



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, March 22, 2022

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Speaker: I see the chief government whip has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Culture to move second reading of Bill 3, the Special Days Act.

We all know the importance of recognizing special anniversaries or occasions in our lives. They serve as opportunities to come together with ones that we love, celebrate the achievements we have made, or make new traditions that strengthen our families. The same is true for many special days, weeks, and months that Albertans recognize together. They unite people, and right now we need to find ways to find joy and work together, whether it's the anniversary date the first Ukrainians arrived in Alberta, which we celebrate on Ukrainian Canadian Heritage Day, or Month of the Artist, which celebrates creative work and artists in the province. Alberta's government has recognized these types of days through ongoing proclamations, one-time declarations, or through passing legislation. Proclamations, declarations, and acts have been used as ad hoc solutions depending on the significance of the date. This has caused confusion for Albertans and within the government as well.

Bill 3, the Special Days Act, proposes a simple, standardized way to establish dates in perpetuity. Ministers will be able to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial orders. All dates recognized this way will be tracked on a centralized web page. Dates that have been previously proclaimed or created through legislation will also be listed online. Not only will this help reduce confusion and duplicate requests; it will also help more Albertans learn about the cultures, causes, and histories behind each date. Dates that are only recognized once will be recognized through ministerial statements.

There are some requirements for dates to be officially designated by the government of Alberta. Dates must be submitted by groups, not individuals. They must also follow the guidelines that have always applied to these types of requests. The special days, weeks, months, or years must be directly connected to the province of Alberta. They must also be nonpartisan, not offensive, and adhere to the principles of the Alberta human rights code.

This legislation will help foster more cultural awareness, celebrate Alberta's diversity, and inspire people to take a stand on important issues. I hope that all members, on both sides of this House, will support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members – sorry. Were you about to say . . .

Ms Issik: I was going to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Perfect.

Hon. members, the hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women and chief government whip on behalf of the Minister of

Culture has moved second reading of Bill 3, the Special Days Act, and has also moved that that debate be adjourned.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the Appropriation Act, 2022? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I think this is my first opportunity to speak to the Appropriation Act, 2022, which I believe was tabled last night. It definitely is one of the overarching government bills as it relates to the budget, the no-help budget that's been presented in this Assembly.

I will say that I think when we all saw the fortunate increases – and it's complicated. Obviously, I'm very grateful as an Albertan that the resources we have have hit a new, very high price that appears to be sustaining for at least a bit. And, obviously, there are complicating emotional factors when we think about the people in Ukraine and the horrific situation there as they continue to fight to defend their land and their right to self-government, self-determination, because, of course, the global price of oil has been impacted by this horrific conflict.

The price of oil, of course, the oil here in the province of Alberta – we all own the natural resources that we benefit from here in the province of Alberta. That is something that every single one of us as residents of this province has a sense of ownership over and a right to ownership, not just a sense. We are the owners. We are the stewards of the riches that we have here in the province of Alberta. And we, of course, have a responsibility to ensure that we harness those resources in a sustainable way that brings full benefit and maximum economic opportunities to the people of Alberta, including the benefits that are created through good, full-time jobs, not just in the extraction but also in opportunities where we do upgrade here locally and, of course, all of the additional products that can be created from waste products that are related to those natural resources as well.

We are here today considering a budget that is impacted by global factors significantly when it comes to the revenue side. I am grateful that we have additional revenue in this province for the first time in a number of years because of the extremely successful price in oil right now that we are experiencing. When I think back on other governments and having lived in Alberta my whole life – I did spend three summers in Toronto, but the remainder of my life has been right here in Alberta. When I think about all of the lessons that we've learned or hopefully have learned about – you probably all remember the bumper stickers, at least those of you who have lived here for more than a few years, the bumper stickers about, you know: please, God, give us another boom; we promise not to waste it this time.

An Hon. Member: That's not quite the words.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Maybe that's the G-rated version, but that's how I paraphrase it. Happy to be corrected on the record later by my colleagues.

When I think about the opportunities that I think that bumper sticker was speaking to, one of the biggest ones was an opportunity to invest in a diversified economy. Certainly, we made a number of inroads in a number of sectors, particularly tech sectors, during the

four years that we had to govern in this province. The current government, today's government, has an opportunity to extend those. Unfortunately, they cancelled a number of the different programs that we had in place to support economic diversification, but the good news is that some of them are coming back. Some of them are even coming back through the budget that we're here considering tonight.

I really wish that we had more of a focus on taking this opportunity we have right now through this boom and investing that and making sure that we have strong jobs in the oil and gas sector; strong jobs in the offshoots from that, including hydrogen; strong jobs in the manufacturing sector; strong jobs in tech and AI; strong jobs in the public service; strong jobs in health care and education; strong jobs in renewables; and, of course, the list goes on. I want every kid who goes to school in Alberta to see themselves living their full lives here, to see themselves as creating a long-term, permanent path for them and their families to be successful here at home. No matter what their personal interests are, their political ideation, their values are, I want them to see themselves here for the long term.

Far too many young people have been leaving Alberta for a number of reasons, I am sure. One that many talk to me about, especially recently, in the last year or so, is the cost of a postsecondary education in this province. It has gone from being one of the most affordable places, because we brought in a cap on tuition and we funded postsecondary for population growth and inflation when we were in government to make sure that we could keep those tuition rates more affordable – we were one of the most affordable in the country. That is no longer the case here in Alberta as tuition has continued to be jacked up over and over and over again by the current government.

Another one is employment opportunities. There are many Albertans who don't see themselves feeling success and finding success here in the long term. We saw recently a scientifically validated report, from a survey of teachers in the province of Alberta, that shows about a third of Alberta teachers, a third – if you think about your child's school, a third of the teachers in that school – planning on either not teaching next year or moving to another province to teach next year. If we're to think back just one or two budget cycles, to earlier in the pandemic, when we talked about the need to provide more supports to students here in the province of Alberta, when we talked about the benefits of reducing class size, the government would say: well, where can we possibly find all these teachers to hire in order to reduce class sizes? But they sure don't seem to have a problem right now with chasing teachers out of the province or out of the profession. That should be a massive reality check for every Albertan who thinks, "Well, it's bad, but it's not that bad," because it is already that bad, and it is only going to keep getting worse if we continue to look to the current government to guide public education in this province.

7:40

The truth is that the UCP can't be trusted with public education. They can't be trusted to work in partnership with teachers. One of the first things they did when they came in – and this, of course, relates to Bill 7, Appropriation Act, 2022, Mr. Speaker, because it's about where the government chooses to put its money, and where you put your money reflects what your values are as well, of course. One of the first things they did was tear up the memorandum of understanding, the agreement that was reached between the Education minister of the day and the teachers of the province when it comes to creating the curriculum that guides the education system, that puts the requirements in for instruction, and the legal

obligations that teachers have to share and instill and to support students in their learning, in reaching curricular outcomes.

When they tore that up, what they said to teachers at that moment and what continues to be the case through action is that this isn't a partnership. There are employers and employees, and the government thought that the government knew better and that teachers would not be partners in creating the bones of the curriculum to ensure that all students had an opportunity to be successful.

That maybe wasn't a budget issue, but then shortly thereafter the government decided that teachers' pensions were going to be the next thing on the chopping block. I don't know what the obsession is that specifically this Premier and a number of Conservative governments have with attacking public-sector pensions, but it is so disrespectful to people who have rightfully negotiated and planned and invested and deferred their payment – those are their wages being put into a retirement savings plan to benefit those who retire from the profession.

They were taken to court, because that's what teachers had to do, and the government lost, so that's on pause for now, thank goodness, but again we see an intention to tear up an agreement, a long-standing agreement between teachers and their employer, the province, because the government feels that they know best. The courts had to say: "No, you don't. You don't get to do that."

That's where we're at in those couple of decisions. Then, of course, we see in this budget in black and white – and the minister will only talk about one year. They won't talk about actually looking back the three years this government has been already in a leadership position in this province, but in the tables as part of the fiscal plan there are tabs and numbers for certificated and noncertificated staff. If you look at the adjustments that the government made to the certificated staff number for teachers – that means teachers in the province of Alberta – they show that it isn't going down this year, but what they did is that they put an adjustment to show that it went down significantly last year, and they just didn't tell anybody about it in the budget. Then if you go to the year before, you see that it went down that year, too.

So what you actually look at when you look back three years is that the difference, between when the NDP was in government and today with the UCP in government, is about a thousand teachers fewer working in Alberta classrooms. That's in the budget. That's the Appropriation Act we're being asked to ratify in this place.

So the government continues to say, "Oh, no, no; teachers are great," but all of their actions show that they are cutting teachers, they are tearing up agreements around involving them and making decisions about the curriculum, they are going after their pensions and lost in court, so thank goodness for that, but why should teachers have to take the government to court to be able to defend their own earnings that they're deferring for their retirement? Well, it's because clearly this current government, today's government, can't be trusted with education, and they can't be trusted to work with educators.

Those are a couple of the points I want to make as the Appropriation Act relates to education on the operational side. There are other significant issues on operations. Actually, I will touch on a few others. Insurance, as I'm sure all members of this place have heard from their constituents and their stakeholders – I'm sure school boards have reached out to many of the MLAs in this place; many have reached out to me – has gone up and up and up under the UCP. For school divisions that own a number of school buildings, sometimes a few dozen, sometimes more than 200, having your insurance on all of those assets go up cuts into the amount of money that is available to support student learning

because you have to pay your insurance. You can't operate without having insurance.

By failing to actually properly regulate the insurance industry and provide stability for schools and for students, the government is taking money out of classrooms because that money needs to be spent on insurance for buildings or insurance for school buses, fuel for school buses. There's a variety of different systems here in Alberta. I know the minister of children likes to talk about how unique Alberta is in the child care sector because we have public, nonprofit, and private, and it's essentially the same – it is absolutely the same – in transportation for schools as well. We have some school authorities that run their own transportation system. When their fuel costs and their insurance costs and their staffing costs go up, they see that and eat that immediately in terms of their budget.

Then we have some that work through outside contractors. I will tell you that there are some contractors who are losing money every day right now because they signed an agreement one, two, or three years ago with the school authority to provide transportation services for that school, and then their costs have gone up significantly because the government has lifted caps on insurance, and they've also seen increased costs with their insurance and with their fuel. There are a number of contractors who are losing money right now and are at the point where they either have to decide to take their buses off the road or go back to the school authority to plead for a top-up so that they can afford to keep operating, or they're going to have to continue to eat significant losses. Then, of course, they will have to negotiate them into the next year. What kind of government thinks it's okay to have the transportation of children from their home to their school, a right to education, a right that I hope all members of this place share, at risk because the government continues to fail to properly fund for transportation?

Now, the minister will say: we launched a task force. That's true; there was a task force to review student transportation. It submitted its report well over a year ago to the minister, and the minister will probably say: see, there was an increase to the transportation budget. There was. It's, in transportation, about the equivalent of population growth and inflation if inflation were only population growth and inflation, but what it actually is, as we've rightfully pointed out in this place over and over again: increased cost of fuel far exceeds the cost of inflation; increased cost of insurance far exceeds the cost of inflation. This 4 per cent increase is far from sufficient to cover the massive cost that right now contractors and school boards are eating. When I say, "eating," that means they're taking money again out of the classroom to pay for those additional costs to get kids to and from school.

When the minister says, "Well, there can't possibly be fewer teachers because we gave zeros last year," well, zeros when you're dealing with an increased population and increased inflationary costs as well as, let's absolutely mention, the increased educational needs that students are facing everywhere in this province – the last few years have been very difficult for Alberta families, and instead of stepping up and saying, "You know what? You're a mom with a disabled child; we're going to make sure that your child gets as much support and nurturing right now as possible," one of the first things the government did during COVID was fire more than 20,000 educational assistants who were dedicated to work with those students. The member is right to be outraged and disappointed in the actions of the government. The member is right to be upset and outraged. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Deputy Government House Leader will come to order. I've made a lot of comments about having conversations with other members who are also seated in the

Assembly. I'd encourage him to join the debate, not debate from his chair.

7:50

Ms Hoffman: One of the first things that happened, Mr. Speaker, was that the government chose to lay off more than 20,000 educational workers, and that included bus drivers. Just a few days earlier, when we were asking about school nutrition programs and hungry children who weren't going to be able to be fed at school, the minister decided to talk about bus drivers in southern Alberta who were delivering food hampers to families in need, what a great thing that those bus drivers were doing. They also got their pink slips. They got laid off. Educational assistants who are dedicated to work with disabled children got laid off.

Oh, and all of this at the same time the government has cut the supports for PUF, which is specific program unit funding dedicated to three-, four-, and five-year-olds – or at least it was three-, four-, and five-year-olds – who have measurable delays. All of the research shows that if you invest that money in the early years – and I am sure that the Minister of Children's Services is well aware that investment in the early years pays significant dividends and that particularly if you catch kids up on those areas of deficit when they're the preschool ages – three, four, and five – and get them ready for an even start in grade 1, their educational attainment tracks much more consistently with students who were assessed at three years old as having no delays.

Part of the rush now that the government gave through the budget process was: "Well, we don't have as many supports when they turn six, so that's not fair to the kid that turns six, that when they were five, they had more supports. Therefore, we'll get rid of those supports a year earlier. Therefore, we'll take the supports away when they turn five instead of taking them away when they turn six." Totally counter to what all of the research shows. Totally counter to all of the lived experience that those kids have been through.

Also, I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we've been living through the pandemic chaos through this current government continuing to have children and their families and the staff who work with them have to react last minute to closures, being shifted online, being sent back in person. There are kids who are three, four, and now five who haven't had the level of PUF intervention that they should be entitled to, that the research shows will make a huge difference to their learning outcomes, their earning potential, their ability to contribute back to the broader economy. They have been deprived because of the chaos caused under the current government's leadership when it comes to schools. They were deprived of full supports for the year that they were three. They were deprived of full supports for the year that they were four because of the response to COVID, and now that they're five, they don't get the funding that they were once entitled to. That is something that is shameful.

Again, I started the conversation by talking about how fortunate we are that we have additional revenue in this budget, significantly increased revenue because of the price of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, and how those resources belong to every single Albertan. The fact that here we have three-, four-, and five-year-olds continuing to make massive sacrifices, sacrifices to their self-esteem, to their ability to be successful in school, to their ability to be successful in terms of their earning potential, their ability to go on to postsecondary and the world of work as equal partners in the world of work and the fact that the government now, with all of this additional revenue, refuses to go back on some of the most cruel cuts they've made to vulnerable

children, I think, is – I was going to say embarrassing – shameful, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022, is before the Assembly at second reading. Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this for the first time in second reading and to my colleague the Education critic, who spent a great deal of time talking about her disappointment with regard to the appropriation of monies or the lack of monies going into the Education expense and capital investment lines. This piece of legislation, of course, that appropriates funds for Budget 2022: we have it before us, and that codifies the government's agenda. I would just like to go through some of the difficulties, the disagreements that I have with various ministries and their appropriations, starting on page 4.

The first one – and it hasn't been talked about a great deal yet – is Advanced Education. Of course, postsecondary education is critical for our future leaders, and without it we as a province don't really get the best out of the young minds that are growing up in this province and aren't able to attract more people for postsecondary education if we don't have quality educational institutions. What I'm disappointed in, of course, in this \$2.5 billion for expense and the low amount of capital investment and then the financial transactions, which is the on-lending to institutions through the Finance department, is – well, on the on-lending piece now those institutions are going to be paying half a per cent to .75 per cent on top of what the government of Alberta is able to get, bonds or being able to attract money into Alberta. That's an additional cost, and it never was there before, Mr. Speaker. This government has decided to charge for the on-lending of monies to both advanced education institutions as well as municipalities as well as health authorities as well as airport authorities. That's a cost that will make life more expensive, and it already is getting quite expensive.

Back to advanced education. Of course, we know that tuitions are going up. We've seen some incredible raises to the actual cost of education. Some of those are more than 50 per cent of what they were last year. That is a problem when you look at people going through a four- or six- or eight-year program and getting out of that program with tens and tens of thousands of dollars in debt. As well, now they'll have more of that. We put a great deal of time and energy as a government into capping tuition fees, and students appreciated that. Universities appreciated the fact that they could be competitive, that they weren't at the top of the pack. Now, very much so, they're getting to be in some courses priced out of the market for attracting students.

The next one I want to talk about briefly. I'll skip over Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development for a second and go to Children's Services. Just over \$2 billion in expenses and some smaller amount in capital investments. The things that aren't in this that disappoint me are – well, it is in there, but it was far too long in taking place, and that's the child care agreement. We know that it took several months of delay before that was brought into this province for parents. It's still at a point where parents were having to pay pretty high amounts for their child care, their daycare for their young ones. This government seemed to be bickering back and forth with the federal government instead of doing what other provinces did, signed on and took part. [interjection] No, Thank you. No. Thank you. Instead of what other provinces did: quickly signed on to that program and got those monies to parents. That is unfortunate that that's taken place.

Truth and reconciliation is another area that hasn't been given enough time and attention in this file. The Indigenous youth who

are part of the care of the province of Alberta need additional supports, and unfortunately we're not seeing that in this budget to the extent that it needs to be for Children's Services.

8:00

The next one is Community and Social Services. There's an expense line of about \$4 billion. You know, my colleagues on this side were very proud of the fact that we indexed income support programs and made that something to be really, really proud of in this province. Other provinces are doing that now, but we were one of the first ones to get that done and to backdate financial supports to people on income support programs that would reflect the indexing of each year. The fact that it was taken away and that it is only kind of mused about by this government is a total disappointment to me.

There's FCSS under this file as well, I believe, Mr. Speaker. We were the government that brought that up to \$100 million back in I think 2016, perhaps, well, probably 2016. We increased it from \$77 million, that was set in place by the previous PC government for a long, long time. I was going to say dog's years, but it was a long time, and it hadn't improved. FCSS dollars are one of the best investments this government can make in communities through nonprofits and charities, because there's no profit motive, of course, taken off that \$100 million to the people who are managing that money. It's leveraged up in the community by at least 20 per cent, and many municipalities or counties put far more than that in because they believe in the power of their volunteers. They believe in the opportunity to address the preventative social services needs of their communities, and the fact that this budget line under Community and Social Services has not taken the opportunity to increase this particular budget line of FCSS is another failure of this government.

Ms Hoffman: Can I intervene?

Member Ceci: Sure.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, for the opportunity to intervene. When the member was talking about FCSS, I was reflecting on the excellent work that Meals on Wheels provides. Most recently I had the opportunity to thank the executive director here in Edmonton, Liz Tondou, who is retiring after 20 years in the role of executive director for Meals on Wheels, something that has seen a significant increase, particularly during the last two years, about a 40 per cent increase to the demand that they have to feed, primarily seniors, who are stuck at home and trying to be as safe as possible.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I wonder if he could talk about that their only funding comes from FCSS and about the importance of FCSS as it relates to feeding hungry seniors or others throughout the community. I think that the services they provide are fundamental to keeping people safe during, especially, the last few years but moving forward as well. I would welcome an opportunity to hear more about that from the member.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thank you for the intervention.

Of course, operational funding is what they might use their FCSS dollars for, to pay for their staff. They get a lot of donations, probably of foodstuffs, and FCSS is the grease that makes many of these community organizations work on a regular basis. Brown bagging for kids was mentioned by someone in the House either today or yesterday, and of course for that, providing lunches for kids in schools, FCSS is very helpful because it provides a small

stipend for volunteers, to support volunteers, or even for staff so that they're not totally taking out of their pockets all the time.

I just want to flip over and talk about Culture and Status of Women for a second. CFEP, I believe, is under Culture and Status of Women, and I did see where it was suspended for a couple of years here, and now I think it's coming back under this budget. That's a good thing, but the fact that it's probably coming back at the same amount of money as it was two years ago, when it was cut, really leaves those organizations and the communities that depend on CFEP for ongoing support dollars out in the cold. Many have struggled, many have closed, and the fact that CFEP dollars come in at the same amount – again, it's one of the best kinds of investment you can make because it's leveraged up in the community.

My colleague the critic for Education talked a great deal about the challenges, the difficulties, the problems with the Education budget that's before us: \$5 billion in the expense line and about half a million in capital investment and then on-lending. Frankly, there are too few schools started in this province. There needs to be more investment in K to 12 schools, and we're hearing that. I know that there are many advocates in the Calgary area public system that are looking for schools on the west side of town, and the fact that this budget leaves that part of the city out in the cold again is a tragedy.

As my colleague was saying, there are too few educational supports in schools, and the fact that we're not seeing more money put in the expense line so that school boards can do that hiring is an oversight of major proportions. The educational assistants, the teachers, the supports for young people in schools are not there in this budget, haven't been there under the support of this government. It's another problem that needs to get rectified in subsequent budgets and may not get rectified until a subsequent government is in place.

The war room, under Energy, is the next one. I'm looking at that, and I know that the war room costs of \$30 million a year, or \$82,000 a day, could be redeployed and hire a great number of educational assistants. I think \$82,000 would probably cover salary and benefits for one educational assistant in one school board location somewhere in the province. The fact that we're wasting 365 educational assistants every year because the war room is still there is a tragedy, in my view.

The Environment and Parks expense line is just over half a billion dollars. The fact that some of those – sorry. I'll just back up. In the Environment and Parks area there are a couple of areas that, really, are unfortunate that they're in this budget. One of them is the Kananaskis pass fee, that is being collected from all users in Kananaskis – or from the users that pay the fee in Kananaskis; I guess that is a better way to say it. The fact that Peter Lougheed set that park up for all Albertans and now there is a fee to access that park is a disappointment not only to me but to lots of Albertans who are not happy with that. The fact that more isn't done to regulate OHVs under this Environment and Parks budget is also an oversight. That seems to be a preference for OHV users and the total opposite for people who have no impact on the environment, which is hikers and campers, well, hikers, for sure, in Kananaskis.

Going on to Health, we see that there's a major expense line there, of course. It's our biggest budget line, at over \$22 billion. The difficulties that I have with the Health budget are the fact that EMS – in listening to people at both RMA and AM in the previous two weeks, they were talking regularly and in an unsatisfied way about EMS in their communities and the fact that they see that system as broken. I'll have more to say later.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Appropriation Act, Bill 7, is for debate, and I see the hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the member opposite wasn't interested in taking an intervention, but I do have some points of clarification that I would like to make. I do want to talk a little bit about this budget and the importance I think it has for Alberta families, families like mine. It's part of the reason why I chose to run in the first place. You know you're a fiscal conservative when you tear up during a budget speech when the Finance minister says that we've balanced the budget for the first time in eight years and only the second time in 14. Obviously, the members opposite have a hard time understanding what that is all about. Our approach was not: borrow, tax, spend. It was to bring down our spending in line with other comparable provinces while still maintaining our investments to support those most vulnerable.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's also about growing the economy. It's positive that we're seeing more investment every day, more jobs every day, again, quite the opposite of the record of the members opposite. I'm happy to remind them: 180,000 jobs lost, chased, in fact, out of this province during those four years. Yet we are seeing 130,000 jobs created last year, in a pandemic, and thousands and thousands of jobs already, a number of thousands of jobs, this year alone.

I also want to talk a little bit about Children's Services. Our budget was obviously increased greatly, partially because of the agreement that we signed with the federal government to support early learning and child care. I do want to talk about that a little bit because, Mr. Speaker, I heard the member opposite say: "You know, they should have signed faster. They took too long. They fought too hard." Why is that a confusing concept? It's because fighting for Albertans means listening to them and pushing back when Ottawa tries to impose their ideology on Albertans. I know that's a tough one for the members opposite.

I mean, today we saw again, obviously, the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa and the commitment to support continued growth in nonprofit and public spaces, Mr. Speaker. What is one of the things we fought for in that early learning and child care deal? It was to support private operators, private operators that are largely female entrepreneurs in every single corner of this province, women oftentimes who stepped up and said: "With the economy growing, with the jobs boom, I'm going to help out my neighbours. I'm going to start a child care centre." We believe in that type of entrepreneurial spirit. In fact, I truly believe that that is what grew Alberta.

I am curious to know. What I was hoping to ask the member opposite is that given that private operators were completely left out of their pilot program, given that we heard from a number of operators who said, "Under the NDP's plan we would have to change ourselves into nonprofits" – we value their contributions. We value the spaces they create, the innovation they bring, the high-quality child care that they offer Alberta families, and we know that they are needed. In fact, we got the federal government to agree to that in our plan. I believe the wording was something like: we will continue to rely on the creativity and innovation of the private sector to continue to step up and meet the needs of Alberta parents.

We're going to do that, but, you know, obviously, what we hear from the members opposite: sign faster. Just like they did, right? "Sign on the dotted line. Don't listen to Albertans. Sell out to Justin Trudeau." Sure, Mr. Speaker. We know what they did. We know their record. That's certainly not something we're interested in. I was really hoping to be able to ask the member opposite if that's, in fact, what they support, selling out to Justin Trudeau.

I think that now we're at the Notley-Singh-Trudeau alliance. Is that where we are?

An Hon. Member: You can't say names.

Ms Schulz: Oh, sorry. Mr. Speaker, I apologize, and I withdraw. I apologize and withdraw.

But, you know, we do have this alliance that we see, obviously, the NDP-Trudeau alliance, alive and well.

One of the things that we are absolutely not going to take advice from the members opposite on is, you know, how best to represent those views of Albertans. We will fight for Albertans. We will never apologize for that, Mr. Speaker. We take their feedback, and we use it to develop the programs that we're going to implement. I think that that's what we see in here.

I also wanted to talk a little bit – and, obviously, this deal is good news for Alberta parents. The feedback we have been hearing, Mr. Speaker, is so positive. Why? Because instead of focusing on ideology, we thought: who are we here to represent? Ultimately, for me, that is hard-working parents right across this province of Alberta. We put them first.

We were not one of the first provinces to sign that agreement with the federal government. No; that is true. We took the time to fight, to get a fair deal, a deal that worked for Alberta parents. But in rolling out those dollars, we were, in fact, one of the first two provinces to roll affordability dollars out to parents. Why? Because we put parents first. Ahead of ideology, ahead of any agenda, we put parents first, because we want them to be able to take advantage of postsecondary opportunities, training, retraining, reskilling so that they can take part in this new economy. We know we have labour shortages that we're about to face, and we want parents to be able to access postsecondary or to just jump right in and take advantage of the thousands of jobs that we're seeing created here every day with the amazing investment we're seeing in Alberta.

Now, child care is obviously something that matters a lot to me as a working parent of two young kids, but I also want to talk a little bit about child intervention. I do think, Mr. Speaker, it is rich to hear the members opposite, or that member, specifically, address the child intervention budget. I do believe that at the time that the members opposite were removed from this side of the House to their new seats on that side of the House, that member opposite was, in fact, the Finance minister, the Finance minister who, even after an all-party panel on child intervention, left child intervention underfunded. You know what they said? "Okay. Great. We're headed into an election. Well, we don't need to really worry about that, so let's leave it to chance." That is irresponsible. It's dangerous.

When we came into these seats, it's something that we take very seriously. It's something that my colleagues on this side of the House talked a lot about, the importance of supporting the most vulnerable children and families in this province. So not only did we fund their encumbrance, all those expenses that they didn't budget for, they didn't invest in – we did that – then we budgeted for that in each and every year after that. I know that sometimes it's hard to remember what happened a few years back, but given that the member opposite was, in fact, the Finance minister, I did want to remind him of his record in that area.

Mr. Speaker, once again, this is an area that I am really passionate about. This budget is very good news, not only for working parents but for vulnerable Albertans. We also maintained our investments in prevention and early intervention services. Instead of just continuing to fund things that had been funded because they've always been funded that way, we redesigned our network of family resource networks. It was new. It started in April 2020. None of us anticipated a pandemic when we undertook transformational change, but we continued to fund \$63 million to support this really purpose-built network of community organizations that offer a wide range of support services for families and for kids right across this province.

Just as we committed to doing when we made these changes – I know, obviously, the members opposite made all sorts of accusations about what that was going to look like, but ultimately it was what people were asking for. It's what families were asking for. It was what our community partners offering these services – they were asking for this, so we said: look, we're going to do this. And once again, as opposed to government knows best, we made sure we listened to those community partners. We designed this program with them in mind, and then we saved some money, saying: "Hey, you know what? Sometimes when governments roll out a new program there are things that we miss or areas that were underrepresented or gaps that we see in the system, and it's our responsibility to step up and address those gaps." And we're happy to do that.

These are all things that are funded in this budget, Budget 2022, a budget that is balanced, Mr. Speaker, that brings our spending in line with other provinces and continues to drive economic growth and also invests in those most vulnerable in our province. I'm happy to correct the record on those issues, and I would be very happy at some point if we could get answers from the members opposite on some of those issues.

The Speaker: I'm just going to go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View as we try to go back and forth, but that will be followed by the Member for Calgary-East.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to rise and speak today to Bill 7, which is the budget, because, well, I actually think the budget is probably one of the single most important things we do in this place.

It's interesting. I was reminded recently by social media that it was almost exactly seven years ago that I was nominated to run as a candidate for the NDP. That, of course, takes me back to the reasons that I wanted to run in the first place. Those are primarily issues which are extremely well represented in this budget. One of them is to combat the myth of trickle-down economics, that was pervasive under previous governments, under this current government. It's extremely problematic, and I think there's a lot of evidence against it, so I think it's very much worth discussing.

8:20

Another was early intervention. Early intervention saves money, and the way that Conservative parties generally balance budgets is by cutting things like early intervention.

Another, of course, was to combat bad arguments. You know, Mr. Speaker, this is an ideal moment to rise because that argument that went before me was among the worst I have ever heard: all rhetoric, zero argument, no facts, no evidence, bluster over substance. It was an argument that is, well, the perfect example of exactly what I got into government to fight against, people who say a lot of words with no substance behind them and no facts to support them.

I am thrilled to rise at this moment and be able to defend all of those values. Right now we're dealing with the Appropriation Act, 2022. That's the budget, this government's no-help budget, which represents no help for families. This government in this budget has received a massive windfall. Massive. The price of oil is up, up, up, and that's good for Alberta, Mr. Speaker – don't get me wrong – but let's not pretend that it has anything to do with the members opposite that this budget is balanced.

In addition, we stand here in a time when Alberta families are struggling probably more than they have in 30 years, and this government has nothing to offer them, nothing at all, nothing to

combat the costs that they themselves have driven up. So let's talk about those costs.

Property taxes. Now, the members opposite love to say: we don't control property taxes. Except, here's the thing. Municipalities receive funding through the government. I'll speak to the example I know best, which is to say police funding. This government has downloaded police costs and cut police funding on every municipality, so those municipalities have a choice. They can reduce services or they can raise taxes, and that is the choice that this government has forced onto them. So it is this government raising those property taxes and particularly in the instance, Mr. Speaker, of rural municipalities, where they have downloaded literally hundreds of millions of dollars. This government loves to crow about how they funded more police. They didn't fund a thing. They handed that bill to the municipalities of this province.

This government has also raised taxes on families, to the tune of \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] It's true: \$1 billion. There you go. And this is through what they used to refer to as sneaky, pernicious, all sorts of nasty adjectives, which is, of course, their tendency, as we saw with the member who spoke before me. They used to refer to it that way, and now it's the thing that they're doing. They called it sneaky, they called it pernicious, they called it a backdoor tax grab, and now it's the very thing that they're doing. They are raising those taxes on families.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, one of the things they are definitely eroding through inflation is the child tax benefit. Under the NDP government child poverty was cut in half. We cut child poverty in half, and that was largely through the child tax benefit. These folks are working to take that away, and it will reverse the trend, and that is a problem. It is a problem that everyone in this province should be concerned about.

They've also raised tuition, making it harder for average people to go to school to get the education that they need. They've increased interest on tuition, and this, Mr. Speaker, is a particularly interesting one. One of the oddities of public finance is that by raising the interest on student loans, they essentially made money appear, because that's how the accounting works. When they raised the interest on student loans, because it's projected forward through time, it essentially makes sort of more money appear in the budget. Now, obviously, that's standard accounting practice, that's fine, but it's just one more way this budget misrepresents to Albertans.

Another way worth discussing is education. This government will tell you they haven't cut education, but tens of thousands of new students have entered the school system, and they will enter a school system with a thousand fewer teachers. So that's tens of thousands more students, a thousand fewer teachers. That sounds like a cut to me. I mean, if each student gets fewer . . . [interjection] No, thanks. If each student gets less, then I think we wind up with a cut, and that is, to me, extremely problematic.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing fewer teachers and fewer actual physical classrooms. So as all these students are entering the system, in Calgary, where I live, over the entire term of this government we get one public school and one Catholic school. That is not nearly enough to accommodate the number of students who are coming into the system. It's incredibly problematic, and when we cut public education, it impacts those who may come from a background that is less wealthy but deserve just as much of a chance.

That's why cuts to public education, like the ones under this government, bother me so much, because public education is an equalizer. It means that regardless of where you came from or how much money your parents had, you are given an equal chance to succeed. When we cut public education, then those students don't

have the same chance to succeed, and, worse still, it essentially hides costs that will occur in the future.

There is an enormous amount of evidence. You can actually predict based on elementary school literacy rates your prison populations. There is an enormous amount of evidence demonstrating that investment in early child care, in early learning, in elementary school, in supporting students to have their learning needs met so that they have the opportunity to access that education will save more money in the justice system than it costs. What this government is doing is appearing to save money by taking that money from future generations, forcing those costs onto people 20 years from now. That is incredibly problematic.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

In addition, we see a budget that offers virtually nothing in the way of help for families. I would be remiss if I did not mention this Premier's promise to provide a natural gas rebate to Albertans. A promise to provide a natural gas rebate. They introduced the program; it's fake. There isn't even a line item in the budget. It doesn't apply now, it doesn't apply until next winter, and it only applies if those rates go up 30 per cent from where they are now. Now families are struggling. Families are struggling with the rates now, but this government doesn't think it's a problem unless they go up 30 per cent more. That's no help. It's unlikely that this will ever apply to anyone.

Also on the get lasts: health care. At the beginning of the pandemic we saw this government take off on a war with doctors, and then there was a war with nurses. Now they're attacking other specialties: respiratory therapists, social workers, people who have helped take care of their fellow Albertans through this pandemic. This is incredibly problematic. All of this, it appears, is under the guise of wanting privatization, again, something which – there's rhetoric to say that it saves money; it never actually does. There are enormous amounts of evidence. In fact, of all the studies that have been performed on this, you can't find a single high-quality, methodologically correct study that indicates that adding a private tier improves health care unless the total investment, so the total amount invested in health care, increases. And then it's not the fact that there's a private tier; it's the increase in investment that changes it, which is – I mean, we already know that's the case. You put more money into health care, you get better health care. So that's not really a surprise. This is another incredibly problematic part of this budget.

8:30

Essentially, my complaint about this budget is that it creates a less equal society. It gives more to those who have more. It takes more from those who have less. It cuts public education and makes it harder for those who start with less to get ahead. It cuts public health care, creating an Americanized two-tier system, that we know is, well, generally damaging to everyone but particularly to those who don't come from a wealthy background. It also continues this government's sort of general trend to privilege general tax cuts that help existing companies over targeted programs that help start-ups in newer industries. That's problematic as well.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It's also worth mentioning – I mean, there are many things, many things in this budget, but it's always worth mentioning the war room, which continues to be a nontransparent waste of money. We recently discovered it's not subject to FOIP, which, of course, will come as no surprise to the members opposite because it was always designed to hide money from the public. It was always designed to take the public's money and send it somewhere where there was no

oversight, where the government can spend it without anybody watching what they spend it on or anybody knowing what they spent it on. So that's incredibly problematic.

Yeah. I guess, to sum up, my issue with this budget is that it continues to create less equality. It continues to push forward a situation in which income inequality becomes worse, and it continues to make it more difficult for those who were born to less privilege to achieve. Why? Because they have less access to public education. They have less access to early learning supports like PUF funding. They have less access to EAs in classrooms if they need it. If they choose to go to university, they have more tuition to pay. They have more interest to pay on the debt from their tuition. Their parents may find themselves in a position where they're paying exorbitantly for costs and unable to save for that education. This compounds the inequality problem, and honestly, Mr. Speaker, it's to the point where I almost feel like that is the object of the exercise. It almost feels like, at this point, it can't all . . .

Ms Hoffman: It's a feature, not a bug.

Ms Ganley: It's a feature, not a bug.

It's a feature for this government that inequality becomes worse, that people who are born with less are less able to better their situation than they would have been previously. At a certain point, Mr. Speaker, if it's every budget they've ever introduced, it kind of seems like maybe it's intentional and not accidental. So I think that's really the problem I have with this budget, that there's no help for families in it, their services are reduced, their taxes and fees and costs – I didn't even get into the Kananaskis park fee, which we recently learned goes who knows where. Who knows where. I think that all of this is incredibly problematic, and I hope Albertans can make a different choice soon.

The Speaker: I had previously mentioned – here we go. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you. I don't want to speak for too long on this because I think we've certainly heard a lot so far on this, but I do have a couple of things I would like to respond to the members opposite, specifically the members for Edmonton-Glenora, Calgary-Buffalo, and Calgary-Mountain View, on some of the false things that they've said, frankly. Let's start, for example, with insurance. Now, the members opposite have oversimplified this issue, which we already know is a very complex issue of insurance, suggesting . . . [interjections] And I know that they love to heckle, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I don't need the hon. Deputy Government House Leader's help in determining my job. Having said that, I have already provided caution perhaps to members of the government about having conversations across the aisle from seated positions, and I've encouraged members on one side of the House to refrain from doing that. I'm now encouraging members from the opposite side of the House to do that.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would never in a million years presume to tell you how to do your job. Yours is a mantle I do not wish upon myself.

With that said, I do want to talk about insurance, because I believe the members opposite from the Liberal caucus – and I use Liberal caucus because of the recent matrimony between their federal party and themselves, so they're effectively a de facto Liberal party – have oversimplified this issue. Now, when they were in government, they had put in the insurance cap, as if this was

a way to artificially manipulate the free market to make insurance more affordable.

But this is a party of unintended consequences. Now, members of this caucus know very well that this is a term that we use often when referring to the Liberal caucus opposite, because we could use that term with regard to Bill 6. Mind you, I think the actual consequences that were felt by the ag industry were exactly what they had wanted, to unionize farms. We don't need to go down that road.

But specifically what the insurance cap did to those in Alberta who wanted to get insurance – now, as many know, I come from a small town down in southern Alberta, Cardston, and Cardston is adjacent to the Blood Tribe, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to tell you what this insurance cap actually did, and this is what I talked to an insurance broker in Cardston about. He told me that because of the cap and the artificial manipulation, insurance companies were no longer in a position to insure drivers on a monthly basis unless they were able to bundle that insurance with something like home insurance or life insurance.

Now, for those of you who know much about First Nations, many of them do not own their homes, so if you go in – and I hope the members opposite are listening because this is important. You should know what your policies did, okay? Members of the Blood Tribe, for example, or others who didn't own a home were unable to get insurance because they either weren't willing or could not afford to pay for an entire year of insurance up front, or they didn't own a home with which to bundle their insurance packages.

While the members opposite, the Liberal caucus, are saying that the rate cap that they imposed and we removed has driven some consumers out of the market, their policies punted people out of the market entirely. They weren't even eligible for insurance. There were some workarounds that some insurance brokers tried to find, things like tenant insurance, but even then the insurance companies realized what was happening because they were not generating any revenue and they were under water.

Now, insurance companies are private businesses. Look, I want low insurance rates like anybody else, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anybody argues with that, but the reality is that no one is in that business to lose money, and artificially manipulating that market is inappropriate. What the members opposite did punished so many Albertans who didn't own their homes.

If you want to talk about unintended consequences, let's talk about the members opposite. Let's talk about their record. Let's talk about Budget 2018: A Recovery Built to Last, a budget that was supposed to project a \$1.4 billion deficit for the fiscal year '22-23. That's laughable. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite suggest that our budget is just a windfall budget. I actually believe the Member for Lethbridge-West in a news article called it, if I'm not mistaken: a pylon budget; that a pylon could have balanced the budget. If the members opposite – if we were on their fiscal track, we'd be staring down the barrel of a \$6 billion deficit. That's the party of debt, deficits, and dumb decisions, and everybody in this Chamber knows it. They refuse to realize it, and they refuse to admit it.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, let's go back to insurance for a moment because this is so important. It's so important to my constituents. I can tell you right now that the constituents of Cardston-Siksika don't have a bus to ride, and they certainly as hell can't walk. I retract that comment. They cannot walk to the grocery store. They can't walk to Lethbridge. [interjection] Oh, yeah. Sure.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker. I love the passion that the Member for Cardston-Siksika is

expressing. In fact, I would love for him to expand a little further on the insurance. I know of many individuals in my riding – a young man, who is now my son-in-law, was offered \$7,000 for one year of car insurance because he was in that age where he didn't own a house, he didn't have a large record, and he's in the high-profile demographic, so just a high risk. That's the only insurance he could get. The value of one year of insurance was more than the value of his car.

I've also heard from insurance agencies in Lethbridge that under the previous government's policies up to 30 per cent of drivers on the road had no insurance whatsoever. They would purchase insurance, they would get the sticker, and then they'd cancel the insurance and drive for the next 11 months without insurance. Incredibly risky.

I appreciate the Member for Cardston-Siksika bringing up this incredibly important issue and expounding on it. I wonder if he would go a little further.

Mr. Schow: Yes. Well, I want to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I'd like to say that at least there's some common sense in half that city right now represented in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I'm appalled. I'm absolutely appalled by the audacity of the members opposite to stand in this Chamber and cast aspersions about us removing the rate cap when they know full well what their rate cap did. That is one member – the Member for Lethbridge-East clearly articulated just one of what I suspect are countless examples of people who were driven out of the market.

Going back to this issue of the rates, the market is now correcting itself. It is just now correcting itself, and insurance brokers are only recently able to begin to write monthly plans again for some of their clients. But imagine, for example – we want to talk about inflation. We want to talk about all the problems that people are facing in this province right now and across the country, for that matter, as a result of the Liberal poor decisions, both in the previous government here and the current government in Ottawa. The price of insurance is so high that some people just don't get it. The member just said that. Think about the kind of stress that you would have knowing that you can't afford insurance but you need to get to work. So you're now driving a vehicle illegally, without insurance, but you have – maybe they feel they have no choice. I'm not in the head of some of these individuals. I'm grateful that I can afford insurance, and I have that.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there are people who are not doing well in this province, and it's a result of the fiscal policies of the previous government and their desire to manipulate the free market to the point that it makes it unaffordable or, in fact, unattainable for so many.

Mrs. Frey: Give way?

Mr. Schow: Sure.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much to the hon. member for giving way. I was curious if the Member for Cardston-Siksika – I know that not only was he a staffer when the United Conservative Party was formed, but he was very involved in many of the campaigns. So he heard across the province just how much the affordability crisis, created by the NDP with their carbon tax, affected Albertans and their pocketbooks at home. I'm curious if the Member for Cardston-Siksika could elaborate on the unintended consequences of meddling in the market when it relates to the carbon tax and the electricity market, that the NDP themselves created.

Mr. Schow: Well, I want to thank the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for the intervention and for the very insightful and thoughtful question. Like her, I have a very rural constituency in some parts. That carbon tax, in particular, was something I heard about every time I knocked at a door, and I continue to hear about it. Cardston, like many of the towns – you know, if the members opposite have something they'd like to say, they're welcome to jump up and speak on this.

There are a lot of people on a fixed income, Mr. Speaker. Fixed incomes are very common down in Cardston because people retire in these towns. They're wonderful places to retire. But the carbon tax put such a burden on many of my constituents that while the price of everything is going up, they could barely afford it. It was just a new cost of living, something that wasn't built into their retirement plan when they were saving during the time when they were working. [interjection] You know what? I'm going to allow it.

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday I got Wordle in one; today I got an interjection from the Member for Cardston-Siksika. Like, I should probably go buy a lottery ticket after this. Thank you so much to the Member for Cardston-Siksika for the opportunity to return to debate. I'll keep it short.

Just about a minute or two ago he talked about the market correcting itself when he talked about insurance rates getting jacked up and the number of Albertans who were facing significant increases to their insurance right now. I would say that for most Albertans, who are facing extreme pressures in terms of cost of living, they wouldn't call that a correction. They'd call that extreme pressure, and they would say that the government should be doing more to support them in making life more affordable and finding ways to actually control some of their costs.

Then I just wanted to say that if we're going to refer to members of this Assembly being from parties that they're not, then people might refer to people being from ridings which they grew up in and not the ridings that they currently represent. I don't think that that would create a good tone in this House, so I respectfully request that we refer to each other as the ridings that we represent, like the Member for Cardston-Siksika, rather than saying other names of places that people might be associated with.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I'm happy to address this issue of rising insurance rates, as I have already in my remarks. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I would rather have expensive insurance than no insurance.

Ms Hoffman: More expensive?

Mr. Schow: No. Insurance in general.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite made insurance impossible to achieve for so many members of my constituency, and I'm disgusted by it. While they stand there on their high horse and pretend as though they're doing a favour to all Albertans by capping insurance, what they're really doing is driving some people out of the market because they didn't own a home. It's plain and simple. This is Liberal logic at its finest from the members across the way. In the last 12 months insurance rates have begun to decrease because the market is correcting itself. But I can tell you that as I knocked on doors in my constituency of Cardston-Siksika, I heard them countless times saying: "How long is it going to take? How long is it going to take for this province to fix itself after only four years of an NPD government? How long?" One part of it: it's already taken three years.

An Hon. Member: How long?

Mr. Schow: Three years to begin to correct the mistakes of the members opposite.

Now, if I can switch gears just for a moment, because I'm going to get riled up a little bit about insurance because of what it did to some of my constituents, to people that I represent – I take that personally. But I'll tell you that they're talking about taking money from future generations. Taking money from future generations: that is something our government is doing, in the words from the members opposite. It's so ridiculous, so absurd. Look at their budget projections, Mr. Speaker. If it was up to them, they'd be squandering anything they had. I mean, they did. They squandered an opportunity to continue governing because of their socialist policies. They squandered the trust of Albertans by forming an unholy alliance with the federal Liberals, and they've said nothing about it.

An Hon. Member: Not a word.

Mr. Schow: Not a word.

Unlike other political parties in this country, Mr. Speaker, that one opposite is directly attached to their federal party. You buy a membership in the provincial NDP, you've got one in the federal. Jagmeet is your guy. Bromance at its finest. Yet they talk about, you know, "Now we actually have some money to spend," because there is certainly a windfall in the price of oil – and we're doing that with this budget – but it's still not enough. It's never going to be enough. We were elected with a mandate to get Alberta's finances back in order, to bring prosperity back to this province: jobs, economy, and pipelines. Jobs, economy, and pipelines: I could go through all of it at the moment, but I'll spare you the details and say that Alberta is leading Canada, and the members opposite know it. If you listen to the questions in question period, they're flailing. There's no direction because things are on the right track in this province, and they can no longer go stand in this Chamber and talk about COVID.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, the province is on the right track, and this budget is a large piece of that. I applaud the Minister of Finance, the Premier, and all members of Executive Council for the tireless work that they have put in on behalf of Albertans to get us to this point, but the work isn't done. It's not done. My constituents keep asking me: "Are we getting back on track? Are we bringing back the Alberta advantage? Have we recovered yet from the disastrous NDP?" The short answer is no.

You look at what the NDP did in their budget projections. I believe, like I said, in 2018 they had projected \$60 oil, with an \$8.8 billion deficit. Compared to last year, those were boom times, Mr. Speaker. Now we're sitting with oil well above \$100 a barrel. We're making significant strides to help Albertans who are struggling, like helping them cover their utility bills to the tune of \$150, despite the NDP suggesting it's only \$50, looking to potentially as a party mislead the public. But, of course, never let the facts get in the way of a good story or a good tweet.

I can only imagine what the NDP would do. They'd look at the budget we currently have and all the money coming in from oil and say: "Look at us. Let's go spend everything we want to." Zero fiscal restraint from members opposite.

I find that I'm going down a bit of a rabbit hole, Mr. Speaker, so I'll conclude with this. When the NDP get up in this Chamber and talk specifically about finances, you hear snickers, audible snickers, coming from members on this side of the House because we recognize that the members opposite don't have a clue when it comes to how to balance a budget. According to their new party leader, Justin Trudeau, the budget balances itself. You know, if

that's the way that members opposite are going to approach the finances of this province, I am grateful every day that the United Conservative Party sits in government, because heaven forbid if the NDP were back on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 8, supplementary supply. The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022. I'm going to focus most of my comments on just a little piece of the budget. Some of my colleagues have gone into great detail in the other areas, but I'd like to look at Community and Social Services specifically, which is about almost \$4 billion in spending. I would assume that the government would want to pay some attention to some of these concerns.

It is a lot of spending, and what's unique, I think, about this particular ministry and these programs and this spending is that they're really front-line supports. When there are changes to policy or changes to amounts and things like that, people feel it almost instantly, as we saw with something that I think the government thought was as random as realigning a payment date, let's say, for AISH or income support. I think they truly believed that there wouldn't be an impact, but of course we saw that there was because these programs do touch individual lives very, very quickly.

I'm going to talk a little about assured income for the severely handicapped and the income supports benefits. The previous speaker went on at length about, you know, the importance of accuracy, so I'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about accuracy and some inaccuracies that are in this budget. While we don't see it in the actual figures of the budget, we do see it in the text of the budget again and again and again. What we've seen are different members repeating these messages again and again and again, and I would hope that I'm going to, for I think the second time, try to explain that what you're saying is not accurate, and it's my sincere hope that the government pays attention and actually corrects their story.

What we have heard again and again is that the assured income for the severely handicapped benefits are the most generous in the country. That is not accurate. It is not correct. Now, I know it's hard to compare programs because they're not always the same, but still this is not accurate. I'd like to quote here. This was reported by Global on September 16, 2020. It was the Premier saying this. He said, "The truth is that we have, by far, the most generous benefits for social services" – he's referring to AISH – "of any province in Canada. I think in the case of AISH, about 40 per cent more generous than other provinces." That's incorrect. Quebec: disability supports core amount for a single is \$1,685, which is 16 per cent less than Alberta. That doesn't even account for the supplementals that are regularly assigned to people. British Columbia: disability core supports for a single are \$1,358, which is 19 per cent less than Alberta. That also doesn't account for the extras. So, obviously, 40 per cent: not accurate.

The other thing that isn't accurate, Mr. Speaker, is that the Northwest Territories and Yukon have more generous disability supports than we do here. It is my hope that the government will

correct the language that they use. Now that they know better, hopefully they will do better.

The other part that's somewhat alarming: can you imagine someone being a diabetic and, you know, relying on someone else for diabetic supplies like, let's say, test strips and that if they got one test strip for the week and knew that they needed seven test strips for the week but were told: "It's generous. Just be thankful for it"? I mean, can you imagine telling someone that it's generous, that it's good enough, to just be thankful for something as life-saving as a test strip or a diabetic supply?

The reason I'm bringing this up is that we all know that for somebody in Alberta to be able to live on \$1,685 a month is next to impossible. You know, the average one-bedroom rent in the capital region is just under \$1,000. You add on transportation, which is more than likely a bus pass, because people can't often afford vehicles or gas or insurance. You're looking at food. You're looking at insurance for your apartment. You're looking at clothing, even medical supplies, because not everything is covered. So you can see that it is almost impossible to live on \$1,685.

We know that the low-income measure in Canada is \$24,642 for a single. In Edmonton, in the capital region, it's just over \$21,000. AISH per year is just over \$20,000. We know that people that are living on AISH are living below the poverty line. So for this government to repeatedly stand up and crow that AISH is generous, the most generous in the country, (a) that is incorrect, and (b) I would suggest that that's abusive. It is my sincere hope that the government rethinks their language around this. Can you imagine being someone with a severe disability trying to get by, knowing that you're sinking further every single month, and to have their government tell them that, basically, it's good enough?

Anyway, when I saw this budget, I was – I guess I'm always hopeful that this government will do the right thing. They never seem to quite get it right as it relates to Community and Social Services, but I was really hopeful that, given this windfall with commodity prices, they would look at reindexing these benefits. Mr. Speaker, I think that all of us know that people that live on AISH and income support are some of the most vulnerable people in this province. I'm sure we've all had casework that includes people that live on AISH. I was really hopeful that benefits would be reindexed.

In 2019 we heard the Premier talk about, you know, difficult economic conditions which really necessitated the need for him to deindex AISH and income support and that that would be re-evaluated when economic conditions changed. Well, economic conditions changed, and still these benefits are not reindexed even when we have surpassed 5 per cent inflation. You know what? That is alarming. I'm not going to go on at length about the cost of poverty. I think that we are all in this Chamber smart enough to understand that there is a cost to poverty. There is an additional pressure to acute care, to other safety nets, other social safety nets. We know that there is a cost to poverty, and year after year of not keeping pace with inflation is causing people to go farther and farther below the poverty line.

9:00

You know, one of the things in – I think it was in early 2019 when we did index these benefits. Obviously, one of the things I was really grateful for, actually, is that I felt for the first time that people with disabilities – and let's be clear; there are over 70,000 people on AISH – would not have to sort of make a case for themselves every single year about why they needed a raise, that for once it was just going to be a given. Although it's not a huge increase, every single year keeping pace with inflation makes a difference. It truly made a difference for people's lives. For this government to have

cut that and then when there is a windfall that we see because of commodity prices – I didn't even hear a murmuring about what the criteria was to reinstate this indexation, which is incredibly, incredibly sad to me. It's incredibly sad, actually.

You know, the other thing that I wanted to mention – again, I mean, it's one thing to say it; it's quite another to create programs that allow for this to happen. We hear it again and again. This government will say that the best social program is a job. Sure, jobs are great. A good social program sometimes does include a job. But that is incredibly ableist – incredibly ableist – to think that you know that a job is going to make somebody's life better. You don't know what somebody's life is like. None of us knows what somebody's life is like living on AISH. If you happen to have a disability severe and permanent enough – and that's the reality about AISH recipients, that in the legislation it is required that their disability is so severe and the permanence is there that they cannot support themselves. To hear these comments coming from government doesn't even make sense. It's almost like government members don't even understand the AISH legislation or what the program is.

I would really hope that we all want to do better. I'm still learning about what ableism is. It's still fairly new to me. I'm not a disabled person, I don't live on AISH, so I don't understand all of the aspects of ableism, but I am trying. What I do know is that to assume that you know best for someone what the best social program is is incredibly ableist. I hope that all of us in this Chamber, now that we know better, can actually do better.

What else I would like to say about this budget – and, you know, this goes for other areas of spending. I call it a shell game, and that's exactly what it is. We've heard member after member stand up: we've got a balanced budget; we're keeping spending under control; we're doing this. The reality is that it is a big shell game.

I'll give you a couple of examples just in Community and Social Services. We hear again and again: we've got the most generous AISH payments; it's the highest it's ever been. It's less than a 1 per cent increase. Let's be honest. It's not going to keep pace with growth pressures. We know this. It's about 5 or 6 per cent growth every single year, and 1 per cent is not going to cut it. Of course, it's the highest; you have the highest number of people on AISH. It makes sense. Why spin it? Why not just be factual about it? You know, it's incredibly frustrating.

The other thing is that we see – with homeless supports we saw a slight decrease in homeless outreach supports and then a flat line in spending for the other line that relates to homeless supports, but we know that there's other spending in there because it's rural homelessness. Instead of adding that amount and showing an increase to that budget line, where it should have been, it's not there, so what the government is going to do is trot themselves out and say, "Oh, look at us; we're funding this many million dollars to these rural communities to address homelessness in their communities," just like we saw a few months ago, without putting it into the budget line to say, "Look, we are increasing spending because we made a mistake; we didn't budget for rural homelessness the way we should have." No; shell games. That's what that is, shell games.

Another example, women's shelters: flat spending. The government will crow: "Look at us. We kept spending flat. Aren't we excellent financial managers?" You are not.

Another example. We know that Jessie's House, the newest shelter in Alberta, just opened a little while ago, got one-time funding last year because this government failed to put their operating funding in their budget. They did it again this year. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's a pretty safe bet to say that they're going

to fund Jessie's House again, because we know that – the ED told us that, that they're going to fund it – but it's not in the budget. Why not? Why won't you show us that there's an increase in spending because you brought another shelter onboard? Why? Because this is a shell game. It's made to look like spending is flat when it is not.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker – well, there are so many things. I'd like to talk about FTEs. As you know, in the budget documents and in this budget it's always about FTEs. They are cutting FTEs. My example is Community and Social Services. Since the UCP formed government in 2019, they have cut 514 FTEs from Community and Social Services. Every single year I have asked successive ministers: "Where are these cuts coming from? Where are these FTEs coming from?" "Oh, trust us: attrition." Honestly, do you know what attrition means? It's not that good. Like, 514 employees: that's a 16 per cent reduction in the workforce. Now, for a ministry that delivers . . . [interjections] I don't know why you're making little gestures at me, but maybe you should sit down. Mr. Speaker, I don't know why this government thinks that they can deliver these ever-growing programs like AISH, like income support . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically imputing false motives, that I was making gestures at the member opposite when, in fact, I'd just put hand sanitizer on and was drying my hands. While I apologize if my actions had offended the Member for St. Albert, to impute false motives on me would be wildly inappropriate.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that this is a point of order; obviously a matter of debate. Here we have the Member for St. Albert talking about Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, and being distracted by what I also saw – it looked a little like jazz hands – at the time. I think it is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, I agree. It isn't a point of order. I would provide some caution to the hon. Member for St. Albert that it's not very parliamentary to tell people to sit down inside the Assembly.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Going back to my point, since 2019 514 FTEs have been cut from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Now, I'd like to remind the House of the really important programs that are in this ministry, and, as I said earlier, these are really front-facing programs that deal with individual people on a daily basis. Their caseloads are massive. They're looking at AISH recipients: there are more than 70,000 people. Income support: there are tens of thousands of people on income support. Persons with developmental disabilities: there are probably around 15,000 people. FSCD: probably around 12,000 to 15,000 families. And it goes on and on. That includes the Appeals Secretariat, so hundreds and hundreds of appeals. There are just so many programs that have so many staff that are so essential.

Now, perhaps if the government was clear and transparent and said: "Well, you know what? We're removing these positions. We don't think they're essential because we've looked at all of the caseloads across the province, and we don't think there's a problem. We think we can safely cut here." But that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. That is not the case at all, and what we do know is that of, I think, the six delivery regions in the province for Community and Social Services, all but one are in this red zone, which means that the caseload pressures have become too much. So we're looking at between 300 and 400 people on caseloads.

Now, these are AISH generalists that have this kind of caseload. Now, I don't know if other members – I know I certainly, probably get them. If a day doesn't go by that I don't get casework related to AISH or income support or one of the programs in this ministry, it's an unusual day, and I'm quite sure that other members are getting casework similar to the casework that I get. And it's intense because people don't understand the systems, whether it's because of an intellectual disability, they don't have family support, they don't have an appropriate guardian. They just don't understand it. They're panicking because they're afraid they're going to get evicted. They don't have money to buy food. It's intense casework. It's absolutely intense casework. You can imagine an AISH generalist. Those are the ones that get the calls. Those are the ones that have to deal one on one with AISH recipients. Can you imagine a caseload of between 300 and 400 people and then thinking that it's a good idea to remove more FTEs? It doesn't even make sense.

9:10

Perhaps there is some grand plan and maybe there's some – I don't know. Maybe they've made some shifts or they have changed the role of AISH generalists or the way that cases are managed. I don't know because there is zero transparency. There is no plan other than attrition. It's just attrition. It's attrition. That's all we ever get. It's attrition. I would hope – if we've learned anything from the Auditor General, it's that you establish objectives so that you can go back and you can measure them. You can measure the success, you can see what you've done, but you do a risk assessment. I asked all of these questions during budget estimates and got zip, nothing. There is no plan. There was no risk assessment done.

This was about the bottom-line cutting. This was about removing more FTEs so that we're now over 500 jobs lost in Community and Social Services. That's a lot. That's 16 per cent of the workforce. If you think that that is not going to impact the quality of services that the government of Alberta delivers, you are sadly mistaken, and I think this government is smart enough to know that, to know that you cannot remove 500 staff and not have people negatively impacted. That's just a fact. That's a fact. And we know that the caseload growth has just – it's dangerous. When you have that many people on one staff's caseload, that is dangerous. It is no longer safe.

The other questions, Mr. Speaker, that – again, I wish there was some clarity. In the budget documents – we can see it right in their documents – income support was underspent by over \$100 million last year. Government will spin that: oh, yes, spending is flat or it's a little bit lower because of COVID federal supports. That's all fine and good. We know that caseloads changed. We know that people went on different federal benefits. We know that there are lots of clawbacks going on right now or that have gone on. What we're trying to get at is: "Okay. If that is the case, that's fair. Tell us what the amount is. How much was clawed back? How many people were able to be transferred from AISH or income support to go on to a federal COVID program?" That's easy. Just tell us how much. How many people? How many people on AISH had a spouse that went on EI and that negatively impacted the amount an AISH

recipient received? How many people lost income support because they went on a federal program? Crickets. We got nothing. Nothing.

For a government that likes to stand up and crow about their budget, “You know, we kept spending flat,” it is a shell game. If you want to prove otherwise, it would be very easy to do: just table the documents, answer the questions, show us the plan, show us the risk assessment. I’d be very happy to be wrong about this. If there actually was a plan to keep people safe and to keep caseloads manageable, I would be incredibly happy about that. [interjection] If you’d like to intervene, I’m happy to take it. Go ahead. Yeah.

Mr. Luan: I can’t stand listening to the opposition member, who, after three hours of the detailed budgeting estimate process, is still playing around with numbers which are not true. Let me correct a couple right now. First, when you talk about the AISH caseload, you talk about 10,000 people receiving AISH today. Let me tell you: 70,000. You’re materially wrong. Not even close, okay? We’re currently supporting 70,000 Albertans on the AISH caseload.

Let me tell you something else that you’re . . .

The Speaker: I’m sorry. I hesitate to interrupt because I know that the minister has a desire to intervene; however, the mover of the speech was the hon. the Minister of Finance, and the second to speak was the hon. Member for St. Albert, so there are actually no interventions during the response. My apologies, but I’m sure he’ll have an opportunity to rise a little bit later.

The member actually only has 35 seconds remaining in her remarks.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. That’s okay.

Actually, yes, we’re very well aware that there are 70,000 people on AISH. I don’t know which part of that wasn’t clear. Yes, we do understand that. It’s in the documents. It’s also available online.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, you know, it’s incredibly disappointing that given the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in, our first thought didn’t go to the people that had to give things up in 2019. They have consistently lost after that. We’ve got a lot of people living in poverty.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services has risen.

Mr. Luan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate having a chance to rise in the House to contribute to the debate here. As I’m listening to the opposition member, the hon. Member for St. Albert, I can’t believe she’s throwing the numbers back and forth. Some are making no sense. Others have been answered in the three-hour detailed budget estimates. She keeps throwing her issues as if – for every social issue we have here in our province, just keeps throwing money as a solution.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that’s something that fundamentally we take a different approach to in trying to help vulnerable Albertans. I am so proud to stand on this side of the aisle as a government. We are not only taking care of the most vulnerable Albertans, but we also make our programs sustainable.

Let me give you an example. For Budget 2022 we added \$12 million in addition to the already highest AISH budget in our province, with \$1.4 billion as it stands today. Once again, this is the highest in Alberta’s history. I remind you also, Mr. Speaker, that three weeks ago the Premier and I announced additional prenatal benefits for pregnant women who are receiving AISH and income support. With an additional \$600 per month added, they will receive \$856 per month prenatal benefits. Once again that’s the highest in the country as we speak today.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing tangible changes to make life better for vulnerable Albertans, like the examples I’m taking about. At the same time we protected core funding, what we call the social safety net. Whether it’s income support, whether it’s supporting people with a disability, whether it’s helping families and women flee from domestic violence, we maintained that core funding.

I want to share with you one story that – it’s a real story – one of the members shared with me while visiting the province during the summer. That story stuck to my heart and made a significant impact on me in terms of my work with the ministry and the work that – how we established the direction we currently have. I was visiting the Edson bottle depot. I’ll use her real name. Anne is the executive director there as the employer. We were talking about how the conditions of the pandemic impacted people and employers’ impact to work and so on and so forth. During the conversation she shared something with me dearly. She said: “Minister, you know, my operation here is not a highly paid job. It’s repetitive in nature. I keep losing people. You get people working here. Their heart and mind isn’t here, and the next thing you know, they are gone. Plus, when they’re here, you have to keep a very close eye on the quality of the work.” She said: “It turned out to be quite an expensive undertaking until lately. I hired” – I’ll use a different name just to protect the privacy of the individual. I’ll use the name Frank.

Frank is a guy who’s been on AISH, who was on disability for many, many years. He has been through different programs that helped him along the way. He never competed for what they call a commercial rate of employment, to put it another way. Anne offered a competitive job offer to Frank. Frank competed the same way, no different than the rest of the others, and he got it. What Anne finds different is that every day before she opens the door, Frank is the first person who comes through, and every day Frank is the last one to leave. When she asked him why, Frank said: this is my very first job I competed for that I got the market-rate employment. For him, it’s a job that matches his full potential, and this is a totally different life he’s experiencing.

9:20

Anne said: “From an employer point of view, I never need to worry about losing Frank. I never need to worry about recruitment. He took this job like a new life. This is good for him but good for me as an employer. Why didn’t I know this before?” That conversation really inspired us. Not only do we want to provide a system, provide a social safety net, but we also want to empower people to reach their full potential, like Frank’s story.

Because of that reason, Mr. Speaker, in our Budget 2022 we added an additional \$34 million as a new investment to help vulnerable Albertans who have the opportunity through employment to reach their full potential. Once again, I want to share to the hon. members in this House what a drastically different approach we’re taking. Not only is our government providing core funding to maintain a social safety net, but also we emphasize helping people to reach their full potential. To me, that’s a fundamental difference. Instead of simply a handout approach, which I think the opposition is all about, we do both. We provide safety. We added the enabling part.

I’ll give you another example. The hon. member mentioned about the homeless part of the work. You would recall that in the peak of winter Edmonton’s mayor was making an urgent request for homeless shelters in Edmonton, and, you know, within three weeks we responded. But we didn’t respond in the NDP way, just to pour the money as if that will solve the problem. Yes, we did give \$21.5 million province-wide. We know that resource is important, but that’s not all, because money alone cannot solve the problem.

At the time that we announced the \$21.5 million, we also established a provincial task force. The task force was a group of people coming from multiple sectors, from police – sit down; let me finish first – to shelter operators, from social service agencies to many other stakeholders who care about this issue and who really want to make a contribution to solve their problem. One thing that we agree on is that stand-alone, fragmented issues are not going to help Albertans. We're looking for a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach in responding to homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, I am so much looking forward to the findings of this task force. They're expected to deliver their study and recommendations in June of this year. By then I'm looking forward to see this new way of doing business. Not only will we have resources provided here; we're also looking with a fundamentally different approach to how we approach the complex issue in such a way. All we're doing is a balanced, sustainable solution to make life better for Albertans on the real term rather than just throwing a whole bunch of slogans with no concrete actions coming into place. That is what I want to convey to the House. That is a sharp contrast to the different approaches to how we approach social services, how we approach helping our most vulnerable Albertans but in the meantime providing them with assistance so we can empower them to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of other things that I'm so excited about, the work that my ministry is doing, and so passionate about. I will leave the rest of the time to the House to continue debate on this very important cause here. At the end of the day we want to provide not only the social safety net to provide support to people when they have unfortunately fallen into difficult times, but – make no mistake – we'll never create a codependency as if government throwing money will solve the problem, because I know and lots of people in the sector also know that if you erode an individual's self-confidence, their self-purpose, their sense of pride in themselves, it doesn't matter how much money you dump to them, you're not helping them. You've actually eroded their self-confidence and their success.

Our hope is that we'll provide timely support to them, meaningful support to them, and make their life better, at the earliest time help them return to their journey of their success. Mr. Speaker, their success is ours.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the supplementary supply. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I think, is rising.

Member Irwin: Yes. I just didn't want to interfere with you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this House. I did speak briefly to supplementary estimates last night, but I did not get a chance to do as I typically do the first time that I rise in the House and give a shout-out to the front-line workers out there who are absolutely still doing so much for all of us in the midst of a pandemic. We are still in the midst of a pandemic, might I add, and those in health care, those in retail, those in education, any front-line workers: we owe them a lot, so thank you.

I have many things I want to say in relation to Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, but I must – I must – pick up on a few points from the previous member as I was not able to successfully interject. Intervene? Intervene is the proper word. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I found it quite troubling as he basically threw out a whole lot of accusations about us and the NDP, and he mentioned something along the lines of – sorry; to quote the Speaker, I don't have the benefit of the Blues – the NDP throwing money at things. He gave an example of supporting our unhoused neighbours through the investments over the winter. Hey,

this minister has heard me speak many times in this House about how critical it is that we support houseless folks in our communities. It is a topic that I am incredibly passionate about.

Yes. Of course, we can all agree, and we agreed when that action was taken, to provide additional dollars to Hope Mission, which is based in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. But we also somewhat couched our response in the fact that mats on the floor are one thing – absolutely, they're a short-term, Band-Aid solution – but unhoused folks need more than mats on floors. They need roofs over heads. One of the most tangible ways that this government could support unhoused folks would be investing in permanent supportive housing. Permanent supportive housing not only saves lives; it saves money, too.

Let's talk about that a little bit. There's clear research that shows that permanent supportive housing saves lives. In fact, there's an example in my riding, Ambrose Place. It's in the McCauley neighbourhood. It's an incredible facility that has taken some of the hardest to house folks, folks with, oh, my goodness, multiple disabilities, folks who have been on the streets for extended lengths of time, and provides them with a harm reduction approach, incorporates Indigenous cultural practices, and it's had a really good success rate. Of course, it's not all success, and huge props to the workers there because it's a lot. They're dealing with a lot. But the research is clear from the city of Edmonton that that's a project that has saved lives, and it's a project that has saved money.

You can look at the impacts on the health care system. If those folks aren't housed, they're often going to emergency rooms. Go not too far from my riding to the Royal Alex any time, particularly during the winter. You will see many folks who are unhoused in the Royal Alex in the emergency room. So it saves money there. It also saves money for the judicial system, right? We know that incarcerating folks costs a whole heck of a lot of money.

9:30

Both of these arguments, the moral argument in that it's the right thing to do and it saves lives and the economic argument in that it saves money, were not enough to convince this minister and this UCP government to invest the measly, I believe, \$9 million asked for by the city of Edmonton to support permanent supportive housing. A drop in the bucket when it comes to their budget, when it comes to, you know, the broader fiscal picture, yet they weren't willing to do that. So spare me, please, ministers across the aisle, your degrading comments about our record and about us when you're not willing to make the investments that in the long term are going to save humans and save money.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Okay. Now that I've talked about that a little bit, let's talk – obviously, for those folks who are listening closely, of which, I'm sure, there are many in this Chamber, I will tie this into supplementary estimates. [interjection] The House leader is paying attention, she tells me. Thank you. I will tie this into supplementary estimates, but I just haven't had a chance in this Chamber to speak to my own critic portfolio, and that's Status of Women. I can draw this to Bill 8 and the fact that, you know, this government had an opportunity to invest some additional dollars in, well, multiple ministries.

Actually, I'll give my colleague a shout-out. Sometimes he needs more shout-outs. That's my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. He did a really good analysis in his debate on Bill 7, where he went through each ministry. He's not actually listening to my credit for him right now. I shouldn't be giving him credit because he did not bring me cookies as promised. But he gave a really good analysis

about how in each ministry this government could be doing a lot better.

Look no further than Status of Women. I know it is a small ministry, of course, and historically when you compare it to other ministries, absolutely, I can accept that. But I can't accept that under this government's leadership one of the very first moves this government made was to, first of all, basically, you know, not have Status of Women as a stand-alone ministry, throw it in with culture, multiculturalism, absolutely decimate the budget for Status of Women in the first two years and fully cut back the number of FTEs. In our budget estimates I talked about the fact that I was having complete déjà vu from the previous years' estimates. Even though the folks at the table had changed, there was still no clear plan to support women in this budget or to support women at all from this government. They had an opportunity to address critical supports for women, and they refused to do so.

Actually, it was at that same time as we were doing Status of Women estimates that we had just learned that wage rollbacks, huge wage rollbacks, for front-line health care workers were being proposed, front-line health care workers like – I may need some help from my colleagues here – respiratory therapists . . .

Ms Renaud: Occupational therapists.

Member Irwin: Occupational therapists – thank you – speech language pathologists . . .

An Hon. Member: Social workers.

Member Irwin: Social workers. Yeah. The list goes on. I can't think of them all. It's been a long day. But, I mean, these are folks – like, respiratory therapists. We had an incredible woman named Holly Champney stand with us, actually, and share her story of how she's the person who inserts the breathing tube. She's the person who's kept people alive during this pandemic. And this is how this government is responding, with massive rollbacks. I think her rollback – and again I'm going off memory here – is about 8 per cent, right? I can't even remember exactly what sort of mental gymnastics this government used on that one to justify it, but I imagine it was quite intriguing.

You think about that. You think about the wage rollbacks that are being proposed for, you know, a large group of workers here in Alberta, which would be just awful in themselves, but this is along the backdrop of many Albertans already facing huge, huge affordability challenges.

We talked about this yesterday in the supplementary estimates debate – right? – the fact that this government had an opportunity. They could have addressed it here in Bill 8 other than just the energy piece around, you know, a \$50 rebate. The associate minister came back and said, "Well, actually, it's \$150." Well, actually, I came back to him and said, "You know, we were actually door-knocking in your neighbourhood, in your riding of Morinville-St. Albert, on the weekend." It was wonderful. Lots of support. Lots of orange signs are going to be up there heading up to the next election. It was very fantastic, and I got to meet a lot of great people at the doors.

Without prompting, the top issue that came up was affordability, and as I shared yesterday – you know, it's so intriguing. The area where we were door-knocking in St. Albert, I have to admit, is different than the area I live in in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, a higher socioeconomic background. You might think that they'll probably have different issues than my neighbours in the Alberta Avenue, Parkdale area. No. Similar issues, right? These affordability challenges transcend demographics. Albertans from all backgrounds are struggling with skyrocketing utility bills.

This government had an opportunity – I won't use it as a prop – in Bill 8, in their supplementary estimates, to make some adjustments and to really provide relief to Albertans. They chose not to, and I think Albertans are going to remember that. I really do think they are. Absolutely.

I shared this story yesterday – and she was happy for me to share it – of a younger person named Patti who told me that she is at risk of losing power and heat, and she said: listen, I'm trying here; I'm trying to make ends meet. She talked about using up all of her savings. She talked about how she was working a job, and then she actually contracted COVID during her job and had to take time off. Like, that's not just a one-off example. We've all heard, at least on our side of the House, from a lot of Albertans who are absolutely struggling with their utility bills.

I urge this government: they still have an opportunity. You know, we're only on Bill 8. I'm certain the Premier will be bragging about his robust legislative agenda this session. Well, you know what? Make it robust by making tangible, positive impacts on the lives of Albertans because so far it's a huge disappointment.

I want to pick up on some of what my colleague from St. Albert was sharing. She's always been a huge advocate for folks who are on AISH. You know, I'm thinking back to one the first things we heard from this Premier when he tried in this Chamber to justify the deindexing of AISH. I remember quite clearly his words because I was kind of – I think my jaw was dropped a little bit. Like, did he actually just say that? He said: "You know what? It's not onerous, right?" He said that it's not going to be onerous. I said at the time: well, that is awfully rich for a man who's worked . . .

An Hon. Member: For a rich guy.

Member Irwin: Yeah.

. . . six-figure jobs pretty much his entire working life, who's entitled to a six-figure, seven-figure pension fairly soon. To say that people who are living on \$1,600 a month, to lose \$30 a month: that's not onerous? I'm no mathematician, but that's a huge, huge impact for somebody who's barely making it. As my colleague from St. Albert talked about, she tried to live on that, and she acknowledged that she's got a heck of a lot of privilege and people and a network and community that she could rely on, and she hardly made it, right? So imagine – just imagine – how it is for folks right now.

Fast-forward. You think: oh, he couldn't get more crass than saying that it's not onerous. Oh, yes, he could because in the Chamber just on Monday that same Premier stood, and he proudly said that AISH recipients and seniors who are losing thousands of dollars as a result of his government's policy decisions – guess what he said. He said that they were making "modest sacrifices." Wow. Wow. When I talk to that senior in my riding who's struggling to make ends meet, I'll just let her know: "You know what? Thank you for making those modest sacrifices." No. Absolutely not.

And I joke, I smile, but I'm not smiling when I'm hearing from countless constituents who are struggling so hard right now as a result of this government's policy decisions. It's incredibly troubling that this Premier continues to minimize their experiences, their lived experiences as people who are living in poverty, living below the poverty line, even folks who have traditionally been able to make ends meet who are struggling right now because of high utility costs, high insurance costs, fees on parks – what am I missing? – higher tuition. The list goes on.

9:40

Ms Hoffman: Education property tax.

Member Irwin: Education property tax. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Yeah. Right? The list goes on. I only have so much time here, folks.

Mr. Schow: It's all your fault, too.

Member Irwin: I mean, the Member for Cardston-Siksika is welcome to stand up. I'm not sure if I'll acknowledge him, actually, but he is welcome. I'll think about it.

You know, I would be remiss, actually, if I didn't talk about education. So thank you to Edmonton-Glenora for reminding me of that. You know what? I talk about my neighbourhood a lot: Alberta Avenue, Parkdale area. In the same area, just north of where I live, is a lovely community called Delton. [Member Irwin's speaking time expired] Dang it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Any other hon. members wishing to join debate this evening? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much. I'm going to try to channel my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and talk about Delton school for a minute because Delton school is fantastic in terms of building community and having great support and a sense of inclusion. What Delton school struggles with, though, is the actual building. The building was built at a time when most of the families in the neighbourhood, even though they lived in three-bedroom bungalows, had four or five kids – we were experiencing baby booms – and that school was built to accommodate the significant number of students who were living in the neighbourhood and attending a local school.

There still are a lot of families living in the neighbourhood, but most of the families in three-bedroom bungalows now have one or two children. Many still attend the neighbourhood school, but, as you can rightfully deduce from the number of children who were in the neighbourhood to the number of children who are there now, the school isn't full as it was when it was originally built. It also isn't in the beautiful, pristine shape that it was when it was originally built either.

One of the things that school divisions across the province have been encouraged to do is to find ways to right-size the capital that they have to meet the demand. We do this on the Legislature Grounds, and we did it in this current fiscal year because, of course, the Minister of Infrastructure was there the day they started picking apart to remove the legislative Annex because the Annex was beyond its useful life expectancy in terms of the building envelope. The Annex was no longer needed, and we were trying to right-size the office space on the legislative grounds, a responsible, prudent decision even though I have a special spot in my heart for the legislative Annex as my first office that had a door that closed, that I didn't have to share with anyone else, was in that building. It was a special place.

I have to say that on the legislative grounds the Infrastructure minister made the decision to remove space that was no longer needed, upgraded other space. You probably have all seen the Terrace Building, which I think is being renamed to Poundmaker's, have renovations done to it to improve that building envelope to make sure that the needs of government and legislative employees on this site have safe work environments to work in and the right-sized envelope for the number of people who are working here.

That's what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was almost certainly going to talk about when she spoke about Delton school because Delton school is not a building that is in a condition that is as conducive for positive student learning outcomes as we would hope for any of our own children, and it is also overbuilt.

When the government talks about, "Well, it's only at 65 per cent capacity," that's why the plan is to build a smaller school that is a quality building that's appropriately sized for the neighbourhood. Of course, it wasn't good economic sense for the Minister of Infrastructure to continue to heat and maintain a building that was not energy efficient, that was overbuilt for the parcel of land that it's on, and here we celebrate. There was a big photo op with that building coming down and new space being renovated to appropriately meet the needs of the legislative grounds, the staff, and the government public servants who work in those buildings. Kids in Delton deserve an opportunity to learn in just as positive a school environment as any other child in the province of Alberta. The government could have through Bill 8, supplementary supply appropriations, 2022, focused on the needs of kids living in Delton. The government could have focused on the other infrastructure that's desperately needed.

Let me just talk about a couple of pieces. We have in Edmonton alone a need for five schools that were identified in the year 1 capital plan needs assessment. Now, remember that Edmonton public was overlooked last year in the government's budget and again this year in the government's budget, so presumably the list will keep getting longer while they continue to be ignored.

The government has also asked for many years for people to submit both disaggregated and aggregated lists for capital. The government had three different lists. If they didn't like what was on the top of the aggregated list, they probably should fund all five projects because they've met a needs assessment, but if they wanted to fund a project that was on the disaggregated list, they could have at least done that, even though they tell everyone to focus on aggregated, focus on making sure you reduce the footprint and making sure that you have appropriately sized buildings for the communities you serve, and then, of course, the need for additional new space in the areas of growth to meet the significant demands of growing communities, including south Edmonton, in significant need of a high school, and northeast Edmonton, in need of a junior high.

These are all things that could have been included in Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, or in the budget, Bill 7, which we are debating as well, but the government has chosen to continue to ignore the needs of everyday families, including right here in the capital city. It almost feels like the government has written off Edmonton and Calgary as places that they choose to actually govern and lead on behalf of because Calgary for two years got no new schools for either public or Catholic students living in the city of Calgary – for two years, nothing – when we know that the numbers of kids have continued to increase, when we know that there were many important, worthy capital projects that could have been under construction so that we would have that necessary space, the space that the minister, when we asked to reduce class sizes and spread students, said wasn't possible because there was simply no way that the government could provide additional educational space.

When the government had opportunities to actually build some, which isn't the only way – you can absolutely get portables. You can rent other community spaces, especially during the period of time where groups weren't congregating significantly. Calgary waited for two years with no projects, and this year there's just one new school for public and one new school for Catholic students. For a government that continues to say that they support choice when they fail to provide the necessary capital to meet the educational needs for families who are choosing public and Catholic education as well as francophone education anywhere in the province: zero capital dollars in this year's budget or in this supplementary supply that we are considering here, again, Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 – zero capital dollars – to

support francophone schools and those choosing to exercise their right to a minority education in this province.

Instead, those families continue to have to go to court, and there have been court decisions that say that financial availability cannot be a factor, that children choosing a minority language education have a right to equal access to educational opportunities, which includes equal access to schools. The fact that we continue to have francophone schools throughout this province, including right in St. Albert, having to meet in a church basement to offer the educational opportunity is not equal access. The government certainly should be taking this opportunity to make good on decisions that the courts have already directed is what must be done in terms of people's Charter rights and their access to minority language educational opportunities. But there's nothing in this bill that will do anything to address those needs as clarified again by the courts.

Instead, there is a plan in this bill to make Albertans pay a billion dollars more in additional personal income taxes. A billion dollars. It is the exact same tax change that the current Premier is well documented fighting against both when he worked for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well as when he was in the House of Commons for about 20 years, I believe it was. Maybe it just felt like 20. I think it was 20, actually, 10 around the cabinet table, 10 in caucus. For the Premier to have such a well-documented articulate argument as to why bracket creep is so wrong headed and so hurtful for low-income families in particular, low- and middle-income families, is the height of hypocrisy but also disrespect to the voters, which we all work for.

9:50

To take this billion dollars by forcing a tax on inflation, taxing people more than what their earning power is, because, of course, inflation is a significant burden facing everyday families – the members opposite talk about it. What they fail to recognize is that they're the government, and they have a responsibility to do something about it.

Also in relation to inflation, the government has chosen to deindex, which I know is sort of not the most accessible term, to get rid of inflation-proofing people's income when they are on a very fixed income, of which they require the government to pay for their ability to be able to live with dignity in the province of Alberta.

This bill specifically is failing to index for those folks who are struggling so hard. I want to remind members that prior to being elected as the Premier, the current Premier at that time said that, of course, they weren't going to get rid of inflation-proofing income for folks on AISH, which in this bill – certainly, Bill 8, the appropriations act, could have brought back some form of indexation so that people on AISH, those who are struggling to make ends meet could have a little bit of a bump in their pay to make up for the fact that their power is going up, their personal insurance is going up, their cost of living generally is going up, and the government has done nothing to address those pressures being downloaded on them through government policy decisions that have resulted in tough times getting tougher for many people here in Alberta.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it doesn't just end with AISH. We know that families who are seniors as well, requiring seniors' benefits and other programs, are seeing about \$750 less for a couple because of the government's failure to inflation-proof the family budget and to match those benefits to inflation.

What's in this supplementary supply bill? We know that the 2022 budget is a no-help budget, and I hate to say that there isn't much in the supplementary supply bill either for that short-term relief. The big program the government wants to pat themselves on the back for is \$50 a month just for three months – January, February, March – for families to off-set a fraction of the increased cost that

families have seen to their power bills. This is probably one of the biggest issues that is being raised with me regularly by folks who live in my riding and in others, around affordability and their absolute frustration that the government fails to return the cap to electricity rates and to actually act in some sort of regulated fashion to provide some stability and certainty for everyday families.

I hate to say that this bill is no help, but it is a fraction of the help that everyday families deserve, and Alberta families should have a government that shares the benefits of the resource wealth that they have stumbled upon because that wealth belongs to all Albertans. It doesn't belong to the UCP or the current Premier, that's for sure.

With that, at this point, I move that we adjourn.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Bill 3 Special Days Act

[Adjourned debate: Ms Issik]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the Special Days Act. I think it's worth beginning by talking about what this bill does and does not do. Essentially, what it does is that it gives the minister the ability to recognize by way of a declaration certain special days, weeks, or months. Now, it's actually quite typical for a government to recognize special days, weeks, or months. This sort of puts the declarations into a process although it's interesting because it can still be done by way of proclamation. It can still be done by way of ministerial order, so this doesn't sort of prevent all those other things from happening. One might actually kind of wonder as to the purpose of this act because it puts the declarations all together, but the proclamations and the ministerial orders still sort of hang in their own where-ever-they-ares. In that sense it doesn't do a lot.

But I guess my top-level, top-line message on this act is that this seems fine. It doesn't really create anything new. It doesn't particularly change anything. I did have, just because I'm a bit of a drafting nerd, a couple of questions about this act, and this being second reading, normally one can leave one's questions, and they sort of reappear with the minister, whether in their closing comments or when this is spoken to in Committee of the Whole. The questions I have with respect to this act are – I mean, what it is is an act about a declaration of a special day, week, or month, which again, like I've said, is fine, but it's not a law that's going to sort of go around overruling other laws or change very much the operation of sort of everyday people.

I'm a little bit curious about section 5, which is: the act prevails. Basically, what it's saying is that if there's an inconsistency or conflict between this act and another act, this act will prevail, which is – I don't know. I guess it seems weird. It seems like a weird thing to be in this particular act. Like, what it would be inconsistent with, and why would it need to prevail? Yeah. I mean, there are some times where provisions like this are necessary – I don't disagree with that – particularly when an act might be interacting with a whole bunch of other acts. I can't really see the circumstances under which this one would, and I'm not really sure this would be my top choice for prevailing acts. It seems like a weird decision, so I'm a bit curious why that's in there.

The other question I have is about section 6, which is the regulation-making power. Now, this is very normal. Acts almost always have regulation-making powers because you don't want to

do everything in the legislation because then every time you need a teeny little tweak to something – like, for instance, fees for something tend to be in regulation because you don't want to have to come back to the Legislature every single time although some fees could properly be put in the legislation, I think. The Kananaskis fee would be a big one for me because then we would know where it was going. Anyway, the point is that in this particular act the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make regulations.

One of them is called a deficiency regulation-making power, remedying any confusion in the application or difficulty in applying the provisions of this act. The reason this is odd is that – this is an interesting regulation-making power in the sense that it allows the government to sort of write things that are outside the scope of what was defined in the act for regulations. It's a fix-all provision, so if someone comes along, and they're like, "Whoops. We made a huge oversight; we, like, missed something really obvious in the act, and we need a deficiency regulation," this allows them the power to do that.

I'm a bit curious why, in an act which is two and a half pages long, you would need a deficiency regulation. I feel like: well, what is there you might not have thought about? It literally grants the minister the ability to declare a special week, day, or month. Cabinet can still proclaim special weeks, days, months outside the act. Ministers can still proclaim special weeks, days, and months on their own. I don't know. I'm guess I'm just a little bit curious. Deficiency regulations are normally for acts that do incredibly important things for which a deficiency would be extremely problematic to the orderly operation of government, so it seems a little bit weird that in this instance you would need a deficiency regulation.

10:00

Yes. Those are my two questions. Why does the act need to prevail, and why would we need to be remedying confusion? Other than that, it seems on its face that this act is fine.

Honestly, I kind of like this sort of thing. It gives us a chance to sort of reflect on the significance of different cultural communities that we have in the province of Alberta. Pride Month, I think, is a very good example. It's an important time. It gives us all the chance to reflect on both how far we've come and how far we still have to go. You know, coming up shortly – I mean, yeah, there are a number of these different days. I think also of Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day that I think is incredibly important, that allows us to mourn those we have lost and consider the fact that transgender folks still experience a significantly higher level of death world-wide. That's problematic. That's something that we should think about and talk about and have a day to recognize.

I actually think that some of the things in this act can be very, very important. I think that, you know, days to remember the victims of the Holocaust: again, they remind us. They remind us of these things that have happened in the past and why they're so important going forward. I think, again, days on which we celebrate different cultures that form part of the fabric of the community – the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I believe, was instrumental in the declaration of Philippine Heritage Month. Again, the Filipino community is huge in Alberta, and it's great to have that chance for everyone to come together and to celebrate, you know, the importance of that culture and the contributions of people to the province. And it's like that with every other community. Obviously, I'm not going to go through and list everything.

But, yes; this bill does seem to do an important thing. I have those two questions about it. Otherwise, I would say I am generally supportive.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency name is like music to my ears. I do rise, though, to ask for unanimous consent from this Chamber to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this evening's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 3, Special Days Act. You know, as far as this bill goes, the declaration of special days, weeks, and months in perpetuity: okay. This legislation does nothing to address the huge issues that Albertans are experiencing at this time.

It's hard to believe, you know, having had the privilege of sitting around the cabinet table, Mr. Speaker, that a bill like this would survive a cabinet table of the NDP government because it would be pushed back, and we would say: there are more important things to do for this province with our time than, regrettably, this bill before us. You know, there is only so much time that a government has to do the work that they need to do, and it's hard to believe that this bill rises to the top of the important work of a government. I'm flabbergasted. It's not like there aren't important issues in this province. Like, earlier tonight we were talking about child poverty, a scourge on any population as rich as this province is.

In addition to preparing somewhat to look at this bill, I've been spending my time tonight looking through a document that is called Lessons on Child Poverty during a Pandemic, put out by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. It talks about the importance of child poverty and addressing it for all the reasons we can imagine: in terms of health, in terms of education, in terms of opportunity. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was talking about low-income child poverty being a predictor of young people who don't have opportunity, how more of them wind up incarcerated or not fulfilling, you know, their capacity in life, but here we are talking about a Special Days Act.

Mr. Speaker, under our government we focused on things like the family and child benefit, which this government has cut in terms of their indexing of it, which means that there are more children in poverty today than there were in 2018 when we were government. What about an act to fully house all the homeless Albertans in this province? What about taking time to do that? What about this government putting their time and effort and their brain power behind that or an act to ensure that all youth graduate high school in this province?

An Hon. Member: That would be good.

Member Ceci: That's a good one, too. Yeah.

But, no, we're dealing with an act to declare special days in perpetuity for days and weeks and months. I think that's the big difference between this side, which tries to understand what the issues are and tries to come up with solutions, and that side, which seems to be coming up with acts that, like, you have to shake your head and say: why is this more important than child poverty or homelessness or high school completion or ensuring that all elderly people feel valued and vital in this province? I can almost hear the critics now saying: "Well, that's the responsibility of families. You know, they should make sure that every elderly person feels vital and valued." Well, not every person who is elderly has that family anymore. Not every person can count on neighbours and the kindness of strangers. So why isn't the government spending time making sure there are solutions for that?

Mr. Speaker, you know, a government that preferences the time in this Legislature to talk about special days as opposed to social

issues and problems and other big concerns, whether that be health or education or social or on and on and on, is a government that, I think, is just sort of spinning its wheels and kind of feinting, you know: “We’re a government that’s doing things, but don’t look over here because we’re changing the education system to preference private education. We’re changing the health system to preference privatized health care. We’re changing the tax structure to give more money to corporations.”

10:10

Those are the things that are happening under the surface, and on the surface we see Bill 3, as if – as if – it’s an important consideration in this province. I guess it’s another tick in the box of platform commitments that the UCP has committed to their grassroots. It certainly wouldn’t make it in a group of people like this on this side or the members of the Alberta NDP.

I’m going to take my seat and listen to some other debate on this subject. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 3, Special Days Act. You know, I’d like to echo some of my colleagues’ comments. When I look at it, truly, there is a limited amount of time that we have to debate legislation, for the government to bring forward legislation for us to debate in this place and pass. And with such a finite amount of time, I guess, I thought there was some kind of matrix that this government would use to score or to determine what is most important to Albertans and what will have the largest impact on Albertans, where the greatest need is.

I mean, I look around at where we are right now. There’s so much going on. We’re still in a pandemic. There are crises all over the place, and what we’re debating is a Special Days Act. It’s a bit confusing because I was under the impression that Albertans could already request the declaration of a special day or week or month by the government through a website. If that is not the case – I know that one of my colleagues asked this very question – it would be really great if the Minister of Culture or somebody else that has some knowledge could stand up and provide some clarity.

Now, I think that there certainly is a place for declarations of special days. I think it raises awareness for lots of really great issues. However, if you just use something like this to tick a box, to say: “Look at us. Aren’t we great allies? We flew a pride flag for one day, or we flew the Franco-Albertan flag for, like, 24 hours” when it’s an entire month that it should be up. You know, it sort of begs the question: is this sort of giving more coverage just to say, “Well, it’s a special day; it’s a special week; we’re going to do this for you,” when in fact there’s not a lot of substance behind the support that government claimed to have for some specific special-interest groups or even groups of Albertans that believe certain things or even French Albertans?

One of the examples that I also would like to use – you know, it’s one thing to have a special day and for us to stand up and make a member’s statement and maybe wear a ribbon or a button and talk about how important issues are, but if there is nothing of substance that follows, if there is no true legislative work or subsequent policies that actually drive the agenda forward, then it’s just kind of an exercise in futility.

A good example is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Every December, at the beginning of December, we proclaim this. We talk about it. We do members’ statements. We have an event, which is so important. Then there are awards that are awarded to different individuals and to groups, and that is so important. But what is more important than that is the work that

goes behind it so that every year on December 3, I think it is, when we stand up and proclaim IDPD, which is International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we can all proudly say that we understand this commitment to the United Nations. The declaration on the status of persons with disabilities involves action and it involves investment and it involves funding. It involves addressing poverty. It involves addressing inclusive education and on and on and on.

But that’s not what this government has done, not with this budget and certainly not with this piece of legislation.

Bill 7
Appropriation Act, 2022
(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the questions to the House on every appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for second reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Neudorf	Stephan
Fir	Pon	Toor
Frey	Rehn	Turton
Horner	Reid	van Dijken
Hunter	Rosin	Walker
Issik	Rowswell	Williams
Luan	Schow	Wilson
McIver	Schulz	Yaseen
Nally	Singh	

Against the motion:

Ceci	Gray	Irwin
Ganley	Hoffman	Renaud

Totals: For – 26 Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022
(continued)

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:19 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Neudorf	Stephan
Fir	Pon	Toor
Frey	Rehn	Turton
Horner	Reid	van Dijken
Hunter	Rosin	Walker

Issik	Rowswell	Williams
Luan	Schow	Wilson
McIver	Schulz	Yaseen
Nally	Singh	
Against the motion:		
Ceci	Gray	Irwin
Ganley	Hoffman	Renaud
Totals:	For – 26	Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 3
Special Days Act
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. member has 11 minutes remaining should she choose to use them.

Seeing none, are there others?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to call the question.

The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has up to five minutes to close debate.

Ms Issik: I waive.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has moved second reading of Bill 3, Special Days Act, on behalf of the Minister of Culture.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we had a lot of productive work done this evening, and at this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, March 23, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:25 p.m.]

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