonnes of corn to try and keep our livestock fed and keep that industry alive and going well.

But here we are. We're currently bringing in 10, 11 train car units, 100 cars every week. We are in critical need here, and if we don't get this resolved, we have an animal welfare situation. It's incumbent on legislators, in this case federal legislators, who oversee the rail networks, to recognize that this is an essential service. Without this service, animals on the prairies here are going to go without. We need to get on top of that.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we are not proposing something that would be unconstitutional to the point where we're inhibiting or putting in place unsafe work conditions. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall says: well, it's all about safety; that's all they're asking, just safe workplaces. Well, that's not all of what they're asking, and I don't believe that this motion is putting these workers into an unsafe condition. We need to recognize that without the federal government stepping up to the plate and identifying this as a critical situation, we are going to be having a very difficult time trying to, as an agricultural industry, keep the livestock in good condition and keep that industry healthy and strong going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I know there are other members that would like to speak. I will close my comments and essentially say that I am in full support of Motion 16. I do believe it's necessary to act on this quickly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll try to keep this really brief. Again, the minister did a great job of it. My colleague from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock pointed out the criticality of why this motion is important, of getting the two parties together. It's not about crushing a labour negotiation or anything else. We're really critical in the supply chain. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Manning also for her comments and words and concerns on the supply chain. I'm just going to quickly read the motion into the record here.

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 Member for Edmonton-Manning is one of the folks across the aisle that I have a ton of respect for. She researches her items. She's very passionate about what she does. We may not always be in alignment, but on the criticality of the supply chain, absolutely. What I've been sitting on here, Member – through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member – is that about two years ago, two and a half, three years ago, I was talking about Motion 501, which was economic corridors tying into our supply chains. Subsequent to that, I received a mandate letter from the Premier, and it was also part of the Fair Deal Panel item. I was named in that document as well to lead a task force to look at just this. The mandate letter stated to look at all of the rail infrastructure within the province of Alberta, see what we have to build out, talk about the interconnectivity, and then look at economic corridors, supply chains specifically.

My task force has completed that action. I'm looking very forward to that becoming public. I'm looking very forward to working with the ministers and the member opposite for Edmonton-Manning. Once it's out officially, I'd love to have a coffee with you and go over the items because what you're hitting is spot on. We have congestion in supply chains coming into the port of Los

Angeles, Long Beach, which then cascades into the effect in the Vancouver port, which cascades then into the Prince Rupert port, of how we can't get materials out.

The across-the-border disputes. Yeah, the border crossings for the trucking are critical, but we've got options on the trucking. Again, when we're looking at supply with the Coutts border specifically, that is a pinprick compared to what we're talking about with CP Rail, the volumes that they can move. The minister of agriculture is stating something that's very direct from the ag industry: you've got two weeks, and then it's bullets and backhoes. You literally are going to be starving animals. With the drought conditions and everything else – I know the member agrees with the criticality of this – that's what we're talking about.

I would propose that our supply chain is so darn fragile. That was why we put in the critical infrastructure act, you know, in pre-COVID days, because we already saw that things were getting backed up. With the perfect storm of the logistics issues that I've just spoken about of the supply chain in the west coast, of not only our country but down in the States, with the drought conditions going back and forth, with our feed supplies being bought up on this side of the border, that have already moved south of the border to feed their stock, we're at a critical stage. It's no longer nice just to have an oligarchy or two groups, two rail companies, that have this. We need to really expand our rail infrastructure and our logistics and our supply chain or the wheels come off this wagon. The reason why everyone is now in violent agreement on this is because the perfect storm that we've been predicting for three years has come to roost. This is the issue.

Members opposite, we can debate this back and forth, but I think we're in the same place. The wording and the nuances on it: this isn't about crushing labour. We want to make sure they're there. The one that jumps off the page for me most is declaring that it is critical infrastructure and it is essential service. Mr. Speaker, through you to the other members, I encourage you to vote in favour of this motion. We really need to get things back on the wagon here because it's all fallen apart. Two weeks: tickety-tock, clock's ticking.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [An electronic device sounded] I think we've got a little interruption of music there.

Hon. members, we are on the main motion, Motion 16. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to preface my position on this motion by stating to the House that I have several Canadian Pacific employees living in my constituency of Lethbridge-East, and the CP Kipp yard is a major hub just outside of my riding. I need to assure the House that I'm not taking a negotiated side here. A work stoppage seems inevitable as multiple reports state that if the employees did not strike, they would have been locked out. I would like to think that we are all united in this Chamber, and if what I've heard over the past few minutes is true, when I say I'm hopeful to see a speedy and satisfactory resolution to this dispute, we would all be in agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I am on the side of Albertan consumers. Our supply chain, as has been fully stated here this afternoon, has been negatively impacted for the better part of two years because of the pandemic and other international issues. We are already experiencing inflation that our country has not seen in over three decades. We saw some empty shelves in grocery stores following the massive flooding in B.C. late last year. We all know that Alberta

is landlocked, so without our economic corridors, how else will people be able to get their food? R and R, roads and rail, are the main ways we get goods to and from our province.

I want to also discuss my concerns on how this affects the agricultural industry. The minister of agriculture and forestry has very clearly shared many of these points already. Seeding season is almost here. Most fertilizers ship by rail, and about 75 per cent of fertilizer and livestock feed is transported mostly by train. Given that we saw one of the worst droughts in our province last year and given that having a strong growing season is essential in our long-term economic survival, for many of our farmers this year we need to get this addressed. Grain is mostly moved by rail, which could lead to an increase in prices of items like bread and flour. As you know, CP also operates in the United States, and this work stoppage is starting to affect shipments to and from our largest trading partner. I am concerned about how this will affect Alberta as a reliable business partner at this time.

According to the Retail Council of Canada 89 per cent of small businesses are feeling the effects of supply chain challenges. The council cites retail, manufacturing, and construction as the hardest hit industries due to these disruptions. I think everyone in this House knows several people who are employed in these sectors if not more. The council says that approximately 30 per cent of businesses have already seen their costs increased by 20 per cent due to supply chain issues. I think we all need to take a moment to think about who inevitably pays for those increases, the final consumer.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech on Government Motion 16, I won't take a side in terms of the CP management or the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference union. However, I do agree that rail is an essential service for many of the reasons I stated earlier in my remarks and of those of other members on both sides of the aisle in this Chamber.

Many of the CP employees call my constituency or Lethbridge city or southern Alberta home, and I fully respect the right to collectively bargain and, hopefully, come up with a new agreement that satisfies both sides. I value the critical role that CP conductors, engineers, yard workers, and others play in keeping our supply chain moving and so many Albertans and Canadians safe in the process. I can't comment on the issues that have led CP and the union to this point because I'm not at the bargaining table. Again, what I do support is a quick resolution to this dispute.

In all reality, Mr. Speaker, when there's a strike or lockout, neither side wins. CP loses freight revenue and employees lose wages. However, the ones that stand to lose the most are Albertans and Canadians who are already dealing with increased fuel costs, the staggering effects of inflation, among other things, that are currently stressing household budgets, many directly related to policies of the federal Liberal government and their decisions, including the coming increase of the carbon tax this April 1. I'm glad to hear that sides are still talking, and I pray for a speedy resolution to this unfortunate situation and hope that everyone will put their best foot forward to make sure that we can come to a resolution that doesn't further negatively impact any constituencies in my riding or across Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for acknowledging me here today. I'll be quick in my comments. I do want to set the record

straight for one of the things that was said by the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. She said that because she hadn't heard about what was being done, nothing was being done. Now, that hon. member knows full well, as she has been on the government side and on the opposition side, that just because the opposition doesn't know what's going on, it doesn't mean that things aren't going on.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler has addressed this issue. The Transportation minister has also addressed this issue, letting the Chamber know and also all Albertans know that this has been top of mind for a long time. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has also stated that, you know, he has been doing some really good work in terms of corridors and the importance of supply chains for three years now. That goes to show that this has not gone unheeded and that the members have been working at this diligently.

I will say that – I'm very much in favour of this motion, just to say that on the record, Mr. Speaker – I'm very much concerned that CP and CN have monopolies within their areas, which makes it extremely important to make sure that they're running. They are an essential service to so many of our products in this province. For us to say that it's not an essential service, I don't understand that kind of reasoning.

The other point that I wanted to make is that the approach that we are taking to this is going to have a devastating effect if we don't get this right, Mr. Speaker, on so many Albertans that have done so much to keep Alberta going. Our ranchers, feedlots: they need to have this work. We hope that the hon. members from the NDP caucus will support us in asking our federal colleagues to make sure that we get this right.

The federal government has a responsibility for interprovincial and international transportation. For the hon. members to say that we should have been doing something about that – I heard them argue earlier on in the day, saying that it's not our jurisdiction to go into what the federal government is doing. Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. The reality is that it is their responsibility. All we can do is ask them, beg them on bended knee to please make sure that they get this right because there is no way – if we don't get this right, then our ranchers and our feedlot operators aren't going to survive this. This is a five-alarm fire. There's certainly the importance of getting it done now versus in the future. We can't overstate that.

The other point that I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, is that there have been allegations made by the hon. members about the Coutts border. I will remind them that, once again, I do not believe in the approach of doing something illegally. I'm a lawmaker, not a lawbreaker. I think that it's extremely important to make sure that the members know that at no time did I engage in any illegal activity at the Coutts border. That is very important. This was in my riding, and it was important for me to be able to go down and to meet with the people there to make sure that they were safe, make sure that they were not breaking the law, and if they were breaking the law, to tell them not to break the law, which is what I did. I stated that in my media statement as well. I met with the council down there. I did go down three times, as the members have stated, but those three times I didn't go down there to do anything illegal. I went down there to be able to try to be able to resolve the situation as best we could.

It's important to be able to get our product back and forth through that border. That is the only 24/7 border crossing that we have. That

is the only place where we can actually send live cattle and live swine through. In order for us to be able to actually get that border going – 14 days without having it open or intermittently throughout that was very disruptive to my constituents. I dealt with that in speaking with many of the people in my riding and the Member for Cardston-Siksika's riding to the north part of Lethbridge there. It is an area that is well known for feedlots. They call it Feedlot Alley. To state that we didn't care about that: absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. We did care about it, we do care about it, and we want to make sure that that commerce is flowing adequately.

Now, I do want to state also that in terms of our approach here all we can do is make a government motion. We cannot tell the federal government what to do, nor could we tell the federal RCMP what to do at the border. They have their jurisdictions, and as frustrating as it was down there to be able to see this play out the way that it did – every day was gut wrenching for myself and many of the colleagues that I spoke with.

Mr. Speaker, this goal of ours, in order to be able to implore the federal government to do what they need to do to be able to get that CP Rail going again, is absolutely critical, and I hope that all members of this House will make sure that they support this important motion to be clear to our federal counterparts, the federal Liberals, that this has to happen, that this has to happen now. We cannot equivocate on this, and we cannot be slow on our movement on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. government deputy whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hearing both sides of the argument today and the wide range of discussion, I think we just need to remember that our agricultural industry is in dire need, including our ranchers. In listening to the president of the Cattlemen's Association just on CHED the other day, he was talking about the fact that they're getting corn out of Iowa and that that is the feed they're depending on. It can't come by truck. The volumes that they need have to come by rail. We're going to have a very serious problem in a very short amount of time with the ability to be able to feed cattle and to keep them safe, keep them going. They can't just go and be processed. You can only do so many head of cattle every day, so that is not an option that you can just turn to. Euthanizing them would be the humane thing to do if you can't feed them. I think we need to look at this in the broader situation that we have.

Mr. Schow: It's an animal welfare crisis.

Mr. Rutherford: It's an animal welfare crisis. Very well put, Cardston-Siksika.

I think that we need to understand that the amount of stress people have been under in the last few years, the supply chain issues, the world conflict that we have . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont. However, the time is 6 o'clock, and we are now adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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