



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 29, 2022

Day 17

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Frey
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Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Dang
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to introduce a very special guest joining us today in the gallery – I know that some of you may have met with her, and I look forward to meeting her on behalf of Members of the Legislative Assembly tomorrow morning – Ms Idit Shamir, consul general for the state of Israel, accompanied by Mr. Jordan Falkenstein, director of government relations for the consulate general of Israel in Toronto. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are Jordan, Beck, Laine, and Neva Camponi. They are the family members – I know that you're never supposed to pick a favourite child or a favourite staffer – of one of my favourite staffers from the Speaker's office, Ms Erin Camponi. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Let them eat cake. When first asked about skyrocketing energy prices, the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity proudly rose and declared he planned to do nothing. Nothing. When presented with stories from hundreds of real families trying to choose between buying groceries and keeping the lights on, this government tells them not to worry; it's just the market working. The UCP takes a billion dollars in increases in income taxes out of the pockets of working families and calls it modest sacrifices – food, heat, power: modest sacrifices? – but they have more than four times that to give away to highly profitable corporations with not so much as a single job in return.

They talk about fiscal discipline, but insurance companies aren't required to explain why they need more than 5 per cent a year every year in increases. Not to worry, though. The Premier's insurance went down, so I guess there's no problem.

The associate minister seems so out of touch with the impact that energy prices were having on families. I asked him if he even knew what they were compared to a few months ago or a year before. He didn't. Not even a rough figure, an attempt, some sort of indication that he knew what Albertans were up against. Nothing. Nothing, which coincidentally was his plan to address the cost-of-living crisis. This UCP government is far too busy with their own internal power struggles to worry about what Albertans are up against. Their

so-called help, \$50, sure won't feed a family facing hundreds in new costs. Maybe they do think they can eat cake or at least heat their houses with it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know what became of the French aristocracy. Fortunately, Albertans don't have to go to such lengths to rid themselves of their out-of-touch rulers. They'll have that chance in 2023.

Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Schow: The NDP-Liberal coalition is attacking responsible Canadian energy yet again. The environmental extremist and chief Liberal minister Steven Guilbeault has announced a wide range of policies that will harm Alberta industries and invade our provincial jurisdiction. Don't get me wrong. I support measures to reduce emissions, I support technology and innovation to make our industrial economy cleaner and greener, but what I cannot support are punishing taxes and regulations that will kill Alberta jobs, will penalize Alberta families, and will harm our economic recovery. Mr. Speaker, we are already seeing the destructive effects of ill-advised climate change policies that will be punishing us for decades.

The actions of Minister Guilbeault and people like him have restricted the development of energy and resources in western countries like Canada. They have blocked oil and gas development. They have obstructed the construction of pipelines and LNG export facilities. They have shut down safe and emissions-free nuclear power stations. In doing this, they've handed control of global energy markets to some of the world's worst regimes, like Vladimir Putin, Iran, and the socialist dictatorship of Venezuela, just to name a few. They have also killed Canadian jobs, restricted Canadian supply, and driven up prices for Canadian families, worsening the Trudeau inflation crisis.

Despite this, the Liberal-NDP government wants to double down on their failed ideological policies. They want to further limit the development of our oil and gas sector, further jeopardizing our energy security and raising prices at the pump. They want to attack our reliable baseload electricity regeneration, further driving up utility bills. They want to ban the import of new efficient gas and diesel vehicles that the vast majority of Albertans need to get to work and take their kids to hockey practice.

Mr. Speaker, as always, it will fall on the government of Alberta to defend common sense in Canada and defend our energy sector, and I'm confident that we're up to the task.

Canadian Freedoms and Russian Disinformation

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we are proud of the freedom we have and the sacrifices that were made. We don't recognize often how lucky we really are to live in a free nation. In Canada the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees our right to the "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other [means] of communication" and to the "freedom of peaceful assembly." Here in Canada these rights allow for people to be able to protest government decisions that run counter to their beliefs and allow for varying opinions to be expressed through various forms of media.

Unfortunately, there are parts of the world that do not share these values, as we are seeing with the invasion of Ukraine. That's right, Mr. Speaker. The communist, socialist propaganda machine is alive and well with Mr. Putin. The Putin media has been tasked with spreading the propaganda message on Ukraine, and what is the message? Mr. Putin would like the Russian people and the rest of the world to believe that Ukraine is run by a bunch of neo-Nazi fascists

that pose a threat to the Russian state. He would like the Russian people to believe that he is fighting the good fight against tyranny in Ukraine. While he is committed to the massive disinformation campaign, he has also shut down social media channels with Russia to prevent the truth from seeping in.

But the Russian people know better, Mr. Speaker. They recognize that Russia is the aggressor in Ukraine. They recognize that their lives are being negatively affected by sanctions due to Mr. Putin's war, and they are out protesting this horribly senseless war. Unfortunately, they do not have the right to do so, and thousands have been arrested for having views counter to those of Mr. Putin.

The war is a reminder of how lucky we are to live in a free and democratic country like Canada, and I hope that those in Russia one day will know the freedoms that Canadians often take for granted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Postsecondary Education Budget Protests

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, our actions demonstrate our priorities, our values, who we are. Actions are how we demonstrate to the world what we most care about. Clearly, the UCP's actions towards postsecondary prove that they do not care one bit about students in this province.

Yesterday was the Alberta student day of action. Across the province, in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, and elsewhere, students gathered to stand against the damaging cuts to our postsecondary institutions. Despite the blowing snow, students marched from the U of A and Grant MacEwan to the Legislature protesting budget cuts and the resulting tuition increases. In Calgary students demanded that the province reverse their budget cuts and freeze tuition. Across the province these students had their tuition increased despite taking fewer classes, some faculties and departments losing staff and capacity, and some students unable to complete the degree that they began.

1:40

It's becoming harder and harder to get ahead, and as people are struggling with skyrocketing increases in the cost of living, students are shouldering a large part of the burden, with some having to decide between pursuing an education and putting food on the table, at this time when we should be looking ahead, cultivating talent, and planning for a sustainable future that doesn't just look at the world in terms of election cycles but in terms of future generations.

What have the UCP done? What are their actions by which we can judge them? Massive increases to tuition, increased debt load to students to balance their books, failure to distribute student aid, limited accessibility to programs like engineering and counselling psychology. They created massive barriers to enter postsecondary altogether. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on.

Students took action yesterday. Their actions show their priorities. I can say with pride that our NDP caucus stands with the students, faculty, and support staff of our colleges, universities, and polytechnics.

Energy Security in North America

Mrs. Allard: Two weeks ago I had the privilege of representing our province at the Energy Council's conference of federal meetings in Washington, DC. The Energy Council is a nonpartisan legislative organization comprised of 14 energy-producing states and two Canadian provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Formed in 1975, the council serves as a forum for energy and related environmental policy dialogue. As an appointed member for Alberta, I met with U.S. Senators and members of Congress in Washington as well as

a variety of policy influencers and stakeholders to discuss many issues around energy, chief among them, Mr. Speaker, energy security.

I was able to highlight again and again that Alberta is the answer. What's the question, you may ask? Well, let me tell you. In short, the real question is: how can the U.S. address the demand for oil whilst continuing to source it from credible jurisdictions? The answer is Alberta. How can we establish a North American energy security strategy to ensure we are using ethically sourced, responsibly produced oil and gas and make daily life affordable to our constituents? The answer is Alberta. The U.S. needs to partner with Alberta, Mr. Speaker. We need to work together to ensure there is security in our energy supply across North America, not dependent upon totalitarian regimes with questionable production practices.

Mr. Speaker, this is not only an issue of energy security but of environmental stewardship and wealth distribution. The leftist agenda demands that we keep Alberta oil in the ground, but the global demand for oil continues to rise, so what does this achieve? Two things: first, that we displace ethical, world-class environmental standards in production, and second, that we shut in production in North America, costing jobs and livelihoods here; we transfer that production and wealth generation to jurisdictions that oppose the west, like Russia. That's disgusting. North America must come together to ensure sustained production to meet our own demand, and we must develop a North American energy security strategy for the long term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Continuing Care

Ms Sigurdson: The COVID-19 pandemic hit residents of continuing care the hardest. According to the National Institute on Ageing over 1,605 Alberta residents in continuing care died from COVID-19. Many of these deaths were preventable. Every life lost is a tragedy and should be a call for action to transform the continuing care system. Throughout the worst of this pandemic Albertans reached out to me worried that their loved ones were not getting the care they needed. Their loved ones were being left for extended periods in their own waste and not being fed in a timely manner.

The UCP conducted a continuing care review about a year ago, calling for increases in the amount of home care provided, improving working conditions, and increasing the proportion of full-time staff. I was hoping that the continuing care legislation announced yesterday would have shown some movement on these important actions. Instead, what the Health minister introduced was mostly administrative. There are some reasonable changes in the act, but Albertans need more than administrative change. We need action.

Albertans deserve a government that is willing to take the action needed to care for the elderly in continuing care. Instead, sadly, Albertans are left with a self-obsessed government that is only worried about its own survival. Ministers are more concerned with making stump speeches for the Premier than working for Albertans. Staff are even being pulled away from work to campaign for the Premier. We are left to wonder: who is doing the work of governing at all?

Albertans were told nearly a year ago to expect transformational change in continuing care. What are the UCP waiting for? Over 1,605 people in continuing care lost their lives during this pandemic. If these losses, the grief that families are experiencing, and the scars of this tragic pandemic are not reasons for the UCP to act, I do not know what is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans heard the devastating news that the federal Liberals and the federal NDP had reached a governance agreement that would see the Liberals remain in power until 2025. For Albertans, there couldn't have been worse news. The Trudeau-Singh alliance marks another three long years of anti-Alberta rule. Whatever happened to the vitriol between these two leaders? We heard lots of sniping at each other in the last election. Now, all of a sudden, this dysfunctional relationship has blossomed into a match made in heaven. Rex Murphy described it best in an article entitled Liberal-NDP 'Coalition' Will Make Canada Worse off, but that's just fine for Singh and Trudeau. In this article he describes them, and I quote, with no core ideas, no core principles other than: how can we best hang onto power and how can we get a slice of it for ourselves? Make no mistake, socialists love to hold onto power. They love to virtue signal. They love to raise taxes and increase government overreach through red tape.

Just how is this going to play out for our largest industry here in Alberta? One only has to go back to when B.C. Premier John Horgan formed a coalition with the Green Party in B.C. The concession Horgan more than willingly made to get the Green support was to oppose and take court action against the Trans Mountain pipeline, which is our only access to tidewater and foreign markets. Who was right there cheering on? His close friend and ally – that's right – Jagmeet Singh, of course, who, for all intents and purposes, is now the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada. Singh has stated openly that he wants the federal Liberals to scrap the program where the feds are partnering with us on the cleanup of oil well sites, a \$1 billion program that is restoring and protecting our environment. So much for the NDP being the stewards of the economy.

There's no doubt that trouble is brewing, but the question in most Albertans' minds is: where are the Albertans? Where are they going to land?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Agricultural Land Prices

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a crisis in the country. Toronto and Vancouver, Canada's two largest cities, have become the most expensive places to live and compete internationally. You might believe that this real estate crisis is confined to our country's largest cities, but that is not the case. The secret to Alberta's past and future success has been the family unit dotted across the prairie, working and owning the land. The question is now: will this have any part in Alberta's future? Increasingly, it seems that the only way to establish a family farm is to inherit it or millions of dollars. The price of land in Alberta has taken off like a jet plane, with Ontario pension funds, large financial institutions, and international investors and speculators riding first class. Alberta's young families have been left on the tarmac like unvaccinated deplorables, watching as the dream of landownership and Alberta's future are bought up by the elites, toasting their champagne flutes to another good deal done.

Mr. Speaker, our rural communities are already being depopulated by the economy of scale needed for modern agriculture. With the cost of living and interest rates ballooning ever higher as a result of Justin Trudeau's refusal to turn off the money-printing machine, Alberta families are being pushed out of the basket and their own homes with no parachute in sight. These billions of dollars from

Bay Street, Wall Street, and Shanghai have left Alberta's next generation with no hope of owning a family farm. None of the world's elite give a flying rat's behind if the communities of Manning, Wildwood, Coronation, or Stavelly become ghost towns.

On our current path, Mr. Speaker, the result will be the emptying of rural Alberta, with the corporate machine, rather than Alberta families who live there, running and owning the food supply for our country. Shareholders will be richer, yes, but our citizens will be poorer. Rural communities will be made up of renters no longer attached to the land that they live in with their homes. Now the folks who run and own this province will be out of province, out of touch, and landowners again, flying first class in a plane and a province that used to be owned by Albertan families.

Oral Question Period

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

2017 UCP Leadership Contest Investigation

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier admitted that he's been questioned by the RCMP as part of an investigation into the 2017 UCP leadership race and alleged fraud therein. Now, for those at home, there is a long-standing parliamentary tradition that when a Premier or a minister is under investigation by the police, they step aside to ensure there is no real or perceived opportunity for influence over the judicial system. But the UCP? The rules around upholding the public trust do not apply to them. Why does this Premier and his cabinet continue to feel that they are above the law?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we heard the same fear and smear from the NDP all through the last election, and Albertans rejected their politics of personal destruction. Here's the problem. That kind of defamatory attack made in the privilege of this place is what encouraged her ethics critic to violate the law by seeking to violate my personal privacy. Why doesn't she understand that every time she goes into the gutter, all she does is lower the tone of Alberta politics? That will be, I fear, her legacy in this place.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the appointment of a special prosecutor is the only thing standing between this Premier and a conflict of interest in a police investigation that goes to the heart of his current role in this Assembly. Now, three or four Justice ministers ago the UCP appointed that special prosecutor but then refused to release their name. They said that they're from Ontario, and that's it. Three years later the investigation is still ongoing. Will the Premier today stand and tell us the name of the prosecutor secured by Alberta Justice to protect the integrity of this investigation? Who is protecting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know, nor should I. It would be inappropriate of me to ask that question. The Crown prosecution service and police services can always request, when they deem it appropriate, advice from outside counsel, and I understand that's what happened in this instance in 2019.

Ms Notley: The Premier wasn't the only one interviewed by RCMP. The Minister of Infrastructure was interviewed, as was the former Minister of Justice. Both went to great pains to say that they themselves were not the ones under investigation, again, over two years ago. Mr. Speaker, these are allegations of fraud, of vote

tampering, of serious abuse of democracy around this Premier's leadership campaign. Will the Premier today please rise in the House and say, with one hundred per cent absolute certainty, that he is not the subject of this investigation into alleged voter fraud around his leadership campaign?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I was informed that I am not.

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

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, for three years the RCMP has been investigating the UCP and the leadership race that elected the Premier for identity fraud, allegations of votes being cast using fraudulent e-mails, and people becoming members of the UCP without their knowledge, people having their personal identification numbers taken so their votes could be cast by someone other than them. The Premier admitted yesterday that he was interviewed by the RCMP but refused to tell us anything else. Why was the Premier interviewed by the RCMP, what did they ask him, and what did he tell the RCMP? Simple questions.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, that question is inappropriate. Of course, if I have an interview, it is a confidential matter for those interviewing me. What I can say is this. The NDP dragged all of these allegations through the mud in the 2019 election, and they were sent packing, the first majority government in Alberta history to not make it past one term, because Albertans oppose the politics of personal destruction, of defamation, and division, which is the stock-in-trade of today's NDP.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this is about trust, and the Premier is not alone when it comes to the RCMP interviewing members of this government in regard to their multiyear identity fraud investigation into the UCP. The ministers of jobs, seniors, social services, Infrastructure: all have been interviewed by the RCMP when it comes to this scandal, and now the Premier has also been interviewed. Premier, this is about justice and our democracy. Why should the details of that interview really be hidden from Albertans? It's a simple question, especially when many suspect the UCP's current leadership review process is rigged in the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if the member has questions for the RCMP, I suggest he puts it to them. Of course, police operations happen independent of government. Perhaps he does not know that, but what I know is that his colleague and ethics critic violated the law to violate my personal privacy and that of another Alberta citizen. What did he know about that, what did his leader know about that, and why did they create an environment in the NDP where that kind of illegal and unethical conduct was deemed acceptable by their ethics critic? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member has the call.

Mr. Sabir: The question is: why was the Premier interviewed by the RCMP? These are serious concerns if the RCMP is interviewing the Premier and looking into the UCP leadership contest that the Premier won, and the Premier is referring to that as sour grapes. I hate to break it to the Premier, but the RCMP doesn't investigate sour grapes for three years now. The Premier keeps deflecting. He points to others who have been fined for their roles. I'm asking about his role in this corrupt leadership contest that elected him. Can he finally come clean on this and stop hiding from the people of Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker, if he has questions for an independent police agency, he should put those questions to the independent police agency, but that's not what the NDP is about. They are about the politics of personal destruction, of defamation, division, and deceit. They're addicted to it. But Albertans want a government instead focused on their concerns like the cost of living, which is why we're scrapping the fuel tax this week, like a balanced budget, like a growing economy, like delivering on nearly 90 per cent of our election commitments. That's why the NDP is losing right now in the polls, and you can see how desperate they're getting.

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

Corporate Taxation and Investment Attraction

Mr. Bilous: In the last election the UCP promised that if they cut corporate taxes, investment would come flooding into the province, but even before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, and 50,000 full-time jobs were lost. As a result, companies laid off hundreds of staff or invested elsewhere. In the middle of the pandemic the UCP doubled down on their corporate tax giveaway and even accelerated it, but that hasn't led to increased capital investment either. Now Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and Calgary's is the highest among major cities in the country. To the Premier: why does Alberta continue to fall further behind other provinces under this UCP government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, talk about leading with your chin. You know, the NDP said that we were going to lose \$4.6 billion in revenue through the job-creation tax cut. In fact, we are generating \$400 million more in revenue on that 8-point rate than the NDP was under their 12-point rate. Why? Because this has stimulated \$60 billion of new private-sector investment in Alberta's economy. We led Canada in economic growth last year. We were projected to do so again last year. Last year was the best year ever for film and television, for the energy sector, for our exports, for high tech and so much more.

Mr. Bilous: Corporate tax revenue in 2018 was \$4.8 billion; your numbers are less than \$4 billion this year. According to RBC economists capital investment is expected to increase across the country by 8.5 per cent, with Saskatchewan leading the way at 18.5 per cent. Meanwhile Alberta will have the second-lowest capital investment growth rate at 4.8 per cent. But here's the thing. It's still well below investment levels seen in our last year as government. In 2018 capital investment was \$62 billion. Well, the numbers don't lie. We know this government has played fast and loose with the truth. Will the Premier admit he's failed to deliver his . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons Albertans fired the NDP government was because of their jobs crisis, that they created by driving tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province, and that's exactly why we were elected on a pledge to implement the job-creation tax cut to make Alberta the most attractive place if not in North America, certainly in Canada for new job-creating investment, and now we are seeing the results, with a projection that we will see corporate tax revenues increase from \$4 billion to \$4.5 billion and then to nearly \$5 billion on a rate one-third lower than theirs.

Mr. Bilous: All forecasts. Meanwhile under this UCP government Calgary head offices have shrunk. With higher oil prices we've seen

corporate profits increase dramatically. According to the UCP's last budget corporate profits increased 147 per cent in 2021 and are forecasted to increase another 31 per cent this year, but oil companies aren't spending money on capital investment. Instead, they're choosing to spend profits on dividends and share buybacks. The Premier went to these companies with cowboy hat in hand at last year's Stampede and begged them to spend. As we know, the Premier is all hat and no cattle. Given that he's failed to get them . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, you can't blame the NDP for not knowing what's going on in the oil and gas sector, because they hate the oil and gas sector. The NDP's entire reason for existing is to attack Alberta oil and gas. Look at what their ally Justin Trudeau is doing in Ottawa today with his new outrageous environment plan, his 25 per cent proposed increase in the carbon tax. Now, I want to give the NDP a trigger warning. They won't want to hear this, but here it is: drilling activity in Alberta in oil and gas this year so far is up by 80 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH and Income Support Payments

Ms Renaud: Since 2019 the UCP has cut 514 jobs from Community and Social Services. As a direct result of the UCP's changes and massive staff cuts, vulnerable Albertans are at increased risk of harm. My constituent Darlene reached out to me because her income support benefit was cut by \$200, which is significant given that her core benefit is less than \$900. As a result, she's behind on rent and utilities, and she was in the hospital, so unable to make this government's appeal window. She can't get assistance from the ministry, and she's been calling them for a week with no response. Does the Premier consider this a modest sacrifice or just onerous?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again a misleading question from the NDP. In fact, the provincial budget for Community and Social Services is being increased in this budget that we just passed. But here's the good news. It was also a balanced budget, which means that those programs are sustainable. As long as the NDP, with their reckless increases in spending, was driving us into an endless sea of debt, that would compromise the fiscal sustainability of social programs because more money would go to bankers and bondholders in interest payments and less would go to support the vulnerable.

Ms Renaud: I received many e-mails and calls from people in other constituencies about dangerous wait times being experienced by AISH and income support recipients. Barrington Sr. from Red Deer wrote to me because he was unable to get prescriptions refilled. The stress of this is taking a toll on him, yet another preventable harm that will end up stressing an already overburdened health care system. The Premier talks a big game about supporting these extremely vulnerable Albertans, falsely claiming that they're the most generous benefits in Canada when we know they're below the poverty line. Will the Premier tell this House how he plans to address these dangerous wait times that are causing harm?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, the overall budget for Community and Social Services received a \$36 million increase this year. That's part of the plan. During the pandemic we invested a total of \$132 million for civil society . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask another question, I invite her to rise to her feet to do that.

Until then, the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: . . . an additional \$130 million to civil society partners to help care for the vulnerable during the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to AISH benefits they are 40 per cent more generous than the analogous benefits across the country, on top of which we have the most generous suite of social benefits and taxes; 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax at all.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, these are real people that need answers, not rhetoric. The UCP has cut 514 workers in social services. We know that caseloads have exploded to dangerous levels. People aren't getting the help they need. Is this Premier finally willing to admit what is crystal clear to Albertans, that cuts to income support, the slashing of 514 jobs, the systematic removal of supplemental benefits for housing and food have created a crisis, a real crisis? Will the Premier admit what Albertans already know? He can't be trusted with the truth and for vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the budget for AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, goes this year from \$1.3 billion to \$1.37 billion to \$1.45 billion to \$1.5 billion. Why does the NDP insist on referring to large increases in public spending as cuts? Is it because they studied too much discovery math, or is it just because they're dishonest?

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

Human Trafficking

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Human trafficking is a very serious crime, from which we are certainly not immune in Canada. It happens throughout our communities, our cities, our small towns, and places where people would not normally suspect such wicked operations of ever occurring. Generally trafficking incidents tend to happen in more urban centres, but the lasting effects ripple throughout our entire country. Human trafficking involves a process of recruiting, transporting, or holding victims to exploit them for forced labour, their organs and tissues, or sexual purposes, stripping them of their rights, freedoms, and humanity. To the Premier: can you please tell us why this government struck a Human Trafficking Task Force and who was on it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a commitment to fight human trafficking. This is a horrific crime that happens right here in the province of Alberta. That is why it was such an honour to be with members of the Human Trafficking Task Force this weekend as they provided our government with recommendations on how best to combat human trafficking in our province. Task force members, along with the chair, Paul Brandt, include former Minister of Children's Services and Solicitor General Heather Forsyth, Reach director Jan Fox, Edmonton police chief Dale McFee, RCMP member Douglas Reti, Catholic Social Services director and First Nations advocate and . . .

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

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that our government introduced Alberta's first-ever standardized definition of human trafficking and legislation to combat traffickers two years ago but that vulnerable Albertans continue to need additional policies to protect them as human

trafficking cases in Alberta continue to increase every year and in Canada are growing at one of the fastest rates of any criminal activity, to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what is this government's plan to address the task force's recommendations?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has accepted in principle nearly all of these recommendations, and we are already taking action. We're establishing an office for combatting human trafficking to co-ordinate our province's work on this important issue. We've also increased support for ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, created specialized human trafficking and exploitation units to support victims directly, investigate human trafficking activity, and we are working with local groups to build networks that support victims and survivors like those that we fund in Children's Services under PSECA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Well, given that human traffickers impose life-altering and oftentimes life-threatening restrictions on their victims, in which freedom does not ever seem possible, and that victims can feel forgotten by the system and feel alone in the process of recovering from their pain and trauma and further given that seeking proper aid to rediscover their humanity can oftentimes be intimidating for victims, to the minister: what supports are available to survivors to address financial, physical, and emotional needs once they leave their horrific living arrangements and their traffickers?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the member for her question and thank the task force for their amazing work, including Paul Brandt and Heather Forsyth. Very strong work. In addition to Budget '22 funding women's shelters at the rate of \$51.3 million, we also provided funding for the family violence line at 310.1818. This support line provides services in 170 languages, including Indigenous languages, where women can seek supports. We also provide funding for those escaping abuse through the Alberta supports benefit . . .

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was with students in Calgary for Alberta's student day of action. They shared their experiences of having to drop classes, change programs, drop out of school entirely, or choose between getting an education and putting food on the table. The UCP decimated the postsecondary budget. Then the same minister signed off on staggering tuition increases. The students asked me to ask this minister about budget cuts and jacked-up tuition rates. Will the UCP listen to the students and commit to reversing their reckless cuts and reverse their record-breaking tuition hikes?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to listen to students. I meet, of course, with them very regularly and, more importantly, apart from just listening, actually take their advice and guidance and turn that into reality. As an example, one of the things that student leaders told me about on a very frequent basis was the need to create more bursaries for low-income students. You know, we did. We did exactly that. There's \$50 million over three years to

create new bursaries for low-income students. They also asked us to make adjustments to loan limits, and we did that as well, taking their advice into consideration.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this UCP minister actually underspent the student aid budget by \$4 million last year and given that life has become deeply unaffordable – tuition increases, student loan rate spikes make it hard just to pay off debt – given that these students need support now more than ever and that these students are meant to be the major drivers for our economy for decades to come if they actually stay here and don't flee the UCP, can the minister explain to all of us why this government cares more about filling their coffers than they do about future prospects for young people and long-term economic viability?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question demonstrates that the member doesn't understand how the postsecondary budget works. Any dollar that's raised from tuition revenue goes to the institutions. The government doesn't get a dime of that, so I'm not sure what the allegation is. But when it comes to investing in students, our government is committed to doing precisely that. That's why we're providing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions. As well, we're providing \$15 million over three years to expand apprenticeship educational opportunities, \$6 million over three years to expand work-integrated learning opportunities, \$8 million over three years to create additional microcredential programs. There's more.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister needs a little tutorial in his own budget estimates – in his own estimates he said that he paused student aid because he had so many applications and also shared that they didn't give out the student aid because they didn't want to spend and to ask for more money – and given that already Alberta has fallen short of other provinces in offering student aid and given that higher upfront costs create even more barriers for hopeful students, can the minister let all of us here know today who actually supports his reckless cuts to our colleges, universities, and polytechnics? Certainly, students don't, faculty doesn't, researchers and support staff . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, over the last few years we've worked to bring funding and spending in our postsecondary system in line with other provinces. Having done that work, we're now providing more to create additional spaces and additional seats. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're investing \$171 million to create – the member is right – 7,000 additional spaces. Those are more spaces than have been created in over a decade in our postsecondary system. We're providing key investments to help ensure that when our students complete their programs, they graduate with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to succeed.

Insurance Premium Costs

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, I have a really simple question for the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Service Alberta, one I sincerely hope either of them can answer. To either minister: how much has the average Albertan's auto insurance increased since the UCP government was elected?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say today is that this government dealt with the systemic issues that were driving up costs in the automobile insurance industry. What I can say again today is that seven major insurance companies have either dropped rates or requested a decline in automobile insurance premiums for their customers. Why? Because we dealt with the issues that were creating price inflation in insurance.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that I didn't get any kind of answer there and given that the minister either doesn't know or doesn't want to tell the House just how much the harmful policies of this government have driven up costs for Albertans relying on their vehicle to get to and from work or to pick up their kids but given that I want to give the minister another opportunity, will the minister commit to tabling all information he has regarding skyrocketing insurance rates in the House tomorrow? If he won't, what is he hiding?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, who simply put a Band-Aid on automobile insurance rates by putting on a 5 per cent cap, this government dealt with the systemic issues driving up costs. Rates went up 5 per cent or more under the previous government. This year we've seen Intact drop rates by 2 per cent, Belair by 2 per cent, Zurich by 2.7 per cent, AMA by 7 per cent. We're seeing automobile insurance rates go down.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that most Albertans surely aren't seeing those savings that the minister claims and given that the cost of everything is going up with the UCP in charge and given that they're making matters so much worse by pulling the cap on electricity, pulling the cap on auto insurance increases, increasing property taxes, school fees, tuition, and so, so much more, can the minister explain why he both wants to drown my constituents in debt and also withhold vital information about the cost-of-living crisis they're facing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, our government is dealing with the systemic issues that are creating affordability for Albertans, unlike the members opposite. The members opposite didn't have the courage to deal with insurance pressures. They simply put a cap on. The members opposite, on electricity costs, added over \$7 billion of costs . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: The members opposite added over \$7 billion of costs to our infrastructure system, Mr. Speaker, ultimately broke agreements with power purchase companies, creating a \$1.4 billion liability for Albertans, and imposed a carbon tax.

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

Federal and Provincial Energy Policies

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP and the Trudeau Liberals recently signed a deal that would grant Justin Trudeau a majority until 2025. This deal is bad news for Alberta as both parties are against supporting Alberta's oil and gas industry. It is disappointing, to say the least. Thousands of Albertans rely on the oil and gas sector for employment, but even Alberta's provincial NDP has refused to support jobs in that industry. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: how is the UCP fighting for Alberta's oil and gas industry against the Liberal-NDP coalition?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear now more than ever that the NDP-Liberal alliance will not help facilitate pipelines. They will not help the oil and gas sector, and they will not help Alberta jobs. That's because they want to phase out oil and gas. Yet the world demand for oil and gas is going up – it's going up – as supply is going down, as we need to weed out Russian barrels of oil. The question is: where is that oil and gas going to come from? We believe it should be from Alberta. That's why we're advocating across the border to say: look north; Alberta is the solution.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we are now only days away from yet another increase in Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which will cost a Canadian family \$50 for every tonne of CO₂, and given that the carbon tax has been the root cause of thousands of lost jobs and investment dollars being retracted in Canada as well as in Alberta under the previous NDP government, can the same minister tell Albertans what our government is doing to support Albertans against a thoughtless and unsympathetic Prime Minister?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government is simply out of touch with Canadians. They're out of touch with global supply-demand fundamentals with energy. They're out of touch with the whole issue of energy security. While the federal Liberals are jacking up the carbon tax, we are providing relief for Albertans by suspending the fuel tax, that will ultimately drop fuel prices by 13 cents a litre, effective April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there has already been a substantial increase in the cost of electricity and natural gas for Alberta families and given that the former NDP government worked hard with their own carbon tax to make heating a home and driving a car unaffordable luxuries for Albertans and given that the carbon tax is set to increase at the end of this week, to the minister: what is your response to Justin Trudeau on behalf of Albertans?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Unfortunately, Justin Trudeau and his NDP alliance are moving forward with a 3-cent increase on gas tax on April 1 and, shockingly, continue to move forward today with a 40-cent – 40-cent – increase per litre long term on the climate plan. Tonight inside this House we will be debating on a motion calling on the federal government to remove their carbon tax once and for all. The real question is: will the NDP stand with everyday Albertans, or are they going to continue to stand with their close ally Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a question.

Child Care Affordability

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families and businesses are working hard to get back to work after the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the UCP government was one of the last to finalize a federal-provincial child care agreement despite the fact that access to

affordable child care is a key driver of economic recovery. Better late than never. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many additional subsidized spaces have been created as of today?

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

2:20

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to point out to members of this House that while we were not one of the first provinces to sign an agreement with the federal government, because we did take the time to fight for a fair deal for Albertans, we were, in fact, one of the first two provinces to roll out affordability dollars for parents. Now, part of our plan is making sure that parents in every single licensed space right across this province, whether that be facility-based child care, preschools, or day homes, qualify for these additional supports. We are working to create an additional 12,000 spaces this year, and thousands more have been created in the last few months.

Mr. Dang: Given that it seems the minister doesn't know how many spaces have been created to this day and given that many Alberta families are still recovering from the devastating financial effects of the pandemic and given that these same families are dealing with the soaring cost of living and given that child care centres in my constituency have raised concerns that even though they have the spaces, they've been told that they won't actually receive the grants for all of those spaces, why is the government making it so difficult for child care centres and families to secure affordable spaces?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I've said a number of times in this House, any time you roll out a new program, there are going to be questions. We have offered and certainly I've offered to members of the opposite side of this House that any time a child care operator is having difficulty entering their information on the system, we are more than willing to help. That is what our ministry is dedicated to doing. Parents started seeing these dollars roll out in January. I do believe the vast majority of child care operators have been able to roll out these affordability dollars for parents and families. We are hearing very positive feedback, and we're seeing enrolments start to go up, which is excellent news.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it seems like this minister is full of nothing but empty words and given that the UCP government's federal-provincial child care agreement web page actually states that this agreement aims "to ensure families can choose the child care that works for them" and "support licensed child care," what is the government actually doing to ensure that these promises are rolled out besides the talk that we're hearing today?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite doesn't love my words, so let me use the words of child care operators here in Alberta. A quote from Tricia Cunningham with Sigis Child Care Society in St. Albert: because of this agreement our fees for children aged two to four dropped from \$44 a day to \$23 a day, and parents eligible for subsidy have seen their fees reduced to \$13 a day. What does that mean? It means we did exactly what we said we would do. Parents are able to access these supports right across the province, and this is great news because

these parents can now get back to work and drive Alberta's economic recovery.

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

Indigenous Relations

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Pope and Indigenous representatives are meeting to discuss reconciliation. As this historic meeting unfolds, it's important to take a deep look at how this government is addressing reconciliation with Alberta's Indigenous communities. This UCP budget cuts funding to Indigenous Relations by 18 per cent and continues the slow defunding of the crucial water for reserves program. On the eve of this historic meeting on reconciliation between the Vatican and Indigenous communities is the minister really going to stand by his plan to reduce support services for Indigenous communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is a little bit confused. I think he learned in estimates that we're actually increasing our budget in Indigenous Relations, an additional \$2 million for reconciliation. What we call it in Indigenous Relations is reconcili-action. You can see it out there working right now. I actually just signed off on – I had to crack my hands, so many reconciliation grants were going out the door, over \$8 million and along with Health another \$8 million there. There are a lot of projects going forward this year, and I'm just happy to see them happening.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this government, after taking office, ended the training of civil servants in Indigenous history and culture that our government announced and given that this government also provided no money for the urban Indigenous initiatives, which they previously cancelled, and given that as the eyes of the world are seeing the importance of addressing reconciliation, Alberta should be a leader in achieving this, will the minister end his neglect and undo these senseless decisions? Why is this government committed to taking us backwards on reconciliation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that we actually increased our budget again on urban initiatives. Many things going forward this year. Again, several grants were signed off this morning to help out various projects that are going forward throughout the province. We're working on our garden. It's a reconciliation garden, and we're going to be putting a panel together that'll be helping to name it and work on developing a proper memorial for it. We're so happy to be doing that. I remember when we first started the garden, Chief Billy said that that was the most appropriate thing we could do. It brought hope and healing to the community.

Mr. Feehan: Given that it's been three years since the federal government released their findings from the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls report and given that in the past two years this government has done next to nothing and has not even released findings of the Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls despite their final report being submitted to the minister over two months ago, when will the minister finally release this report? Will he commit to immediate action or a solution to the question of reconciliation to ask those who've been waiting for years to keep on waiting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is probably one of the most important things we've been working on because it is so important to the families. We started out this journey with a ceremony. The panel came to me and they wanted to do full circle, so we received the report in ceremony just last week. The panel members have told me that this is some of the most important work they've done in their career, and I support them on that a hundred per cent.

Even before the report was out, Mr. Speaker, because it is so important, this government started working on several initiatives, everything from our declaration of Sisters in Spirit Day and many other projects.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's EMS system is strained under the competing demands of small rural communities and big urban centres. I have the honour to serve alongside my colleagues in this House on the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee to provide the Minister of Health with solutions to some of these challenges. Budget 2022 recently announced that an increase of \$64 million will go towards addressing EMS system pressure and continuing to make EMS more responsive to community needs. To the minister: can you tell the House specifically how this funding will be used to support front-line EMS workers and rural service providers as well?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The \$64 million in Budget 2022 goes directly towards adding more ground ambulances and crews while providing more sustainable funding for helicopter air ambulance services in Alberta. These additional supports increase the overall capacity throughout the province and improve efficiency in the system. The measures in the budget provide direct support to our front-line EMS workers, who have admirably risen to the existing challenges in the system, which the events of the past two years only magnified.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and through you thanks to the minister. Part of the province's response to EMS pressures is a 10-point plan from Alberta Health Services. Given that point 2 in this plan is to hire more paramedics and further given that there's a plan on launching an hours-of-work project to help relieve staff fatigue, again to the same minister: what are the plans to attract more potential paramedics to the province or encourage citizens to enrol in paramedic programs to achieve the goal and implement this project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for that great question, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank our EMS workers for their vital work, especially in the last two years. To help them manage fatigue levels, AHS has already taken steps to combat this problem and create a better working environment for new and existing staff. Since January AHS has hired 66 new staff, nine temporary full-time and 57 casual staff. These new staff members provide immediate relief for those who desperately need a break. EMS is also working

with learning institutions to expand class sizes to allow more paramedics training and graduation.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister, through you. Given that Budget 2022 only details the addition of five 24/7 ambulances to each of Alberta's largest cities, Calgary and Edmonton, plus one to Airdrie and given the recommendation to improve integration between EMS and hospital staff to improve the overall flow of operations, again to the Minister of Health: how will this help rural areas, who already have fewer ambulances than the larger centres, and what does this do in areas that don't house their own hospital?

Member LaGrange: Thank you again for another important question. Adding 20 new ambulances in these urban centres over the next two years will alleviate the existing pressure in suburban and rural areas. This reduces the need for rural ambulances to answer calls in the urban centres, meaning there are more available to respond to the calls in their immediate communities. Additionally, EMS began a pilot project in the rural areas of the northern zone on January 9 to better manage the transfer of patients who do not have acute-care needs. Mr. Speaker, we're doing more to increase EMS capacity.

2:30 School-based Mental Health Supports

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the last years have been extremely challenging for students, staff, and families. Alberta kids have been through so much over the course of the pandemic, and the impact to their mental health cannot be underestimated. Experts say mental health supports will have to evolve quickly as students face new anxieties and stresses. Considering that this government has failed to meet the mental health needs of students to date, will the Education minister now finally commit to placing a mental health therapist in each and every school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mental health, obviously, is of concern to all of us and particularly within our schools. That's why we've added an additional \$110 million over the next three years, \$30 million in this upcoming year, to address mental health concerns. It was on the recommendation of the child and youth well-being panel, that made further recommendations. Of course, we're concerned about mental health, and we're going to continue to prioritize that in our budget.

Ms Hoffman: Given that that answer was a no and given that experts have said that in order to protect children's resilience, we must give them proper support to process their experiences, the tools for emotional regulation, and access to safe professional guidance in the form of properly trained mental health therapists in schools and given that the recent data from the University of Calgary shows student stress also comes from economic strains suffered from families and with so many Alberta families having their hours cut or, in Calgary, experiencing the largest unemployment of any major city in the country, will the Education minister commit to putting a counsellor ...

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to draw your attention to the fact that we've added over \$700 million to the budget over the next three years, a 1 per cent increase to base, a 1 per cent increase to operations and maintenance, a 4.6 per cent

increase to transportation, as well as an additional \$110 million over the next three years, \$30 million in this upcoming year, to address child and youth well-being, especially around the mental health area. It is of grave concern to us, and we're going to do everything we can to address it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that educators stress that mental health supports go hand in hand with academic success, especially for students who have suffered significant learning loss during the pandemic, and given that Leanne Timko, the director of learning services with Calgary Catholic school district, said that, quote, learning is about taking risks, about knowing you might make a mistake and get something wrong, end quote, but those who learn recognize when their mistakes are made and they pledge to do better, will the Education minister admit that she's failed Alberta students and learn from her mistakes? Will she fund a counsellor in every school, or will she continue to show Alberta families she can't be trusted?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite never fails to continue to make mistakes. Again she's made another mistake. We are adding another \$110 million, on top of our \$700 million, over three years in our budget. We're increasing the supports to our students. That's on top of the fact that last year we added an additional \$40 million to address specialized learning support funding. We're continuing to make sure that it is of top priority to address the mental health of our students. We know of the concerns, and not only is it the Ministry of Education, but all my fellow ministers are working collaboratively to address these issues.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, 47 children and youth in the child intervention system have now died between last April and today, most of them Indigenous. This heartbreaking trend has continued to develop over the past year. It is our responsibility as legislators to do everything in our power to learn from and better prevent the deaths of children in government care. This is a continuing crisis, and it is time to act. I'm asking again: will the Minister of Children's Services convene an all-party committee to address the safety of children in care and outstanding recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been a difficult two years, and my heart does go out to the families of those children and young adults who have died and those who have had interaction with the child intervention system. We know that there are going to be changes that need to be made. Unlike the members opposite, we're not going to wait for an all-party panel. I've asked the ministry to do a review into what we're seeing in these cases as this year has been very different and we're seeing different trends in terms of the data and information we're seeing. We are absolutely committed to being transparent, accountable, and taking action where . . .

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

Ms Pancholi: Given, Mr. Speaker, that a discussion about the deaths of children deserves more time than a 35-second exchange – and that's what this is about – given that we could work together on

this, I urge the minister to reconsider. Now, given that last year the Minister of Children's Services committed to a review of policies and practices when it comes to the deaths of children in care, can the minister update this House on the state of this review? When will it be completed? Who is conducting it? Who is being consulted? Will the report be made public, and will the members of this House be able to consider it? Most importantly, when can we expect action?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken about this. I have said that I would make this report public. Obviously, we had expected this in January, but we did have a number of staff away with COVID, so that has slightly been delayed, but there are three different groups that we see. We see supports for those who are transitioning into adulthood. We're seeing also a group of infants, and we want to look at the circumstances surrounding each and every one of those cases. And then for children in care, as I've already said, I will absolutely make it public. If the member opposite has recommendations, we'd be happy to hear them.

Ms Pancholi: Given that of the 47 deaths this year 21 were young people over the age of 18 who are receiving financial assistance, a grim record, given that B.C. just extended supports to youth transitioning out of care to age 27 and given that once again the UCP is out of step with best practices and chose instead to defend, through the courts, cutting young people off supports for the sole purpose of saving money, if the minister's report finds that decisions of this government in any way contributed to or failed to prevent the situation that we face today, will the minister commit publicly that that information will be included in the report and guarantee full transparency and accountability?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are not actually seeing what the member opposite is saying is the case, and I have shared that information with her before. What we are doing is that we've just transitioned to a transitions to adulthood program. We've always said – I started saying it in 2019 – that we needed to do better than have a financially focused support system for young adults who are transitioning into care and putting in place, really, a series of supports and check-ins to make sure that young people have the supports and services and connections that they need to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Rail Transportation

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Far too often we have been faced with and are threatened by blockades of our borders and halts to our railway. These careless actions cause worry and harm in our economy and for our farmers. Farmers on our side of the border and on the other side both rely on each other to have seed for crops and feed for their cattle. To the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what is our government putting in place for farmers that are experiencing these price fluctuations and supply challenges?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question. Our essential services need to remain essential. We were very happy to see CP and the teamsters agree to binding arbitration, and we look forward to a ratified agreement.

What are we doing? We're very proud of the business risk management suite of programs that we have in partnership with the federal government – AgriInvest, AgriStability, AgriInsurance, Agri-Recovery – in disaster situations like we saw during the drought last summer. Very important programs. There's enough risk in agriculture, from weather to rain to price increases and bad federal government policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that we are faced with daily challenges of getting our landlocked oil to global markets by any way we can as we still must heavily rely on the railway system and given that Gibson terminal in Hardisty relies heavily on the rail system, which sees about 1 in 4 of all barrels exported from western Canada and moves about 210,000 barrels a day, to the Minister of Energy: what can we do to protect terminals like the Gibson terminal in Hardisty from suffering negative impacts from halts to the railway system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying that I very much enjoyed touring the rail terminal last summer with the member. It was an excellent opportunity. There's no question that we have to keep the tracks open. We need this private-sector rail capacity to be able to supply greater volumes of oil into the United States to displace Russian crude, that needs to be weeded out. We have room to move more crude by rail with existing private-sector rail that's out there and not being utilized, but we have to keep the tracks open. That's why we brought in the infrastructure defence act.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that it's not just natural resource products and farmers that rely on the goods and services transported from the rail system – we also see everyday Albertans, family-owned businesses, and other sectors across Alberta rely on these rail systems – to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what plans are in place to protect all sectors of hard-working business owners and families in the event we face another halt to the railway system?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, ensuring that we have alternate routes of transportation, ensuring that we have sound transportation infrastructure is critical in this province. It's all about business resiliency. And trigger warning for the members opposite: business resiliency needs to ensure that corporations and businesses are profitable – profitable, Mr. Speaker – that they have strong balance sheets. That's why we went forward with the job-creation tax cut. That's why we're improving the regulatory environment. We are creating resiliency in Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine. [interjections] Order. If you'd like to have private conversations, there are places to do that.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Rural High-speed Internet and Broadband Strategy

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has made an historic \$390 million funding commitment to improve broadband access in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, helping to eliminate the digital divide. The pandemic made it clear that access to reliable high-speed Internet is not just a luxury. In today's modern and increasingly digital world it's a necessity, a necessity which will cost approximately \$1 billion.

Alberta's government worked hard to secure an expanded dollar-for-dollar matching agreement with the federal government, bringing total public-sector funding to \$780 million. We anticipate that this financial commitment will drive significant private-sector investment, pushing overall investment north of \$1 billion, helping us to eliminate the digital divide. With funding secured, our government announced Alberta's broadband strategy, which outlines how we will deliver universal connectivity to Albertans by spring of 2027.

Alberta's broadband strategy strengthens our economic recovery and diversification. It emboldens our education and health sectors, enabling socioeconomic development. We are currently hard at work reviewing Alberta's focused applications to the universal broadband fund. With negotiations under way, we expect the first round of approved projects to begin construction later this year.

Improved broadband access has long been a concern for constituents in my riding of Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. The Alberta broadband strategy and secured funding is yet another example of how this government doesn't just listen to the concerns of Albertans; we take action to make lives better for Albertans. My constituents and Albertans alike eagerly anticipate the first round of approved projects.

I want to thank the Minister of Service Alberta for taking the time to develop a coherent strategy and securing the funding to make it happen.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced, which I will sponsor, that being Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 12 Trustee Act

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 12, the Trustee Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling today. I'm tabling six copies of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's Mandatory Reviews into Child Deaths report.

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 2
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned March 23: Ms Pancholi speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has six minutes remaining, but I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is on his feet.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, which, of course, is a piece of budget legislation. It attempts to speak to making life more affordable, following the government's stated ambition to convince Albertans that that's exactly what they're trying to do, but in fact it fails to do that on a number of counts. The largest and most difficult to explain is the failure to index tax brackets to inflation wherein the government in this piece of legislation, the budget implementation act, locks in the horrific decision to tax inflation. It's something that the Premier, in his former role with the federal government, really waxed eloquent against on numerous occasions. He used to call this tax on inflation an insidious and pernicious tax grab, and now his government here in Alberta is working overtime, taking an additional \$1 billion out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, that's a significant chunk of change, Madam Speaker – it's a billion dollars – at a time when the provincial government is trying to claim that they're not raising taxes. They'll point to other elements and say: "No, no, no. No raise in taxes is going on right now." What's actually happened, of course, is that this billion dollars is coming out of the pockets of Albertans as a direct result of the bracket creep that the government is engaging in. Albertans are not fooled by this. They know and feel every ounce of the increase that this government is putting forward that's coming out of their pockets.

The economic insecurity that the province is going through right now is being felt on so many levels by Albertans. It doesn't matter whether it's the cost of insurance for automobiles. That's one thing that's really, really a huge burden on the backs of Albertans. You know, the billion-dollar tax grab involved in the budget implementation act is one thing, but it's added onto the other burdens that Albertans are already feeling. It hurts, and it demonstrably will affect the quality of life of Albertan families. The \$1 billion is something that will especially hurt lower income families, as usually happens when extra tax burdens are placed on the population.

The cost of everything is going up, Madam Speaker, as we all know and as we hear from our constituents every day no matter where they are from: Airdrie or Cochrane or southern Alberta, anywhere, northern Alberta, Edmonton, Calgary. We know we hear from our constituents on a daily basis about how difficult life has gotten because of the increases in everything that they're seeing. This bracket creep tax increase that the government is engaging in through the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, is something that was an unnecessary burden on Albertans. It was a tax grab that the government was hoping perhaps they could claim didn't exist.

But Albertans are not stupid, Madam Speaker. They are very well adept at understanding, especially at this time of year when we're all about to do our taxes, that if indeed the tax brackets are not

indexed to inflation, it's going to cost you more. It's a tax increase by any other name. Albertans are not fooled, and they're not impressed by it either. To be taken for fools is not something that Albertans have suffered gladly over the years. This government, by failing to index the tax brackets to inflation, by implementing this bracket creep, and by taking a billion dollars out of the pockets of Albertans, is adding to the burdens that we're already feeling.

2:50

Inflation is skyrocketing for a number of reasons. Of course, the government totally fudged the numbers in their Budget 2022. They estimated inflation at 3.2 per cent, but recently, Madam Speaker, Statistics Canada measured inflation at a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. Of course, now we see the government taking an extra billion dollars out of the pockets of Albertans who are already suffering.

The worst act, I think, that this government is taking, Madam Speaker, when it comes to placing burdens on individuals in this province, who will suffer once again because of this billion-dollar tax grab, is to those who are already on some form of government support. Particularly, I talk about those who are on AISH. The Premier in his remarks today during question period spoke about those individuals in a very offhanded way, in my opinion, and in a very callous manner talked about how they were receiving the most generous government support payments across the country compared to others who are receiving AISH-type payments.

The amount of money an actual AISH recipient receives in this province is not something that is easy to live on, Madam Speaker. It is almost impossible, I would say, to live on. You're certainly not living with dignity, and it begs the question always of why indeed we can afford to give out \$4.7 billion in tax decreases to profitable corporations, yet somehow it's beneath us to make sure that those who are least able to afford to earn a living themselves, those who rely on government assistance, somehow don't deserve the dignity of a living allowance that allows them to live above the poverty line.

To have the Premier today in question period, Madam Speaker, claim proudly that the AISH money that is received by Albertans is above average and that that somehow makes it an acceptable amount is beneath the dignity of this House. I think that if indeed we were to have anything to celebrate about the money that AISH recipients receive, it would be to actually claim that it is well above the level which is required to live comfortably above the poverty line so that you don't have to as an MLA find people somehow groveling to seek slightly more dollars, a few dollars extra a month so that they can actually, you know, have their children eat a little bit better in the subsidized housing that they barely are able to afford. I'm embarrassed to know that the Premier thinks that the current level of funding for AISH recipients is something to be proud of.

Yet on top of that, Madam Speaker, the Premier sees fit to fail to index the tax brackets to inflation and thus takes a further billion dollars out of the economy of this province, directly out of the pockets of those least able to afford it at a time when costs are going up in so many other ways.

Utility bills are another example, Madam Speaker. The government is proud once again to give 50 bucks a month for three months, a total of \$150, to balance off the cost of escalating utility bills. Of course, Albertans once again are not fooled by that. Like, 50 bucks a month is 50 bucks a month, but it's not going anywhere near the way that Albertans hope to have been relieved from utility bills that have gone up \$500 to \$700 more a month. There has been a pittance thrown the way of Albertans who are suffering the most.

While the provincial government is minimizing the benefits to those who are least able to afford a reduction and maximizing costs

out of the pockets of Albertans for things such as tuition fees, they're yet claiming or trying to claim that there's no tax increase to Albertans. Of course, as we do our taxes this tax season, for those that are wondering exactly how much it will cost them, this billion-dollar bracket increase is something that will become painfully clear to them as they realize this government is once again hitting them with a tax increase while at the same time trying to claim that they're not. That adds salt into the wounds, Madam Speaker.

For a government that wishes to extract an extra billion dollars in tax revenue from the taxpayer, Albertans at least expect an upfront and honest approach to it, and that's not what they're getting here. What they're getting is the government saying to them: no, we're not increasing your taxes. Well, perhaps the level, the rate may not be going up, but they're changing the rules, fudging the lines, making sure that they get their billion dollars in revenue. They're doing it in a way that is kind of insidious and pernicious, to use the Premier's former verbiage when he was railing against this bracket creep as a federal minister. Yet somehow when he does it here to the Alberta citizens, the Alberta taxpayer, it's not a tax increase. Well, they're not fooled, and they're not impressed, Madam Speaker, by this Premier's performance on so many accounts.

The average family, Madam Speaker, will lose \$500 alone just because the basic personal exemption in the income tax act isn't being adjusted for inflation. So 500 bucks is what you're going to see as an additional tax increase on your tax bill as an Albertan. Thanks to this provincial government and the bracket creep, you know, this phantom tax increase, that the government says doesn't exist or didn't happen, is going to be a real \$500 out of the pockets of Albertans, and it's going to become apparent very, very quickly as we do our income tax in the upcoming few weeks. Some of us have already done them and realized, of course, that we're getting nailed 500 bucks by this UCP government that would like us to believe that, in fact, our tax bill isn't going up, but it's exactly the opposite. That's the type of argument that this government tries to use in so many cases, and Albertans aren't being fooled. They'll say: "No, no. It's not happening. That's not what's going on." In fact, that exactly is what's going on, and Albertans realize it.

Tuition fees: another example. We just had students across the province rallying to oppose the hikes to tuition fees. Then the minister of postsecondary education, of course, gleefully gets up in this House repeatedly to rail off figures, saying, "Oh, we've increased spending on postsecondary education," when, in fact, what's happening is that the tuition fees are really going up. They may have spent X dollars in one year, but it doesn't really make up for the billion dollarwise that they decreased in previous budgets.

The attempted deception to have Albertans try to believe that they're actually minimizing the taxes and the fees and making life more affordable is not something that Albertans are swallowing. They try to talk about a spoonful of sugar in the form of a 13-cent reduction in the provincial gas tax. But tell you what, Madam Speaker, it doesn't help the real hard medicine go down when you're looking at the billion-dollar tax grab that this piece of legislation is actually implementing and that Albertans will feel as soon as their taxes are done.

Tuition fees are something that are a barrier to entry into university. To have the audacity, on top of that, to say that, well, we're going to cushion Alberta students and their families from the increases in tuition fees – and some of them are huge increases – by increasing the limits to the loans that they are able to get as students is crass, is really crass.

3:00

I mean, out of university, if you're looking at a debt of tens of thousands and in some cases over \$100,000, students may

justifiably say in their own minds: well, I'm not going to do that; what's the sense of going into debt that far when indeed I can do something else and not face that debt burden? That choice causes brain drain, Madam Speaker. That choice forces students to go elsewhere, where tuition is lower or where government supports recognize the fact that the youth and the education of the province are important.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This budget implementation act and the terrible decision made by this government to tax inflation, that I wanted to speak to: I will come back to this later on. I just wanted to speak to the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents and the people I'm meeting on a daily basis.

I got a call from my constituency when driving on the way to the Legislature this afternoon, and they wanted to know what kind of supports they have in this budget for their communities. We have been listening to our constituents. We have been listening to Albertans for three years, specifically racialized communities, what they are demanding, that they don't feel secure in their communities, in their places of worship, nor at their homes, in public places, in shopping malls. That's what they were worried about, and that's what they were asking the government for, to step up and to improve their safety and security and introduce the programs to combat racism in this province.

We had the Premier's Anti-Racism Advisory Council. They worked hard. They created the report and the recommendations, submitted them to this government, and it was expected that the government would take some initiatives in this budget to address the concerns raised in the ARAC report. We didn't see it in this budget. Those are the real concerns my constituents are concerned about, and I haven't seen anything.

On the contrary, I remember that when this government came into office in 2019, we had a ministry that had a budget for multiculturalism and diversity and inclusion. That was reduced in the year 2020-21, and that has been totally eliminated in this budget. I'm getting calls from people from racialized communities from across this province. They're asking me if I'm raising their concerns. They're asking me if I'm representing their voices in this House, and if I'm doing it, what is the government's response to it? What kind of action are they taking? What kind of lessons are they learning from it?

It was very sad to see that after the rising cases of hate in this province, the government, instead of supporting this, removed the community group antiracism grant program. They removed the antiracism human rights education funds. So every step of the way they have been attacking those programs that were helping the vulnerable and marginalized communities in this province. Those are the questions I am receiving. Those are the concerns people are worried about in our communities.

I asked this minister. First of all, the ministry was actually moving, the Associate Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration, from Culture to the labour ministry. That was very sad to see, that the government sees multiculturalism through the lens of labour, not through community and citizenship but through the lens of labour, and not even that. Under that ministry the government has totally eliminated the budget that has been subscribed to the program in the past two years. Those are the kinds of concerns and questions that I'm hearing from my community members every time I meet them, every time the people come into

my office. They want me to bring these messages to this House. Any time we are discussing or debating something around financial statutes or the budgets, they want to see why these communities are being ignored.

The government and the Premier only remember these communities when it comes to getting help and support for their personal benefit. We have seen the rallies. We have seen the tweets, we have seen the messages, increasing messages around those communities and appeals from the government in relation to the coming leadership vote and debate. But when it comes to serving those communities, the government is totally failing.

The other concern I have been hearing for the past two months is the rising cost of utilities, the affordability issue. I remember even a few months back, in the early days of the session, when my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie actually arose in this House to ask the question: our constituents are concerned about the skyrocketing cost of utilities; does the associate minister have any plan to deal with this? The minister took pride in jumping off the seat and saying just one single sentence or word to answer the question: no. That is very discouraging. It is very sad to see that this is what is happening in this House, and that is not being discussed in this budget.

On the contrary, the government has taxed inflation. It's not about what the Premier has called it while he was a federal politician, how many names he called it: insidious, pernicious, or vicious. What is more important is that he knows what it is. He understands what it is. Still, it's sad to see the hypocritical position the Premier is taking, not only the Premier but his Executive Council and the people sitting around him, not even speaking a single word, but the Premier was saying it on the record not only once, not only twice, not only in one year, not only in the second year. He has a history of those understandings, but he implemented the same thing in this province when he got the option, when he got the choice, when he got the option to serve these very people, and he's mum.

3:10

Every single day my colleagues are rising in this House and asking this question, "Why is this government raising the taxes on the very people?" and we are not getting any answer. The minister is simply deflecting from the topic when it comes to answering these questions.

Affordability. Costs keep growing in the province, and the unemployment rate keeps growing. People keep losing jobs. Over 14,000 people lost jobs last month. In the last quarter people lost jobs. Affordability is a concern. People are struggling to pay their bills. It is not even a small increase in their utility bills. The rates have been increased three times.

I would be happy to see if any of the government caucus members want to debate on this, that this fact is not true. Three times. The utility bills rose three times. I'm surprised to see that none of the government caucus members rose in this House and represented their constituents' issues. They're struggling, and they're calling for the government to act and take real action to address this issue, but so far what we're seeing are fake programs that the government is trying to use as a distraction. A \$50 rebate per month for those who have seen an increase of \$600 in their bill: this is how much the government cares about Albertans.

The rising cost of tuition fees. After coming into office, one thing the government did with speed was – they didn't like a cap on anything. I think they don't like the word "cap," even when it comes to protecting the very Albertans, the people to whom we promised during the election that we would keep their interests before us, or first, before anyone else.

They removed the cap from the insurance prices. They removed the cap from the utility prices. They removed the cap from tuition fees. And now what is happening? People are struggling with unprecedented skyrocketing costs, whether it comes to utility bills, insurance premiums, or this hike in tuition fees. Not only that; the government doubled down on Alberta's youth by rolling back their minimum wage, saying that that will actually help to reduce unemployment or create more jobs in Alberta. On the contrary, what happened is that they saw a higher unemployment rate than in the history of this province. But the government still did not take a lesson from it.

What we are talking about, what we are saying is that these are not just NDP views. This is not just rhetoric. These are facts. The government has these facts, we have these facts, and these facts are being discussed and published on a daily basis in the media. The government needs to answer these questions, and government needs to address these problems. This budget does not talk about anything but more of this.

By passing this budget, Albertans will see their taxes going up because of this inflation being taxed in this budget, that our Premier has called vicious and pernicious tax creeps. Albertans are about to pay, like, \$1 million more in taxes under this UCP government because the Premier did not hear Albertans on something . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to my colleagues for this opportunity to engage in the consideration of Bill 2, which is titled the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, which is the act to implement our budget, so it probably won't come as a huge shock to members opposite that I'm not keen on the no-help budget. In case you didn't hear it in question period any of the days since the budget has been presented, I'm putting it on the record at this moment.

Let me talk about what I would have liked to have seen in this budget and what would actually be a helpful budget for the people of Alberta and the folks that I've been spending a lot of time talking to throughout this province and especially, of course, the folks in Edmonton-Glenora. I have to say that the number one issue that gets brought up with me right now when I am meeting with folks, typically on their doorsteps, is affordability. The number of people who are experiencing significant hardships, particularly with their electricity bill, with their power bill, is shocking to me. I will say that it doesn't matter if they're a young person who's renting or a young family who's renting or if they're a senior who's been living in their house for 50 years. They're all expressing significant concerns about the big increases to their power bills.

This has been one of the most difficult winters, I would say, for families, and it's not because their usage is going up. That certainly isn't the case. The current government decided to forge ahead with ideology and get rid of a cap that was in place to ensure that rates couldn't go up significantly, and of course as soon as they lifted the cap, they knew what was going to happen. If they thought that rates would stay low, they would have left in the cap, but they lifted the cap, and of course rates went up. It has impacted families in a significant way.

Sometimes we'll hear members opposite say: well, good news; we're going to create more opportunities for people to find jobs. Well, the proof is in the pudding on that one, Madam Speaker, and that's that there are still significantly larger numbers of unemployed Albertans than there are in many other parts of the country, I think, only second to Atlantic Canada. Specifically, Calgary, the largest city in the province of Alberta, has the highest unemployment right

now of any major city across Canada. For folks that are being told, “Well, just get a job; that will help you pay your bills,” that’s not really a realistic option for a lot of folks right now given the situation here in the province of Alberta.

The government seems to have its blinders on and its earplugs in when it comes to acknowledging the real hardships. When I think about the seniors who are telling me about their pressures, are you telling that 85-year-old who’s been living in her house for over 50 years that she needs to go get another job to pay her increased power bills because the government got rid of the cap? I sure hope not. I think that that is pretty disrespectful to the many, many people who’ve helped create opportunities for all of us to prosper here in this province over their lifetimes and, hopefully, not just for ours but also for future generations. Affordability, I would say, is probably one of the number one issues that continues to get raised with me over and over and over again, and specifically power bills have been really difficult on ordinary families in Edmonton-Glenora and throughout Alberta.

Another one I want to highlight – and we won’t see it quite yet, because the bill will come very soon but not yet – is educational property tax. Here we have an opportunity where the government stumbled backwards into a very profitable international price of oil. That means that Albertans, who are the owners of these resources, have a government right now who has the opportunity to invest that back in making life more affordable for the families who are the owners of that resource but instead has decided that they are going to actually increase educational property tax, increase school fees, increase licences and fees, accounting for over \$117 million in increased educational costs being downloaded onto ordinary families.

3:20

The current government also continues to fail to build for what we need today, let alone what we need into the future. We see Albertans across this province in need of better, energy-efficient, high-quality learning environments for their children. In areas where there are schools, many of those schools were built in the Peter Lougheed days and certainly have cycled their life cycle for that school building and aren’t rightsized to the number of children that live in that community or that neighbourhood. We see on these Legislature Grounds that the government will take the time to remove buildings that they believe are inefficient or ineffective or are a drain on the resources of the provincial treasury, but when it comes to actually replacing schools with appropriately sized schools that are safe and quality, for everyone to learn in, the government has ignored the needs of municipalities and school boards right across the province.

At a time when they have stumbled into this additional revenue and it could be going towards helping every Alberta family, instead they’re continuing to double down on their practices of making only certain profitable corporations, large profitable corporations, more profitable and leaving everybody else to pay more. So \$117 million in educational property taxes, fees, licences – that essentially is education property taxes and school fees – in my opinion, does not help ordinary Alberta families.

When we need schools – in Edmonton public alone there were five schools on their year 1 needs assessment, and the current government granted zero schools for the second-largest division in the province of Alberta. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of Alberta families continue to choose public education, and the government, for the second year in a row, completely shut out Edmonton public families from any capital investment in this budget. In Calgary over three years there were two years where there were no new schools for public or Catholic families in the city

of Calgary and finally, here in the third year, one – one – new public school and one new Catholic school for our largest city, the largest and third-largest districts in the province and continuing to grow.

It really doesn’t say to kids, “When you come to school, we expect you to do your best and give your best, and we believe in you,” when we fail to actually give kids the kinds of educational opportunities that they all deserve. Let’s start with the buildings, right? There’s tons of research that shows that kids who go to well-maintained, clean, safe schools learn better. I’ve asked many custodians over my time, specifically when I served on the Edmonton public school board: tell me more about why that is. It’s because we’re showing kids what excellence is. When kids show up to school and they’re in a safe, well-maintained, happy, high-functioning building, we know that we’re giving them our best. Of course, they know that we expect their best from them as well.

But this government certainly isn’t giving their best to children when it comes to school facilities across the province, leaving many to travel, even within the capital region here, over two and half hours round trip, for example, to the closest francophone school for many families who live in the Edmonton area. Again, francophone schools: completely shut out of this year’s budget province-wide, not one school, at the same time as, of course, there have been court decisions making it explicitly clear that francophone families have a Charter right to equal access to educational opportunity. The government continues to ignore that and to ignore the needs of families who want to exercise their right to access a public francophone school or a Catholic francophone school in an equal opportunity within the province of Alberta. So the government has really given no help to families when it comes to education capital.

Of course, when you actually look at the tables at the back of the budget documents and you compare the tables – I imagine that many members have gone through the tables – you can look at the full-time equivalent staff loads for certificated and noncertificated staff in education, for example. You can look at it for the Ministry of Energy, for example. You can compare one year to the next. What we see in education is that between the time when the NDP was in government and today, there are 1,000 fewer teachers in Alberta schools. That’s the government’s own budget documents. They’ll say, “Well, the NDP said it’s one year.” No. We said, “Between when we were in government and today, it’s 1,000 fewer.” Yes, they’ve moved their accounting practices around a bit, but the tables don’t lie. You can find out exactly how many teachers there were three years ago versus how many teachers there are today in this budget.

Wow. Time flies when you’re talking about all the things that could have been in this budget. I want to take a few minutes to talk about the importance of – it probably won’t surprise people that I care deeply about public health care and public health services and resources that we all rely on. I’m very proud of the fact that in the first few months, actually – there was a spring election, and by the summer, when I had the opportunity to serve as the Minister of Health, we made a firm commitment to the people of Alberta, the people of Calgary that we were going to build the Calgary cancer centre. We were going to stop the political yo-yo that Conservative governments had done to the people of Calgary over more than a decade, and we were going to move to make that happen. I am glad to see that it is continuing to make progress on the building.

What I will also say, though, through the extensive consultations we had with staff and with patients and with family members of patients – there was a dad who I think about often when I think about the Calgary cancer because his wife had passed away, but he and his child wanted to stay connected and do something better to leave families in Calgary in a better position than where they were when his wife was a patient at the Calgary cancer. He talked about

the people who worked there and how there was a need to expand on the services.

Instead, what we're seeing through the current government and the budget that's been presented is a continued contraction in the number of people who are working to deliver services in the Calgary cancer centre, as is well documented now through media reports. I can tell you, having loved many people who've lived with cancer and died of cancer, that that time between diagnosis and treatment is agonizing. So for anyone who is continuing to wait for their treatment options to hear that we're losing expert technicians from the Tom Baker cancer centre and that the primary reason they've cited is because of a lack of trust and a lack of respect and a lack of fair negotiations around their compensation – they're not part of the union – and that they have felt that they need to leave when they are given far better opportunities in other provinces is devastating for those families and for every single Calgarian and anyone in southern Alberta who's relying on the Tom Baker for their cancer treatments.

These are the kinds of things we could be addressing in this budget. We could actually focus on the main issues that our constituents are raising with us. We could talk about health care and education and affordability and economic diversification. We could actually fund additional staff for Calgary cancer today to make sure that we provide those additional services in the Tom Baker as they transition over to the new Calgary cancer centre.

We could make sure that we're increasing funding to support long-term care. For anyone who lived through the stress of having a loved one in long-term care or continuing care over the last two years, one of the scariest things, I think, was realizing that people needed to put somebody they loved in a congregated care setting when we saw the devastating impacts that COVID-19 in particular had on congregated care sites and also when we saw the issues with having staff work multiple part-time jobs in multiple settings and how quickly something can spread like COVID, which had deadly consequences for many, many Albertans, especially those who lived in these types of congregated care settings. We could be looking at putting things in this budget to actually help address the root issues that led to so much harm and suffering over the last two years, like additional staff for long-term care.

We could be moving forward on the absolutely necessary south Edmonton hospital. The last time Edmonton got a new community hospital was the 1980s, when the Grey Nuns opened. That is not acceptable. We should not be looking at our second-largest city, one that has grown significantly and continues to grow, and continue to deprive it of basic community hospital opportunities for all Albertans who access the capital region and especially those who are living in south Edmonton, who need a hospital. This government has continued to delay and dither when we know how important it is. We know that there's a very clear business case, and we know that it's important to the success and well-being of ordinary families and also can support the economic diversification of that part of the city as well, creating good opportunities for people to live and work close to home, if we were to move forward in a timely fashion on the south Edmonton hospital. Clearly, this government has no intention of doing that given that there isn't any kind of concrete action related to its construction in this budget.

3:30

Also, I want to highlight – it was cut in a previous budget, but it should have been restored in this budget – the child and adolescent mental health facility, that is so desperately needed here in Edmonton, in, I believe, my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's riding or very near to her riding, anyway. We need to have a facility that says, again, to those children that I

talked about, the importance of quality schools. We need to have a health care facility for kids who are suffering, for their families who are suffering that says: we care about you; we're putting you in a quality space that has wraparound services, in-patient and outpatient support, and we're going to make sure that you get the help that you need because we believe in you and we care about your future.

Really, it's hard to say that today, when you look at some of the places and the incredibly long wait-lists that families are facing when it comes to accessing support for children who are suffering emotionally and mentally.

I would be an enthusiastic supporter if this budget would have hit some of those key marks, if it would focus on real affordability.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll put my glasses on so I can see everybody's lovely faces. Yes, it is absolutely an honour to rise in this Chamber. You know, it is my first time being able to speak in the week, and I always like to just talk about the fact that we are still in a pandemic and that we still have so many incredible front-line workers, who are doing so much for us every single day, and I don't want us to forget. I don't want us to forget about the fact that we deemed them as heroes for many months, and then we seem to forget their contributions. So for those on the front lines in health care, in education, in retail, wherever it might be, just know that you are seen and that you are so much appreciated for the work that you do.

All right. Hard to follow my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora on the budget. She is always full of wisdom, and I really appreciate it. I'm going to piggyback on a few of the areas on which she focused because they are critical ones to me. And, like she said, you know, she frames her comments largely based on the conversations that she has with her constituents. I know that she's been out knocking on doors a lot in Edmonton-Glenora. Like me, when she's out knocking on doors, she asks her constituents: "What's top of mind for you? What are your big issues? What are your big concerns?"

You know, I shared this, actually – gosh, I can't remember; time is confusing, and my memory for time these days is quite weak – probably last week. I just shared that I've been door-knocking in various parts of the province, and no matter where I seem to be, the issues are the same. They seem to transcend socioeconomic backgrounds, that sort of thing.

Most recently I was out in Edmonton-Manning with my colleague the MLA there, you know, in a little bit of a different neighbourhood than most of the neighbourhoods that I represent. But, again, what were the top issues that we heard on the doors in Edmonton-Manning this past weekend? Affordability, for sure. Affordability was top of mind. We may have folks say to us: "Well, yeah, but you probably prompt people, and you probably mention: how about those high power bills, and how about those high electricity bills?" No, absolutely not. Those are issues that are organically raised. And you can watch me. If anyone would like to come door-knock with me, I'd be happy to have you hear some of those concerns. Truly, that's what I say. I say, "I'm your MLA" or "I'm with your MLA and just really want to hear what's top of mind for you."

Affordability. A few people did bring up just how much higher their bills have been over the last few months. Again, that's something I've heard in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood as well. I've heard it in some of the other ridings that I've door-knocked in,

like Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Morinville-St. Albert, and I'm looking forward to knocking on doors in a number of Calgary ridings in the upcoming weeks. I don't want to anticipate what they'll say, but I have a feeling that many of those issues will be the same.

Affordability is certainly a top issue. You know, to tie it back to this bill that we have in front of us – I should name it – Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, yeah, this government and this minister really had an opportunity to address affordability. I haven't had a chance to be up in the Finance minister's riding lately although I do have family from up in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region, and my mom is actually a northern Albertan. Well, she's from the Valleyview area, but I spent lots of time in the Grande Prairie area, too. I can imagine that affordability would be top of mind to many of the Finance minister's constituents.

I am curious. It's unfortunate that it's the opposition MLAs who seem to be the only ones speaking up and speaking out about affordability. I would have hoped that one of them might have joined the debate today, but alas not. I would be curious: just how does the minister respond to those concerns that his constituents raise around affordability? [interjection] Actually, yeah, I'd love to have him intervene. Why not?

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for giving way. I'd be pleased to answer that question. Absolutely, Albertans in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency are concerned about affordability, as they are, I believe, right across the province. We're in a time of significant inflation. In February the Canadian inflation rate was 5.7 per cent, and we are very aware of that phenomenon. As we take a look at the various levers that governments have in times of inflation, we've reflected on those levers, and we've worked to understand: what is the best possible policy during times of inflation? Is it simply to borrow from future generations and add more fiscal stimulus into the economy, exacerbating inflation? If we take a look at the root cause of inflation today, it's certainly caused by constrained supply chains. It is caused by very liberal central bank policy, monetary policy.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I actually was just chatting with the minister backstage – that's probably not the right word – back there, and I do find him to be quite reasonable. But I will have to disagree with him because, you know, he's talking about the action, or rather the inaction, they've taken when it comes to inflation. This budget implementation act very much locks in the terrible decision made by this government to tax inflation.

It was that same Premier – and we've heard many people in this Chamber throw back at this Premier the very words he used in I think it was the '90s, the '80s, maybe before my time – who talked about how a tax on inflation was, quote, an insidious and pernicious tax grab. Yet this very government and this very Premier are doing exactly that, and they are taking an additional \$1 billion in income tax out of the pockets of our constituents, my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that minister's constituents in Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

You know what? This would be a hard pill to swallow in itself, but add on to that that this is all happening with the backdrop of higher utility bills, higher insurance costs. This minister was asked, just earlier in the day, by my fantastic colleague from Edmonton-West Henday about auto insurance and, if I remember correctly, was asked quite explicitly. I believe the question was something to the effect of: do you know how much auto insurance has gone up? Very short, very succinct. Well, that minister did an incredible dance in not answering that question. But the reality, as my

colleague talked about, is that our constituents are seeing rising automobile insurance costs as well.

3:40

Tuition fees. Let me tell you about the fact that I spent yesterday – I didn't get a chance to march over from the U of A with the students, but I met them in the parking lot just out here. I'm bad at directions; I should never point. There were a number of students who marched in a beautiful spring snowstorm to rally against high tuition costs and about budget cuts.

I have to tell you – and this is not just me being, well, cheesy. I'm often cheesy, but honestly I was so inspired by those students. They basically had an open mic yesterday on the stairs outside of the Legislature, and they talked about the impacts of rising tuition costs on each of them. What was, I think, most inspiring to me was the fact that they weren't doing that just for themselves. They were doing it for future generations because they know that the choices that this government is making through Bill 2, through their bad-news budget, will have an impact on future generations as well at a time when we should be encouraging young people to attain a postsecondary education, whether that's a university education, whether that's a trades-based education, whatever it might be. There should be opportunities for young people across this province, but this government is making it more challenging.

One of the students talked about – it was an engineering student whose name was Adrian. Apologies that I don't know his last name off the top of my head. He was an engineering student. He talked about the fact that, you know, we should be seeing diversity in the engineering faculty. We should be seeing people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, international students. Like, he's a young white guy. He said: I don't want my faculty to just be more people like me. His point was that postsecondary education is becoming something for the privileged, for the wealthy. This government is making explicit choices to make it more challenging for young people to have an opportunity here in postsecondary education.

A couple of other students stood up and spoke as well. A lovely student named Joannie is at Campus Saint-Jean. She's a student there. I've met her before. She's an incredible advocate. She talked about how – and I'm looking at my colleague from St. Albert, qui parle français aussi. On va parler français.

Ms Renaud: Oui. On peut pratiquer.

Member Irwin: Oui. On peut pratiquer un peu.

She talked about the fact that she is not able to access her education entirely in French – whereas, you know, those who came before her have been able to – because of budget cuts to Campus Saint-Jean, right? I look at my colleague from Edmonton-McClung as well, who I know is a francophile comme moi. It's absolutely absurd that someone like Joannie doesn't have an opportunity to see through her entire education in the language of her choice, which is French.

You know, these are the kinds of real-world stories that I wish – I wish – this government were listening to. I had an opportunity to speak at the mic yesterday. They said, "We don't usually have politicians." I said, "Well, you know, if any of the UCP MLAs want to come join the rally and speak, they certainly can." I did shout at the Minister of Advanced Education, but I don't think he heard me. But I wish he would truly – and I mean it quite seriously – listen to those stories.

What we see as a result of this government's choices is that we are seeing young people leaving. We're seeing young people choosing to study in other jurisdictions, where it's more affordable,

where they see more job opportunities. My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just earlier in question period talked about the loss of jobs, right? What kind of young person – he can talk about tech as well, right? There could be so many opportunities for young people in this province, but this government is making explicit choices that are making it more difficult.

Oh, goodness, I've only talked about a few things here, and I've got so much more to talk about in this bad-news budget. Tuition and affordability are certainly a big one.

Now, my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke quite wisely about education, and I had the chance last week in budget estimate discussions or supplementary supply, I should say, to just talk a little bit about the fact that in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood there's one school. It's called Delton school. It's in a lovely neighbourhood just north of where I live, in fact. It was number one on Edmonton public schools' capital list, a great school community. This government will come back, and their response will be: yeah, but it's not fully at capacity.

Well, let's think about this. It's terrible logic. It's not at capacity because young families in my neighbourhood of Delton are seeing that, well, maybe there's not a future here. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora said it quite well, right? We want young people to be in safe, healthy schools. They don't all have to be new. They don't all have to be new. I get that. I taught in Bawlf school when it was an old school. They've got a new building now, but I've taught in schools that – Bawlf school just had one little window. I still remember that. That was not good for my vitamin D levels, but, you know, it was a safe, welcoming, caring school environment for the students there. Of course, it was in need of upgrades, and I'm happy that it got them.

The same thing for the school in Delton: we would see more parents choosing that school if they knew it was, you know, a building where they felt confident sending their kids to. Don't get me wrong. There are amazing families and students and staff at that school right now, and I'm so proud to represent it. But the fact is that this government chose to not heed the number one request of the Edmonton public school board, and that was a new Delton school. Yeah. That's incredibly frustrating to me. It's hard as their MLA to have to try to find some sort of logic in this government's decision-making, and I'm not seeing any, right?

You know, I think that if there is one theme to my speech today – and I know it's probably hard to draw too many themes from a scattered speech – that might be to just listen, right?

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had some very good debate this afternoon on Bill 2, wide ranging as it always is in this Chamber. I'm excited personally for a balanced budget, one focused on growth, and growth in all sectors as well. I think that that absolutely needs to be highlighted, as Albertans have had a tremendous opportunity in whatever profession or vocation that they are in to make sure that they've got a chance and an opportunity at a job, job security, and growth in income, and that is what is exciting about this budget as well. It is balanced, and there is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. You do not have the ability to speak at this time as you've already spoken on Bill 2.

Perhaps there is another member that I could recognize, which looks like it will be the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to recognize everything that we just heard. I think it was bang on. I don't need to go into any more detail. I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

18. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to move Government Motion 18.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the number one issue facing Albertans right now is the cost of living, inflation, particularly energy inflation, because that makes everything more expensive. According to Statistics Canada we are experiencing 5.7 per cent inflation in Canada right now. That is a 30-year high, and that is a tax on people's savings. It is a tax on everything.

3:50

It is driven by a number of factors, Madam Speaker, including the significant recent increase in energy prices, but, in addition, the federal government is ultimately responsible for monetary and at a macro level Canadian fiscal policy, both of which have been aligned by this Liberal-NDP coalition government in Ottawa to increase inflation.

We're now in, I think, the eighth consecutive year of quantitative easing, which effectively, to put it in plain English, Madam Speaker, is when central banks massively expand the money supply. That is sometimes called for at a time of a severe recession, like we experienced, for example, in the spring and summer of 2020. When there is a huge destruction of demand in private-sector economic activity, it is sometimes necessary for central banks to step in to stimulate growth and to stimulate demand by increasing the money supply, but to carry on a policy like that indefinitely, even in the face of inflation, makes a bad situation much worse. Printing more money means that money becomes less valuable, and that's effectively what inflation is.

But on top of that, Madam Speaker, the federal government has a deliberate policy to make the cost of living more expensive for everyone and everything we do. That is the explicit stated goal of their carbon tax. It is not a coincidence that food inflation in Alberta has been 18 per cent since 2015. What happened in 2015? Well, the Alberta NDP brought in their job-killing carbon tax in 2015, immediately following the election. It was very interesting. They never mentioned it once in the preceding election campaign, but they imposed the largest tax hike on the province as soon as they could.

By the way, Madam Speaker – guess what? – a fellow named Steven Guilbeault was at the news conference in the basement of this building, in the press gallery, standing alongside the now Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the NDP, to cheer on and endorse her Alberta NDP carbon tax. It is no coincidence that the same Steven Guilbeault, a former Greenpeace radical arrested for criminal acts to advance his environmental extremism, today

introduced a new federal environmental policy that could be devastating for Albertans, our economy, the cost of living.

Madam Speaker, the carbon taxes are designed – when I hear the NDP stand up with crocodile tears about energy inflation, the cost of electricity, the cost of gas, the cost of home heating, the cost of food, when I hear them pretend to care about this, it's like an arsonist pretending to care about a fire that he just set. You know, it is the desired outcome of their policies. Like, this is not even up for debate. Many of these issues are complex and you can debate them and come at them from different perspectives, but the obvious, stated, explicit purpose of NDP-Liberal carbon taxes is energy inflation. That is the whole point, to take the basic cost of energy and then add onto it and add onto it and add onto it with taxes. Why? Because they literally want to punish people for consuming energy. In this energy-rich province the NDP is so ideologically, zealously opposed to energy production and consumption that they actually want to punish people for consuming it.

Madam Speaker, we could not disagree more strongly. We believe that people should not be punished for consuming energy. Now, the whole concept of a carbon tax in theoretical economics is that of a so-called Pigouvian tax. A Pigouvian tax means a tax designed to disincentivize certain kinds of behaviour. The whole history of taxation is filled with remarkable examples of human behaviour being distorted by incentives and disincentives through the tax system.

One of my favourite examples, Madam Speaker, is that in 16th-century England, in the Tudor era, some tax collector had a brilliant idea of imposing a window tax because – whoever did this was an ideological fellow traveller of the NDP; you know why? – in the 16th century having a window was a sign of being wealthy. It was a luxury that most people could not afford. Glass was a very rare and expensive commodity. You know, the NDP of the 16th century, in their class warfare mentality, their resentment of people who could afford glass, said: let's tax those windows; the more windows you have in a house, then the higher the tax you have to pay.

Well, to this day if you go back to some of the villages and towns in England and see 16th-century buildings and homes from that era, guess what you see? Plastered up window frames all over England from that era. Because how did people respond to the tax on windows? They plastered up their windows so they didn't have to pay the tax. That is just, I think, one of the earliest and most colourful examples of how statist throughout history have ended up distorting human behaviour through the power of taxation, and that's exactly the idea that inspires their Pigouvian carbon tax.

Now, I cannot understand why they're so zealous about this, Madam Speaker. I accept that we do need to intelligently reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including CO₂ emissions. There is compelling evidence and a scientific consensus about the reality of anthropogenic causes of climate change. Of course, the climate has always changed. The climate always will change. There are both natural and human-made causes behind climate change. These are, I think, largely evident scientific facts, but the notion that we can somehow radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and have an effect on global climate by making it more expensive for people to heat their homes, drive to work, pick up their kids from soccer, or turn on the power at home is perverse because, at the end of the day, people only have so much money and consuming energy is not an option.

Now, I know the NDP's response to Albertans who say: "I can't afford potentially \$2 a litre gas. I can't afford continued food inflation. I can't afford these high electricity prices." The NDP response is: walk or take the bus. Remember that? The Leader of the Opposition, when she was asked about this, said: well, I don't

just mean go and buy electric vehicles, but you can also take the bus.

Well, Madam Speaker, I look at my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I don't think there are many buses or subways out in his riding. I don't know what buses they're talking about. When I look at my colleague from Fort McMurray, most of his constituency is the size of a European country. In northwestern Alberta people don't have the option of taking a bus. They have to get in their pickup to get to work, to take their kids to school, to go to town, to get to the market, to get to the store. It's not optional. Maybe for some people living in central Fort McMurray there's some transit, but that's a minority of his constituents. They don't have those options, especially in this big province, especially in our rural communities.

The carbon tax is a prejudicial attack on rural people in particular. It is a transfer of wealth from intense energy consumers in rural communities to the minority of people who live in urban cores, who don't need to necessarily own a car, and they live in a thousand square-foot apartment as opposed to having to heat a farmhouse and a barn and run a small business on the side. I submit that the green, left obsession with making life more expensive for people is a disaster. It's an economic disaster, and it is a disaster for folks who are just trying to pay the basic costs of living.

4:00

Now, right now, Madam Speaker, the average middle-class family with – well, I should say that right now the carbon tax is \$40 a tonne, going to \$50 a tonne on April 1, and once it reaches that level, it will cost the average family – that is to say, with about a \$70,000 household income – \$600 in costs, but they're not done there. They want explicitly – again, this is not some Conservative conspiracy theory. This is not some political rhetoric. This is the stated goal of the Alberta NDP in cahoots with their ally the Trudeau Liberals. Their stated goal is to increase the carbon tax by another 400 per cent, from the current \$40 to \$170 a tonne; \$170 a tonne from the current \$40. That would take the cost, out of an average family's household budget, of \$2,000 a year. Albertans, working people, families simply cannot afford this.

Now, when they're put on the spot, the Liberals and NDP say: "Oh, don't worry about it. We're going to send you all a rebate." A rebate. Well, Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, an independent officer of Parliament, just confirmed that the majority of households will be net losers on this fiscal shell game of carbon taxation and then rebates. The majority of households will pay significantly more in carbon tax than they get back in these putative rebates. But, of course, our economy is much bigger than just households. Our economy includes businesses, in Alberta hundreds of thousands of small businesses, and nonprofits and community organizations, and they all have to pay. None of them get a rebate.

Madam Speaker, just the other day I was in the constituency of the Member for Calgary-Klein, and we were at a wonderful local community hall that, you know, provides a place for seniors to be active and families to gather. While I was there, I visited the Calgary Filipino golden age club. It was the seniors in the Filipino community. They got all dressed up to the nines, and they held a big celebration. They had a dance night. I thought it was just so wonderful to see those seniors in their 70s, 80s, some of them in their 90s – I'll tell you, they were very energetic. They tried to drag me out on the dance floor. I don't want you to see the video of that. But, you know, wonderful, kind, hospitable folks, and it was just great to see them getting together after COVID and reconnecting and having a good time.

But the director of that community centre came up to me and said, "Premier, last month we had to spend \$2,000 on the carbon tax just to pay for the power and the heating in this community centre." And she said: "We're in kind of a low-income area here. We can't really raise our membership fees. We try to offer free space to these little nonprofit community groups. We don't want to charge people if we can avoid it. We don't have any big-business sponsors. How are we supposed to pay this carbon tax?" And I said, "That's a very good question." And I said, "You know that they're planning on raising it by another 400 per cent?" You know what she said to me, Madam Speaker? She said, "Well, we just won't be able to operate; we'll have to hand the keys back to the city or something; like, we won't be able to pay \$8,000 a month in the winter to operate our little community centre" there in north Calgary.

Do they care? They call themselves the party of compassion. They couldn't care less. What about those Filipino seniors? What's your answer? Nothing. What's their answer? To sign a coalition deal with Justin Trudeau to raise the taxes on that little community centre by 400 per cent while calling themselves compassionate. I'm sick of this hypocrisy, these guys standing up in this place pretending they care about inflation and the cost of living. Madam Speaker, Albertans are struggling and shocked to see their electricity bills, and rightfully so. Then they get these socialists standing up and caterwauling about this when they created the whole problem. They created the problem.

In their hard-heartedness and incompetence they spent 7 and a half billion dollars – they approved that – in additional electricity transmission infrastructure that we didn't need because we were already overbuilt. But because the NDP don't understand economics, they don't understand business, they don't understand electricity markets – all they understand is that they've got an ideological impulse to punish people for turning on the power – they put in 7 and a half billion dollars of higher transmission costs, and guess what. Here's what the NDP doesn't understand. They think there's a free lunch, but there is no such thing, as Milton Friedman famously said. "There's no such thing as a free lunch," so who pays for the 7 and a half billion dollars? We do. We all do. Four and a half billion Albertans do on our power bills. That little community centre, those Filipino seniors on their fixed modest incomes: they have to pay for it.

I know that the NDP, in their foggy, socialist, utopian minds, they imagine: well, you just make the rich corporations pay for it. What does that even mean, Madam Speaker? What does that even mean? Like, let's just walk that through. If we were to – and they didn't. They didn't. In their own power policy they passed all those costs on to consumers. Lest anybody be gullible enough to believe the beggar-thy-neighbour, class warfare, failed economics of these socialists, hear me. If you take just the industrial consumers – let's say our forestry plants, our forestry lumber mills. They are major, intense consumers of electricity. Imagine we make them pay a hugely disproportionate share of the NDP's transmission costs. Well, guess what's going to happen to those lumber mills. They won't be able to compete with lumber mills in B.C. and Quebec, that operate on hydro power. So what will they do? They'll shut down, and they'll lay their people off. That is NDP economics.

Now, not only did they put in 7 and a half billion dollars into transmission that we're all paying for, but they also made a complete hash of the power purchasing agreements, and that's a complex, basically, contract between power producers and the government. The NDP made such a hash of it that they had to pay out \$1.3 billion in compensation to the power companies because of their carbon tax, because of their zeal to shut down the single most reliable and affordable form of baseload electricity in this province, which is thermal coal. They wanted to be able to go

cocktail parties in Ottawa and hang out with their heroes, like David Suzuki and Steven Guilbeault, and say that they were green. They don't care what the cost is for those low-income seniors. So that \$1.3 billion got added onto our electricity tab as well.

What's more, they then, in their zeal, brought in these regulations and carbon taxes that shut down all those thermal coal plants and forced those generators to spend hundreds of millions, billions of dollars in converting to natural gas. By the way, I agree in the long run that that was going to happen, and in the long run natural gas is a good, reliable form of baseload power, but they were in a zealous, ideological rush to do it overnight. Billions of dollars in costs got passed on to consumers. I don't know whether it was just cold-heartedness or incompetence or both that the NDP did these things.

Then the carbon tax itself. They started it at \$10 a tonne. Is that right? Then it went to \$20 a tonne. Then it went \$30. Now it's at \$40. April 1 it goes to \$50, and they're going to get out their pompoms and cheer on their ally Justin Trudeau on April Fool's Day for his 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax. Then the NDP and the Liberals want to take it to \$60 a tonne and \$70 a tonne and \$80, all the way up to \$170. But it won't stop there. A study from Environment Canada said that for Canada to achieve the Paris climate targets in terms of emissions reductions, it could require a carbon tax as high as – fasten your seat belt, Madam Speaker – \$400 a tonne. Four hundred dollars a tonne. That would be like a 1,000 per cent increase from where we are right now.

4:10

Now, I've used this analogy before. It's worth repeating. Why do they come in and start at \$10? They just hope that nobody's really going to notice it. It's just a few pennies. It might be a couple of pennies on a litre of gas or whatever. People won't really notice it. It's called the frog in the pot, the old analogy, the old metaphor, Madam Speaker, where you put a frog in pot of hot, boiling water and the frog's fight-or-flight instinct kicks in. The frog jumps right out of that pot. The frog saves himself. But if you put the same frog in a pot of cold water and you turn it up to just lukewarm, the frog is getting kind of cozy and having a bit of a bath. You turn it up from there to warmer, and the frog is getting more relaxed, like he's in a sauna, he's in a whirlpool. And then you just turn it up to a boil, and by now it's too late. You've got to boil the frog.

It is the incremental increases in taxation. It is so fundamentally dishonest. Here's the deal. These socialists and their Liberal allies in Ottawa know full well that if they imposed a \$170 or a \$400 carbon tax cold turkey, if they imposed a \$2,000 incremental cost for a middle-income family to survive or a \$4,000 incremental cost at a \$400 carbon tax, you know, they wouldn't win a seat. Madam Speaker, they would be done for good in electoral politics not just in Alberta but right across the country. So their little, tiny incremental increases are designed – they are fundamentally misleading. They are fundamentally misleading, and that is why we are having this debate.

We are having this debate to plead with the government of Canada to stop the dishonesty, to stop seeking to punish people simply for leading normal lives. Yes, we would love it for people to invest, when they can afford it, in more energy-efficient appliances and vehicles and maybe upgrades to their home in time. You know, maybe some tax credits and incentives for things like that make sense. People over time can make adjustments, as they are, to reduce their energy consumption. The big gains on reducing emissions, Madam Speaker, are not going to be found by telling those low-income seniors that they have to spend \$2,000 a month in some punitive tax; the real gains are going to be made through the miracle of modern technology on an industrial scale.

Now, for example, the oil sands pathways group has estimated that with a capital investment of approximately \$30 billion in carbon capture, utilization, and storage technology in this province – by the way, a technology that the NDP has always been opposed to – we could reduce the absolute emissions from the oil sands by nearly 50 per cent, getting them halfway to their net zero target by 2050. Now, that's something we can get behind. In fact, it was something Alberta has been behind. It's something we've invested nearly \$2 billion in. Not just that, but the Alberta carbon trunk line and the infrastructure to support it. It's why we are trying to find common ground where we can with the federal government over an investment tax credit to support that. Now, that's the kind of practical thing that makes a big difference, not nickel and diming seniors on fixed incomes, not punishing community nonprofits for simply heating their operation. Madam Speaker, that is why this motion calls on the federal government to pause its scheduled carbon tax increase.

Obviously, this side of the House would like to scrap that tax altogether. The Bill 1 that we passed was the carbon tax repeal act. For the record the NDP voted against it because they were angry with us for making life cheaper for Albertans. Go figure. That was in May, June of 2019, okay? Then fast-forward to January 1, New Year's Day. Justin Trudeau's holiday gift for people was to impose his federal carbon tax on Alberta. Right away we kept our election commitment. We sued him in the Alberta appeal court. We joined our friends in Saskatchewan and Ontario as intervenors in their courts. We won that case as that being an unconstitutional intrusion in our ability to regulate our resources at the Alberta appeal court by a 4 to 1 decision. It went to the Supreme Court of Canada; regrettably, we lost that case by 5 to 3, so now we have this federal carbon tax.

You know, I think what's happening is that people are getting mugged by reality, and central Canadians are realizing exactly what the green left has been up to all along, which is to drive them into energy poverty. Madam Speaker, if I could add another dimension to this, a moral dimension, driving people into energy poverty hurts the poorest the most. It doesn't matter what kind of nonsense rebate schemes you come up with.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Hear me now, Madam Speaker. The increase in natural gas prices – and this is a point that my friend the Minister of Finance frequently makes. Because we have not had enough investment in upstream oil and gas exploration and production, we have a global scarcity of supply. That means the price has gone up dramatically for natural gas, and natural gas is a necessary feedstock for fertilizer production. Now, Europe has already shut in, shut down half of their typical fertilizer production because of the unaffordability of this natural gas, and sadly much of the natural gas they are using for fertilizer feedstock comes from Vladimir Putin's Russia, fuels his war machine. You see how all of this is connected.

But here's the problem. That global reduction in fertilizer production, driven by green left energy policies, driven by them opposing pipelines, LNG facilities, carbon taxes, discouraging energy production through misapplication of ESG principles . . .

An Hon. Member: Tanker bans.

Mr. Kenney: . . . tanker bans, and all of it – all of that means less fertilizer production.

Now, I know that for the socialists, like, when a conservative starts talking about something as mundane as fertilizer, their eyes kind of fog over. They don't really get what – “who cares?” is probably their attitude, Madam Speaker. I'll tell you who cares. The billions of people in the developing world who can barely afford to

feed themselves care because as that fertilizer comes off global markets, global agriculture yields will plummet. They will plummet. The real green revolution in much of the developing world was all about increasing agricultural yields so that countries like India went from chronic starvation and malnutrition to being net exporters of grain. Why? Because of crop science, because of smarter seed technology, and, yes, because of ever more effective fertilizers.

Now, I know they don't understand farming or agriculture, and they don't care. They don't care. But here's the reality. In Africa, in Asia, in Latin America hundreds of millions of people in the next year are going to experience food scarcity not just because of the conflict in Russia but because of a lack of fertilizer, which is driven by energy inflation, which is the desired outcome of green left policies like this carbon tax. How many people need to starve for them to care? How many people in the developing world need to go into malnutrition?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The same people, by the way, in the developing world, many of them, have no access to reliable, affordable energy. Madam Speaker, I've been to many developing countries. Often when you land, the first thing you can smell is the smell of carbon, of people gathering twigs and cow dung and garbage to heat their homes and cook their dinners. Why? Because they do not have what we take for granted, which is affordable, reliable energy and the infrastructure to support it. What is the answer of the utopian green left in the rich northern countries? So sad, too bad.

The oil exports. You know, I remember visiting Narendra Modi when he was then chief minister of Gujarat in 2008 in Ahmadabad, and the first words out of his mouth were: Minister Kenney – I just violated the rules by using my own name. Excuse me. He said to me: “Minister, how can we get Canadian LNG? We're building an import terminal on the west coast over here in Gujarat. We want your LNG.” And he said to me: “Right now we have contracts with Qatar, but Qatar finances the ISI in Pakistan, which destabilizes us and funds terrorism in my country. We want democratic, reliable Canadian energy.” Are we any closer to getting it to him? No.

These folks, the green left, campaigned – you know, the Member for Lethbridge . . .

4:20

Some Hon. Members: West.

Mr. Kenney: West. Got to get that right. The Member for Lethbridge-West actually wrote a foreword to a book by another Greenpeace radical that was promoting illegal civil disobedience to stop pipelines. She actually stood up at a rally in Prince George, B.C., opposing the Northern Gateway pipeline. Maybe if we'd gotten that pipeline – and my colleague the hon. the Minister of Energy worked for eight years . . .

Mrs. Savage: Nine.

Mr. Kenney: . . . nine years of her life, that she lost, on trying to get that pipeline built while the Member for Lethbridge-West was out there trying to stop it.

Madam Speaker, here's the point. There are people in India who have to burn waste sometimes, if they're very low income, to heat their homes, and that is because we didn't get the Canadian energy to them. They don't care. They're out there – they get on their moral high horse. They go out there in front of this building with Greta Thunberg two years ago, and they're all star-struck. They're all star-struck. They're out there with Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace and all these folks, and they're calling for no more pipelines. That's

what you've got the NDP caucus out there chanting: no more pipelines. They were pushing and shoving to get in the camera's shot with Greta Thunberg because in the weird left-wing salons that they inhabit, that's a badge of honour or something. That's what they care about, woke, politically correct points, not the people in the developing world who desperately need affordable and reliable energy.

I'm here to say that they're wrong economically, they're on the wrong side of the cost of living, and they are on the wrong side of global peace and security. They're on the wrong side morally by promoting energy poverty. You know what they say? "Oh, don't worry; those poor folks in the developing world, well, can just buy windmills and Teslas and solar panels," when they're heating their homes, in some countries, with dung. Madam Speaker, it is time for some realism and sanity in the energy and environment debate in this country. This government gets it.

I'll close where I started, by saying that the number one concern for Albertans right now is the cost of living, which is – it's all connected. When it's more expensive to buy diesel – well, right now a litre of diesel in Alberta is over two bucks, and we're the cheapest in Canada. But just imagine this. Imagine your good Alberta trucker – I know my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge has a lot of good, hard-working truckers, by the way, a lot of them from the Punjabi community, wonderful, hard-working long-haul truckers. God bless them. They kept our grocery stores filled through COVID. Right now some of his constituents who are truckers are down there in San Diego taking on loads of groceries, and they're going to then drive from California all the way up to Calgary, and they're going to unload those groceries. Then those groceries go onto the shelf at Safeway and IGA, whatever, Superstore.

Guess what. The gas that those guys have to pay for gets embedded in the cost of the groceries. Again, this is basic economics, so I don't expect the NDP to understand it. The higher the fuel price is, the more the carbon tax is, the more expensive the lettuce is. What does that mean for poor people? It means they're less able to afford produce, and they have to instead buy food that's less good for them. We want people to eat well, eat healthy, but the healthy stuff often costs more because it needs to be transported from places south of here.

This is why, Madam Speaker, we're doing everything we can. It's why at midnight on April 1, like, Thursday night at 12:01 a.m., the Alberta provincial fuel tax will be suspended: 13 cents a litre, gone. That's a big-ticket item. Now, that's predicated on there being high oil prices, \$80 and \$90 WTI. Right now we're trading at about \$105, so that will certainly be there for the next quarter and quite likely for the balance of this year. If it's there for the balance of this fiscal year, it would represent a total reduction in fuel taxes for Albertans in the range of \$1.4 billion. That's real money. To put it in comparison, when the NDP first – I think in 2018 they were bringing in \$1.3 billion on their job-killing carbon tax.

I'm so excited about this. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for coming up with it. I was bugging him pretty hard, Madam Speaker, about finding a solution to the inflationary issues and the cost of living. He is such a great conservative. There were other people saying, "Let's do rebates and everything else." He said: "You know what? We conservatives believe in lower taxes. Let's lower this tax. Let's eliminate this tax." I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his wisdom in putting that forward: \$1.4 billion. This is what I love about it. Unfortunately, we didn't win at the Supreme Court on the carbon tax reference. We're stuck with the Liberal-NDP carbon tax, but this is our backdoor way of providing people with the relief that we sought when we passed Bill 1 in May 2019.

On top of that, I want to thank the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, who came forward with a proposal for an electricity rebate, recognizing the disaster that we've inherited in NDP electricity costs. As soon as the power companies can put it on the bill, we'll be providing people with a \$150 rebate if they consumed less than a certain amount of electricity. Basically, I think 99 per cent of households and small businesses will get the rebate, and that's worth about \$300 million. So combined, on an annualized basis we're talking \$1.7 billion of consumer relief from Alberta's government, far, far more than any provincial government in Canada is providing.

But here's the tragedy. On Thursday night of this week there will be folks working at gas stations across the province who go in to enter the new pricing, the new taxes, and they'll take 13 cents off the cost of a litre to reflect our suspension of the Alberta fuel excise tax, but then they'll add 3 cents to the price of a litre to finance the Liberal-NDP carbon tax hike in Ottawa, so people will only be 10 cents better off. I'm sorry to Albertans, but we're doing everything we can to fight their carbon tax. I don't know what more we can do. I really don't.

Here's the weird thing. People say to me: well, why don't you have a made-in-Alberta thing rather than the Trudeau one? Well, Madam Speaker, that's what we're looking for. Like, down in New Brunswick, you know what they did? They just took their provincial fuel tax, and they renamed it the carbon tax, and the feds said: "Oh, that's fine. That's good. We're good with that." We went to Ottawa, us and Saskatchewan, and we said: "Can we get the same deal? Can we just rename?"

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Kenney: Exactly. The answer was no, because who are we? We're just Alberta. We're just the key engine of Canada's economy. We have the largest industry in the country. We contribute \$20 billion net to the rest of the country, so do we even get fair consideration? No. We'll keep fighting for the best deal we can get, but at the end of the day we're doing everything we can.

Now it's the time to be tested for the NDP. You know, Madam Speaker, Alberta's NDP is in their constitution legally just like a local branch plant of Jagmeet Singh's federal Canadian NDP.

Mr. Getson: Just a franchise.

Mr. Kenney: They're the same party, the same membership. Yeah, they're a franchise. They just signed, through Mr. Singh, a coalition agreement with Justin Trudeau, so I know that they probably have to check in with headquarters, with Mr. Singh and Mr. Trudeau on this motion. They've got to get their marching orders from Ottawa, from Mr. Singh and Trudeau on this motion. If so, I can predict that they're going to vote against this. They're going to vote against it because they actually support these carbon taxes. They actually support.

Here's my message to Albertans in closing, Madam Speaker. If you're upset with inflation, you have every right to be. If you're upset with the price of electricity, you have every right to be. If you're upset with the price of fuel, you're right to be, and if you're looking to find a solution to all of this, let's vote the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa out of office at the earliest opportunity. At the earliest opportunity.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I once again encourage members to vote for this motion, to vote for reducing the cost of living on Canadians, to oppose this federal carbon tax increase because it will make life even more challenging for people at the worst possible time.

Why in the world does the NDP want to make energy more expensive while we're living through 30-year-high inflation? I'm looking forward to them trying to answer that question.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 18? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It was a pleasure to listen to the Premier's amazing speech on this. He hit all the key points, as he always does, and I'm really excited to follow and contribute to this Motion 18. I really hope that we can find unanimity, that we will have unanimity in this House, that we will collectively pass this motion, both the government and the opposition, because, as the Premier pointed out in his remarks, if you're on the side of working Albertan families, Henry and Martha in Sherwood Park, in Rimbey, in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, you should be supportive of this motion and opposed to this egregious, precipitous rise in the carbon tax, 25 per cent on April 1, April Fool's Day. But the fools are really in Ottawa, with this unholy coalition of Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau.

Madam Speaker, in my time speaking to this motion, which I will be speaking in support of, I am horrified that we're at the point where we have to even speak to this. There's a lack of common sense in Ottawa – we know that – and the best that we can do, as the Premier said, is vote out the unholy alliance of the Liberal-NDP cabal in Ottawa. It is all from them. It is all economic pain, no environmental gain, including on this phony carbon tax, which we fought. We did our best. We lost in court, but here we are. We're still doing what we can to make life affordable for Albertans.

In my time I want to speak to the themes of affordability as well as international relations, the ESG-geopolitical component to all of this, as the Premier had touched on – again, the NDP are on the wrong side of that aspect as well – and, furthermore, on the unholy alliance and how, again, this is all economic pain, no environmental gain for Albertans and Canada. I'll also share some constituent stories, you know, through you, Madam Speaker.

I'd say that the Premier was very interesting, talking about the rising costs of products that everyday people need, including lettuce. I kid you not, Madam Speaker. I was speaking to a constituent, as all MLAs do – we're all very hard working – last week on this. The concern of my constituent – we'll call her Jane – was the rising cost of food products, based in part on this 30-year-high inflation, caused as well in part by the disastrous policies of the Liberal and NDP parties' governments, including the opposition here when they were in government with their disastrous policies, leading to huge cost rises that we're still paying for today, as the Premier and the Minister of Finance have articulately pointed out over the last few weeks.

Anyway, her main concern, Madam Speaker, was the huge rise in the cost of lettuce, actually, and the great concern she had there. She was also calling about utility bills. She understood, and it resonated with her. You know, ultimately, she understood systemically that the previous NDP government, when they brought in their disastrous carbon tax, when they overbuilt the transmission line system and cancelled the most affordable form of energy in thermal coal – overall, the genesis of all this pain goes back to the disastrous policies of the former provincial NDP government. It's thankfully former, and it will be former again in 2023, a hundred per cent, the first one-term government in Alberta's history, a total disaster. But, also, their big bosses, ultimately, in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, are highly responsible for this

burdensome higher cost of living, with this egregious, very injurious rise in the carbon tax on April 1.

I mean, let's put it into context, my fellow members, including the opposition. We are living in unprecedented times, folks, absolutely unprecedented. We have lived through the first pandemic, Madam Speaker, in a century. We at one point were blessed with high commodity prices, but if you go back to I think it was February 2020, around there, oil was trading at a negative price. We're thankful for where we are today, but, you know, the energy roller coaster is something that we always have to be cognizant of, and of course Alberta had been, at that point, in recession for six long years.

Of course, our swagger is back on the economy because of a lot of the free-enterprise policies we have put forward, but take into account all those triple crises that Albertans, Henry and Martha, were facing over six years, in part also due to the disastrous fiscal and economic policies of the previous government, chasing away tens of billions of dollars in capital, Madam Speaker. And they want to talk about affordability? The members of the opposition think they can preach and promulgate on what economic policies are needed when they, as the Premier rightly pointed out, are ultimately the main creators of all this economic pain and unaffordability that Albertans are facing. That is so rich. I know the great people in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland feel that way. The great people in Taber-Warner get that; all Albertans do. On this side of the House we defend affordability for Albertans, their quality of life. We are on the side of working men and women, their families. That is what we're here to support.

Again, on the affordability, Madam Speaker, as the Premier had mentioned, we are rolling out \$1.7 billion in immediate relief to Henry and Martha, to Albertans, understanding that they are facing unbelievable pressures with 30-year-high inflation. We are there to support them, unlike the NDP. I haven't heard a word from them. I haven't heard them complaining or, you know, going to Ottawa to talk to their big bosses and say: "You know what? Could you just hold off on that carbon tax? Like, I don't think it's going to really work. Albertans are hurting right now. Could you just temporarily take a pause?" I'm not hearing that from them, but they want to stand here and say, "I'm door-knocking here, I'm door-knocking there, and I'm hearing about affordability." Well, look in the mirror. You guys are the cause of the unaffordability that Albertans are facing. My goodness, that is rich. That is rich. [some applause] I'll take that. Thank you.

You know, there are so many ways we could look at this. I'm just going to go on to the international relations component, that the Premier was also wonderfully talking about. Here's another aspect of this motion, Motion 18, where the opposition is on the wrong side of history. Their green, left, radical politics are nothing but a pain, economic pain and social pain, for Albertans because they stopped caring probably – what? – 30 years ago, I would say. The left stopped caring about working-class people. They got into woke politics, the radical, green, left movement. It's all about globalism and being a global citizen rather than caring about your country, your province, right? Country first, province first, Alberta first – how about that? – not David Suzuki or whatever Thomas Piketty or whoever is writing. I mean, come on. This is not what they should be caring about.

Anyway, here's a great example. They have been campaigning consistently for decades now against pipelines, against responsible energy development. No one does it better, Madam Speaker, than here in Alberta. We have the highest ethical infrastructure, pipeline standards in the world, but they have been campaigning again and again against energy infrastructure. So what happens when we have a constraint and not enough Alberta oil, for example, on the market?

You have dictators like Putin and the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia. All these dictatorships now control the energy markets. From 2000, when Vladimir Putin assumed power, until now, \$4 trillion in Russian oil and gas exports have gone into his coffers to fund war against neighbouring Georgia, against Ukraine in 2014, against Ukraine again in 2021.

Now, I'm not saying that they support that. They absolutely don't. They're good people. We had a great, unanimous motion in the House a couple of weeks ago, standing against Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine, and I thank the members opposite for that. But I wish they would understand – and I hope I can cause them to see this and that they will end up supporting this motion in part because of it – that by standing against Canadian, democratic, ethically produced oil and responsible energy projects, they are indirectly propping up and supporting dictatorship oil regimes that seek to overturn the post-1945 world order, that we have all benefited from over the last seven decades of incredible peace.

4:40

We don't want to empower Putin. We don't want to empower Maduro or the ayatollahs in Iran. This is not what we need in the global 21st century, where we need to ensure that in the ESG framework – I like how Alberta is leading the way on this discussion. Thank you to the Premier and the Minister of Energy.

Security is also an important component. You're looking at two great powers, Madam Speaker, Russia and China, that are revisionist. They don't like the post-1945 system. More immediate, Vladimir Putin doesn't like the post-1991, post-Cold War system either, and we're seeing that today, unfortunately.

Alberta's destiny is to be the energy arsenal of democracy in the 21st century. It can be the capital "S" in ESG in terms of security. We have the third-greatest reserves of energy in the world. You know, right now, for example, take the world's third-largest economy, Japan. It gets 80 per cent of its energy resources from the geopolitically combustible Middle East. Then, furthermore, those exports go through the South China Sea, which a revisionist power, China, is contesting. That is a critical choke point for them.

The Canadian west coast is closer to Japan than Qatar is, and Canada is a much more stable, democratically reliable country. We have an energy security premium. I know the Premier and the Minister of Energy have gone down to Houston and other places to tell the story of how we need more Alberta oil. Again, the energy arsenal for democracy: that is what Alberta's cornerstone destiny is in the 21st century, to supply Europe, to supply east Asia, all these democracies around the world, so that we can displace and get off nasty dictator oil. We cannot support it.

Anyway, that is Alberta's destiny, and I would ask the members of the opposition to please think about that when they're out protesting about pipelines or virtue signalling for the Scotland crowd or at COP 21 or what have you or to David Suzuki or whoever. Just think about that: you're empowering Putin, the ayatollahs in Iran, et cetera. Friendly democratic countries, as we mentioned, on the European continent, in east Asia, Japan, South Korea, other places: they want Alberta oil.

I had a conversation with a consul general – and I won't say which one – and they were telling me: we want Canadian energy more than any other place, because Canada has the highest standards. Canada is a democracy and such a great friend and also a supporter of the post-1945 world order. But they said: we fear that you guys can't get energy projects done here in Canada. And that is – and I am saying this now, Madam Speaker – because of the radical green left. They believe that by putting people into crushing energy poverty while they enjoy their wine and cheese on the virtue-

signalling circuit, somehow they're doing the world a favour, okay? Well, they're not, including on the security component. They're empowering revisionist, post-1945 powers that don't like the world order we're in, and we have to be cognizant of that. We have to be responsible.

I could go on, but I just want to talk a little bit more on the unholy, pernicious, injurious alliance between Jagmeet Singh, Justin Trudeau, the Liberals, and the NDP. I know we have a lot of speakers who want to speak, Madam Speaker. I'm cognizant of that. Just quickly, I've been talking to constituents on this, and they are telling me: "I didn't vote for this coalition. You know, we go in and we vote for one party, but then these two parties get together in cahoots. You have the leftists in with the radical leftists, and it's just not good. It is extremely prejudicial, especially for Alberta. This is not good."

But that's why on this side of the House, the government, we are proud that, as has been the tradition of Conservative governments, we are the guardians of Alberta's interests. Albertans put their confidence in us in April 2019, and I know that we'll gain their trust next year, in 2023, to be the guardians of Albertans' interests within Canadian Confederation. This behind-closed-doors secret deal between the NDP and the Liberals will be nothing but extremely painful and prejudicial against Alberta, and we stand against that. And with all being Alberta first here in this House, all 87 members, you know, that is in principle what most people would think. We should all vote in favour of this motion, Motion 18, to say: pump the brakes, Trudeau and Singh, on increasing the carbon tax.

So I'm hoping that the members opposite will be supportive of this motion and please send a message to their big bosses in Ottawa, their ultimate bosses. Like, even Gil isn't that big of a boss. We're talking the real big bosses, Jagmeet Singh – right? – and Justin Trudeau.

An Hon. Member: Even Big Daddy Gil?

Mr. Walker: Even more so than Big Daddy Gil. He'll like that on Twitter, I'm sure.

Please tell them to back off. This would be the worst April Fool's joke ever. This is painful for Henry and Martha, for my constituent Jane, as she had told me. Please support this motion. Put a call in to your big bosses, Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau, and say: please back off.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I am supportive of Motion 18. Let's be on the side of Alberta working families and against the radical, green, left agenda.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. Well, after those two speeches I've got to tell you that there's not much left to be said. It was pretty impressive, I tell you, so take your expectations down just a touch.

Mr. Williams: My hero.

Mr. Rowswell: Yeah. Right. You know, I'm in that line as well. Like, I've been approaching this issue all the time from affordability. No one cares about that. No one talks about that. They talk about, you know, the virtue signalling of carbon dioxide. I might be alone in this. I don't even know if I agree with my party or if the party agrees with me, but we're talking here about carbon dioxide killing the planet in eight years. That's where we're at, and the entire premise of the carbon tax and all this stuff is related to

that. If we're wrong, what are we costing the world? We're taking the most reliable source of energy that there is available to us, the cheapest if we left it alone, and we're just wiping people out. There's the energy that the world needs to operate just to live, the food that comes from it.

I'll mention one thing. The carbon tax is making us have less ability to compete in the world. I can talk about the Canadian Fertilizer Institute specifically. I met with them, and they said: "Look, if we get to a \$170 carbon tax – we're an international company. We have to make fertilizer where it's the most affordable to make. Here we are sitting on an ocean of natural gas, and we will not be able to make fertilizer." We'll be subject to the transportation costs and whatever people are charging because we can't make it. It's just unimaginable to me that people would support something like that.

I've made statements relative to where I sit on carbon dioxide and whether it's an impact on severe weather events. You know, I've quoted science, and I've been berated by the NDP. I know that when I first started talking about it, they tried to intimidate me into silence by calling me names. That didn't work, so then they tried to send their trolls after me, sending me nasty e-mails. I fought back on that, and that didn't stop me. Now, you know, like, they're asking my colleagues to tell me to shut up. I refuse to be intimidated because this conversation has to happen. We have to have an honest conversation about whether carbon dioxide is going to kill the planet, and if it's not going to kill the planet or if it's not considered a pollutant, we have to have that conversation.

4:50

That's pretty much what I'll say today. The points that were made by the two previous speakers were tremendous. I just wanted to add my little nuance and make sure that that gets stated and that that, hopefully, becomes part of the conversation at some point in this debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder to all that interjections are allowed.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am encouraging my colleagues to vote for this motion, especially those on the other side of the House, my colleagues in the ranks of the New Democrats, because I believe that ultimately this is the ultimate blue-collar, union job, working, you know, average Albertan motion. Really, all it says is that the cost of living is going to be the next question in the general election in Alberta, in Canada, in the United States, in every single western country. It will be a question of: is life more expensive or less expensive under the government we're going to elect? It will be the ultimate question.

This policy is basically admitting – if you don't vote for this motion, if you're supportive of the deal that the NDP and the federal Liberals have struck together in Ottawa, then you're basically saying that you do not care about inflation either. The end result is the same. Whether it's because you've imposed it in this fabricated way through a carbon tax, that's meant to go over \$150 a tonne, or if you just let it happen through endless money printing that never ends from Ottawa, they do the same thing. They hurt your constituents as well as my own. I'm asking you: be the NDP we used to know. Be the NDP that doesn't just pander to woke leftists and a few small people on Twitter but instead really looks after the interests, the true interests, of average Albertans. I promise you – and this isn't a threat; this is a reality – that they will vote for us if you don't do that.

Whatever gains you think you get by squabbling over petty, inside politics inside the United Conservative leadership race, you will not see that on election day because average Albertans will say: these guys, the NDP, were trying to cause some sort of drama instead of trying to look after my interests. In Refinery Row out towards Sherwood Park – average, blue-collar, working folks in union jobs in my own constituency, whether they be teachers or nurses or private-sector unions working for trades, will not support the ideology of woke leftism over the bottom dollar of what gets their family ahead.

This is my plea to the members opposite. This is a nonpartisan issue if you fundamentally care about the cost of living for your constituents. This is fundamentally an Alberta – this is an average citizen issue that each and every one of you ought to be paying attention to. If you let this go underneath and you say, "Oh, I can pander a bit more woke, leftist politics to Twitter and just let this one slide," it'll slide way too far and way too fast for yourselves.

But maybe I shouldn't be warning you, because I'm happy to take those votes in my constituency. I'm happy to have my colleague in Sherwood Park get those votes. I'm happy to see my colleagues across the province and my future colleagues yet to be elected in 2023 say: "Thank you, NDP. Thank you for voting against this. Thank you for following that crazy path down the crazy, left, woke, Liberal ideology instead of looking after the interests of average, blue-collar Albertans."

It's going to mean the next election. You cannot with a straight face say that you support carbon pricing in this way and also oppose inflation, also oppose skyrocketing electricity transmission and distribution costs, oppose all these things that end up driving day-to-day costs in the average life of, you know, Henry and Martha or name your constituent, wherever they are. It's inconsistent with reality, but I repeat myself: that's the NDP policy and world view, it seems, inconsistency with reality.

The last thing I want to speak on, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this so-called unholy alliance between the NDP and the Trudeau Liberals. Now, what I oppose about this so, so very much is that we've had how many elections over the last four years federally. I mean, Canadians had a choice to vote for the NDP if they wanted to. The federal Liberals had, I think, three opportunities now to say: we're going to enter into some sort of supply relationship or an informal coalition with the NDP. They didn't do it. Why didn't they do it? Because the voters would have rejected that. They would have rejected it soundly, and they make their coalitions after the election and pull the wool over the eyes of average, swing-vote Canadians across this country.

Conservatives rightfully say, "We will build a coalition in advance; we will rebuff those who are out on one side of the spectrum too far, and we will rebuff those who have unsavoury views that are absolutely inconsistent with human dignity," and say, "This is who we are; these are our views; this is our platform," or as they say across the pond, their manifesto. It was how many pages, Premier? Was it 200-odd pages? Two hundred-odd pages of precise policy that we are executing on. Our members were known beforehand. You vote for Premier Jason Kenney. You vote for MLA – pardon me. I withdraw, Madam Deputy Speaker, unreservedly. You vote for the Premier. You vote for the MLA for Peace River or the future MLA for Peace River. You know that he or she will be a part of the team, and that's who is there.

People who voted in the bellwether constituency of Peterborough federally did not know they were entering into a relationship with the federal NDP if they voted for the Liberals. They didn't know that. They should have, Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is fundamentally the problem with these ad hoc, afterward coalitions. Albertans, Canadians, and the electorate do not know what they're

getting until afterwards. That is not how a democracy should work, and that is what allows them to drive up electricity prices and everything that has to do with carbon – everything that has to do with carbon – because now they're even more emboldened.

The voters who thought, "I want a middle-of-the-road plan" aren't getting that. They're getting an even more radicalized, if it's possible, version of the Trudeau Liberals, and they're getting that because of a shady political deal that is in its heart an offence to the very notion of the election that was held. It's an offence because it says: "You're voting for X, but let me pull the wool over your eyes. You're getting ABC instead."

That, I think, is the problem, and that is why I think voters will reject the provincial NDP's plan to play woke politics on Twitter. It is why the federal Conservatives, I believe, are going to win the next election, whoever their leader is. It is because Canadians know that they want certainty, they want the cost of living driven down, and they want to know what they're getting and what they're bargaining for when they go to that voting booth. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is our job to deliver it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour in this House to speak on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Falconridge. As the Premier mentioned, I represent the constituency where we have a lot of new Canadians who are involved in the service industry. They drive cabs. They drive trucks. They work in the service industry. They also own small businesses. For the last few days and few weeks I am listening to my constituents over the phones and also at the doors, and they are concerned about the rise in the prices. They are worried about inflation.

I still remember those days when I moved here more than 25 years ago. If you go and rent a basement, they used to rent a basement for \$400, utilities included. When I became a small-business owner, we used to sign a lease, and it was a lease net rent plus common area cost. You know what, Madam Speaker? In these days, even if your lease net rent is zero, still you can't afford operating costs because it's more than that lease. This is the reason that a lot of small-business owners are suffering.

Before I get into this rise in prices of utilities, I want to speak about the new coalition we have. The way I see it, what Justin Trudeau did: he has replaced democracy in Canada with a dictatorship style of governance. His latest stunt of collaborating with the NDP is a stab in the heart of this democracy. Shame on Trudeau and Singh. He states that that's what Canadians want. No, Madam Speaker. That's what he wants. This is not what Canadians voted for.

When it comes to the provincial NDP, it's just like politicians coming from different parts of Canada. They tell us when they come to Alberta that they believe in our oil sands or our main industry, but when they go back, they speak differently. At the end of the day, their concern is: the more you hurt Alberta, the more votes you will get in other parts of Canada.

5:00

It is unfortunate that the previous NDP government spent reckless amounts of money on energy infrastructure. The money? They never had it, running deficits and spending so much money on this infrastructure. When we look at the bills, the transmission costs, in the year 2008 – I still remember that bill – we were paying \$10 just for transmission cost. The same bill: you are paying \$50 now. Just five times, or you can call it 500 times.

When people ask us why this cost is going up, it's because of a few factors. The money: they never had it. They ran so many

deficits. They kept on spending money, and now we are paying for it. After they left office in 2019, they added approximately, I think, \$70 billion in debt to our province, and now we're paying for it, Madam Speaker. They worked hard to make energy consumption unaffordable for Albertans. They worked together with Justin Trudeau to create the carbon tax. It was their hidden agenda. Trudeau brought the carbon tax; they brought their own carbon tax. Started at \$20. The Premier rightly mentioned that we might end up paying \$400 per tonne. Where will it take us? Just looking at the bill, I think almost one-third is a carbon tax. If we are paying it, we don't have the control. We can talk about the energy cost, but these are the hidden taxes.

Right from day one, since we formed the government, we were up front that we don't want this carbon tax. We brought Bill 1. This Trudeau: he fought with the government of Alberta, with the government of Saskatchewan, too, to impose this carbon tax on us. As a provincial government we are fighting and will keep on fighting. One day, if not in 2023, maybe in 2025, at the federal level we will promise not only Albertans but Canadians that we will wipe out this carbon tax. This is not fair. This is not fair for Albertans. We can't tell them: do not heat your homes; do not drive your kids to the hockey arenas and schools.

As the Premier mentioned on Friday morning, we will be paying 11 cents per litre as a carbon tax. The Alberta fuel tax: the Premier made the right choice to waive this, but it won't balance it. In the year 2030, when they're saying that we will be paying \$170 per tonne as a carbon tax, it'll be 40 cents per litre. Forty cents. It doesn't matter what the energy prices are; everyone will be paying 40 cents. If it gets to \$400, this is basically more than \$1.25 per litre. Who can afford it? The NDP told us they believe in the environment. So do we, but the problem is that they want to punish you. They want to make it so expensive that at one stage you'll say: no, I can't afford to heat my house; I can't drive. This is not what we dreamed about for our future generations.

With the provincial opposition, our Prime Minister has placed his ideological drive ahead of the needs of Canadians and has kept on saying that he will keep on increasing the federal carbon tax \$10 every period of time. When my constituents are already struggling to afford other costs such as groceries, this Liberal government is refusing to put aside their politics and work together in making life affordable once again.

Our UCP government committed to removing the carbon tax that was created by the NDP. As I previously said, we passed Bill 1. This was a promise made to Albertans when we were elected, and I was happy to see that we delivered on that promise. Not only removing this; we have offered our support in the last few weeks. Nearly 2 million homes throughout the province will be getting a \$150 rebate to help off-set the high and unusual cost of utilities. Madam Speaker, effective April 1 our government has committed to removing the 13-cents-per-litre tax that Albertans have paid at the fuel pumps. This is the response that Albertans need from their government, leaders at the time of financial distress. Instead, they have received no support, absolutely no support, from Justin Trudeau and his Liberals. It is unfortunate to see the federal government so out of touch with reality that they are committed to moving forward with an increase in the carbon tax at the time of this economic crisis.

Madam Speaker, by removing the carbon tax in Alberta, our government has made Alberta an attractive place for the oil and gas industry to establish business. Billions of dollars have been brought back into Alberta after the NDP drove them out during the time they were in office. The NDP proved that this same kind of left-wing ideology being used by Justin Trudeau is bad for business. It makes

life more expensive and does not bring any investment or create more jobs.

I'm honoured to represent my constituency, the constituency of Calgary-Falconridge, and I'm grateful that our government has made and also delivered on a promise made during the election. This is the type of leadership that Canadians need, that Albertans need, and they will not find it within Justin Trudeau and his new ally Jagmeet Singh.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite will likely try to turn their back on the UCP and try to convince Albertans that it was our government's removal of the rate cap that caused skyrocketing utility costs. It's simply not true. Albertans will not forget the policies implemented by the NDP that led so many individuals and families to unemployment. Our government is committed to cleaning up the mess made by that government. It is sad to see that they still have not come to terms with the damage they caused as they continue to support Justin Trudeau and his carbon tax. Today is the opportunity for them to send a strong message to both Justin Trudeau and Albertans. This is the opportunity for the NDP to admit that they made a serious mistake by once working with Justin Trudeau to create this tax. Instead of standing with Ottawa, I hope that this time they will stand with Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 18. It's interesting to think about this motion. I thought about, you know: what does it take for a government to raise taxes, and how do you go about doing it? Actually, I listened to an interesting talk on this. The speaker said: you need to have lots of Hollywood star power to be able to try to sell it and make it seem like it's valuable and important, you need to be light on details, and you need to employ a strategy called wag the dog. It's a wag-the-dog strategy. When they're taking this out of your pocket, you don't want to be thinking about that, so they'll be doing all sorts of stuff on this side here so that you don't realize what's going on.

5:10

This is why this motion is so important and so critical right now, because we have the opportunity to be able to shine a light on what's been going on and what is continually going on throughout this world, which is an increase in cost to everyday Albertans, everyday people of the world. It's sad that earlier the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was complaining, when she was talking about Bill 2, how there were no members of the government side standing up and speaking about affordability. Yet we have had, I think, five speakers now talking about the importance of affordability and what happened and why that affordability was lost.

Madam Speaker, as you know, I've been in this House in opposition. I watched as the NDP went forward with their strategy of increasing the costs to Albertans, especially when it comes to utilities. Just so that the members opposite don't forget and that Albertans can remember what really, truly did happen, when the NDP were in office, they decided that they were going to implement the carbon tax. They actually did that prior to the federal government. They can blame all they want on Justin Trudeau: he's the one who brought it in. That's actually not true. What happened was that they brought it in, and the federal government was emboldened by that, and they thought: what a great idea; let's do that. Then they actually implemented their carbon tax on a federal level.

Now, what's interesting is that once they made a policy decision, all of a sudden the consequences of that policy decision started to unravel. One of the consequences of that policy decision was that with utility providers there's a clause called power purchase agreements that actually said that if you change the contract and change the ability of us to be able to make money or not off of these contracts in any way, we can cash in these power purchase agreements and we will sue for damages. This is what happened, and the cost to Albertans, Madam Speaker, was \$1.4 billion. That is the cost that was borne in terms of the liability costs. The damages cost was the \$1.4 billion.

But what has not been talked about is the fact that when you quickly move from coal to natural gas – there was already a plan for it – what happens is that you move the incremental costs up 100 per cent. You go from 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour to 3 cents per kilowatt hour for natural gas. Now, I remember when they first were talking about doing this. I brought this up in the house, and of course they did the wag-the-dog strategy, where you just talk about other things rather than the actual issue at hand, which was affordability. When you have a 100 per cent increase in input costs, that has got to be something you need to take into serious consideration.

Madam Speaker, the members blindly went forward and added that cost onto Albertans. Yet we have heard for weeks now the members going after the associate minister of utilities, saying that it's the government's fault or it's his fault that these costs have increased. In reality, this was the NDP's approach to utilities, and it was all because they wanted to bring in a carbon tax, the largest tax hike in Alberta history. This is the reason why the snowball effect happened, where they started to bring in these different policies, and as those policies came in, we saw the cost of everything go up.

Now, the other thing to remember, Madam Speaker, is that there's nothing that you can get in this province that isn't trucked, so as soon as you add on a carbon tax, that is going to be a cost to Albertans in everything they do. The NDP knew that the past Conservative governments had already implemented a bill that said that they cannot bring in a PST unless that PST is brought before Albertans in an election, and they refused to do that. What they did is that they brought in something that's almost as egregious as a PST, which is a carbon tax, because it taxes everything, just like a PST taxes everything. The carbon tax was their strategy to be able to bring a PST in, and the cost of everything went up. So when the hon. members to my left talk about affordability, it's hypocrisy, Madam Speaker. It's hypocrisy.

I want to talk about a very close issue in my riding. Everybody in here knows about Rogers Sugar, I'm sure. I grew up on Rogers Sugar pancake syrup on pancakes in the morning. Every morning my dad would make pancakes, and we would have Rogers Sugar syrup on it. It was a household brand. Rogers sugar is produced – actually, the name of it is Lantic Sugar – in my hometown of Taber.

Now, what's interesting about this is that Rogers sugar is made out of beet sugar, and beet sugar competes against cane sugar. Now, what's interesting about that, Madam Speaker, is that out of all the cane sugar that's produced in the world – there's a total of 1.1 billion tonnes of cane sugar that's produced – 906 million tonnes comes from countries that do not have a carbon tax. So Lantic Sugar, or Rogers Sugar, is at a competitive disadvantage to cane sugar already. It also comes from countries that don't have the same environmental standards. They don't have the same ethical standards, they don't have the same labour standards, and they don't have the same cost of living as we do. So how is it that Lantic Sugar, Rogers Sugar, can compete against countries like Brazil, India, China, Mexico? Well, actually, Mexico does have a carbon

tax. It's interesting because Mexico has started to lose their cane sugar, and it's just gone to other countries. That's a natural progression.

What's interesting about this is that Lantic Sugar recognizes very quickly that just across the border – my riding is right on the U.S. border – you have a country, the United States, that does not have a carbon tax as well. That carbon tax advantage of the United States – the lack of carbon tax advantage the United States has – is now starting to take away from our ability to keep Rogers Sugar, a household name in our province that I grew up on, from being able to stay not just in Alberta but in my riding, which is a major employer of men and women in Taber-Warner, a major employer that provides good-paying jobs, that provides jobs for people who actually came up from Mexico. The Low German Mennonite population works – a disproportionate number of people from the Low German Mennonite population work in Lantic Sugar. They love it. They love being there. They're paid well there compared to what they would be paid in Mexico.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Through our ability to provide Rogers sugar to Albertans, we not only provide a great product that everybody loves, but we also are able to provide people from other countries, like the Low German Mennonite population from Mexico, with good-paying jobs. We've allowed them to be able to come to our country, to our province and to be able to have a lifestyle that they would never have been able to have in Mexico: buy homes and have a vehicle to be able to take their kids to soccer practice, to be able to go to a soccer game, to be able to go to swimming, have their kids in ballet or in swimming lessons. This is the lifestyle that is actually provided for the Low German population that is disproportionately employed by Rogers Sugar.

5:20

Now, 100 per cent of the sugar beets produced in the United States, which is our direct competition, in direct competition with us, have no carbon tax whatsoever. On a regular basis I have to meet with Rogers Sugar executives and management and help them understand why we have the Alberta advantage and to just stick with us a little longer because – you know what? – we're going to be competitive in other ways even though we have a federal government that's bent on doing everything they can to make us less competitive with other jurisdictions.

I hope that the hon. members to my left will recognize the trickle-down effect of bad policy, the trickle-down effect of the policies that they had made in the past that took away our ability to be competitive on a national scale. When we have a situation where you're not price makers, where you're price takers with international products like sugar, there's no way that you can compete if you've got that kind of an input cost going up to \$170 a tonne. Mr. Speaker, they are complaining about being competitive at \$40 a tonne. At what point do we drive out the Rogers Sugars from this province, from this country to other jurisdictions that don't have a carbon tax? What number does it have to be? I guarantee you that it's not going to be \$170. It's going to be well below that. Within years we're going to see a complete change in employment opportunities, good-paying opportunities for our children, for our grandchildren.

There just doesn't seem to be a recognition from these members in the NDP-Liberal coalition that this damaging carbon tax, this increase in those carbon taxes, that April Fool's joke that isn't a joke, is going to cause massive problems and concerns for the very people that they say that they are actually representing, because Edmonton, which is where most of the members to my left are from

– they are also employed. They are also needing jobs. They also need to be able to have those opportunities for gainful employment. For them not to think about that – they think that they can get green energy jobs and that that will be the silver bullet for all of this – is astounding when you think about it, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that I would hope that we would see a change in the hon. members to my left, that we would see a change in the way that they understand and see how economics works and how good policy will create jobs, which is what we're seeing right now. We've created many jobs, thousands of jobs, because we have established back that Alberta advantage again. The NDP don't believe in the Alberta advantage. They actually want to break it down and destroy it, and I believe that Albertans rejected that. We're seeing that right now in the polls as the poll numbers are starting to drop for the NDP as they're starting to see that those damaging policies have a real effect on Alberta families, on each of our families, and also on the NDP's families, yet they are going quickly to do what they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, I am fully in favour of this, and I hope that all members will follow as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 18, are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the conversation we're having back and forth here. This motion, just for the folks at home that are following along, is Government Motion 18 by the hon. Mr. Nixon.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1 . . .

The Speaker: I just might remind the hon. member that no matter what the context is, the use of proper names is inappropriate.

Mr. Getson: I apologize, sir. I got caught out by reading it off the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1 . . .

April Fool's, by the way.

. . . increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne . . .

It's actually going up from \$40.

. . . and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Speaker and to the folks here, this is like déjà vu all over again. You know, we went and campaigned on killing the carbon tax. The opposition put in this gouge that had set the world on fire, quite frankly, when it comes to Albertans. They had never had a PST before, and all of a sudden they're getting this tax grab that was hitting them. Some of my constituents – there was one gentleman that I'd spoken to. He and his father ran trucks, and he was just looking for a fair deal. He was looking for a fair shake in his own province. He said: I wish they would stop stepping on my throat while they're picking my pocket. That's where we're at. We've already had it once. We challenged it in court. We won, by the way. We won. I think the magistrate had said that it was the Trojan Horse, a Trojan Horse of legislation. We lost in the Supreme Court.

I'm still a little frustrated, honestly, Mr. Speaker, and getting a little emotional here because, again, I hear it from my constituents. We're driving costs. The inflation is up. We keep just hammering them, stepping on them a little bit harder, robbing what little bit they've saved up, especially coming out of COVID. Just as we're starting to take off, we want to throw a drowning man an anchor. Thank you very much, Jagmeet and Justin. That's what's happening. People

can't take it anymore. It doesn't make sense. It just does not make sense. Why would we continue to do this? You know what I'm thinking, jokingly? Maybe they don't get it.

But here's the other scary thought: maybe they do. Maybe they really want to drive a wedge between the west and the east. Maybe they really want to bankrupt how many more families out there. Maybe they want to have us rolling tumbleweeds down here. You know what happens then, Mr. Speaker? You break people. When they have dependency on the government, well, that is the neo-Marxist marching orders right to the end: help you; put you in the shackles; keep you dependent; keep you fed; break your will.

We want to talk about people leaving? There's a ton of people leaving. There are more coming into our province because we're still the bastion of hope, but the people that have left – I hear the other side talking about: what could possibly be driving all those engineers, cost control, and professional people out of the Calgary office towers? Well, you hammered the energy sector so hard that they picked up and left. I had a gentleman by the name of Bryce Barkus reach out to me before I got elected. He says: "It looks like a long-haired Liberal hippy just became your Prime Minister. When are you packing up and moving south?" The writing was on the wall. This is from a gentleman at NKE Associates. I worked with him when we were doing Eddystone, Pennsylvania, putting in a trans-shipment facility. He was the guy that took care of the engineering for me on the trans-shipment on the rail tracks. They could see the writing on the wall. Now we've lived through this.

It just keeps getting worse. Now, the same boy band that brought you the emergency measures act, that got put in place: they tried that on. The bromance went so well: "Well, hey, let's start a coalition. Here's a great plan. Tell you what? Why don't we do a little handshake, and you just keep me propped up in power, so then we can do all this really crazy stuff?" You know, there was a line out of *Tropic Thunder*. I'm going to kind of twist it a little bit, but quite frankly the words of advice were: never go full socialist. This is where we're at. I've got one leader of one party dressing up like Thelma and the other one's like Louise, and they're running the T-bird off the edge of the cliff. The rest of us, unfortunately, are supposed to go along with this in the back? Enough.

The opposition will stand up here and they'll talk about how bad the energy sector is. They'll talk: "Oh, my gosh, the power prices are going up. I can't imagine why. What's happening on my doors, all these people." I wonder if they're honest with the people on the doors. When they look them in the face, instead of saying, "Oh, it's because of the new budget," look them in the face and say: "You know what we did? We messed up. What we did was because of our ideology. We rapidly accelerated this phase-out of coal, which was the cleanest coal tech that we've got in the world because of the Devon institute, that put it in place." They rapidly accelerated that. Then they allowed them to go hog-wild building out the infrastructure for the transmission lines. Because, you know, they're so full, well equipped, they didn't understand this little thing called contracts. When they broke the contracts, they had to pay for them.

5:30

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little passionate about the coal because, again, that's my area. I understand the tech because I came from that energy sector. For a point of interest, I was the project manager for Enbridge while we were looking at a JV partnership with, turns out – at the time it was called the pioneer project. We were going to do carbon capture and storage, take it off the top of those nice little stacks there, push that down towards Drayton Valley-Devon, re-energize the fields down in that area so that we could have more flow and throughput.

Now, we had a little bit of a technological problem back in 2012, and it was with the technology that was coming out in the carbon capture from Korea. We couldn't make the financial model work. So now when I get elected and I hear we're phasing out coal, I end up running into the same project manager from the other side. I took him for a ride in the truck and said: "Jamie, can we throw this thing back? Can we turn it back?" He goes: "It's too far gone. It's too far gone." I'm going, "It doesn't make sense." [interjections] Yes, sir. Intervention? Sure.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the hon. member talking about the innovation. The question I have for the member is: does he know of any situation where governments or organizations have been able to tax their way into a solution versus innovate their way into a solution?

Mr. Getson: Thanks for the question, hon. member. Again, the question was: have you ever been able to tax your way to a solution? No. I've never seen that work. You can put in different programs, like the TIER program that we put in place. That was good. Industry worked with us and said: "Okay. Take over from here. We'll pay a little bit extra. Put it into a fund where innovation is held in trust, and we'll grow it." Absolutely, that works. But just to tax your way on the inputs?

When I was talking to this project manager, again going back to Jamie and having that conversation, I'm going, "Well, it takes three parts to four parts the amount of gas to produce the same amount of energy as you do coal." And he goes, "Yeah." But they've taxed the coal – I think it was at 45, 50 bucks at the time – so high that it wasn't making sense. Well, now roll the shot clock forward. I'm in an open house at TransAlta just a couple of weeks ago, and they're looking at me at going: the people are ringing our phones off the wall complaining about the cost of power, and it's all that we can do to tell them it's because we're burning three times the amount of gas, and now we're going to be paying 50 bucks a tonne.

You've made it artificially even higher than the coal cost was when you phased it out. So when you're at your doors, give them my number and tell them to ask me what happened to the power prices so that when they're sitting in Edmonton, they'll understand what the heck is happening on the grid. And the folks in rural pay way more for their transmission costs. This is just a cascading effect, again, of the carbon tax.

Is the intent of the opposition – Mr. Speaker, through you to them: are they Thelma and Louise? Are they the cast of *Tropic Thunder*? Or are they something else, something way more nefarious trying to drive us and separate us and drive a wedge into this country until we all walk within a soup line with our little dishes?

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is laughing it up. Thinks this is funny. Why don't I go door-knocking with that member and talk to the people about what's happening in their representation? I have folks from eastern Europe calling me and saying: "Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland" – I didn't use my name – "this is scaring the heck out of us. We lived when Romania came down, when the walls came down. We were in Hungary. We were in Ukraine. We were in Russia. We moved here because the land of opportunity, Canada, was a safe place. We're scared. This is how it starts. Where do we go, and what can you do?"

Again, we can have a motion in here. We can plead. The other side isn't playing by the rules, Mr. Speaker. We need to start exercising more of our constitutional rights. If you want to wake up the bromance, let's drag and let's start talking something realistic; let's bring that CPP back. Let's talk regionally. We want to promote pipelines and energy? You see the mess that's taking place over

there? Motion 501: I had that two years ago. Not a single member from the opposite agreed with me on that. They wouldn't vote in favour of it, and it was simply talking about economic corridors and pathways to strengthen our country, to step up to do what we needed to do.

Roll the clock forward to where we are today. Holy cow; the world is dependent on communist and socialist oil. Now, is that by accident? Is that why the members opposite and a lot of the groups that they promote, that they show up at protests with – Extinction Rebellion. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood really loves that group, thinks they're so good that they should bring them to the classrooms and teach our kids. Well, actually, it's not teaching; it's called indoctrination. To indoctrinate our kids about that type of thing, waving communist flags more often than not: is that part of the plan?

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, I provided some reflection on the use of government motions in comparison to the second reading of a piece of legislation. Second reading: significant amount of swath. Government motions: perhaps slightly less swath with respect to relevance. I think it would be prudent for the member to return to the origins, if you will, of the motion. I'm sure there's lots there that he could talk about.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you for the correction, Mr. Speaker. Again, I apologize to the group. Obviously, we're pretty passionate about this. Again, it's simply because I'm a patriot, love my country, love the flags that are represented behind us in our institutions. I feel compelled to express that, to maybe shake up the opposition to maybe vote with us on this for a change, to vote in favour of Canada, to vote in favour of the people out there right now.

When you're at your doors and people are struggling, Mr. Speaker – and I know you know it on your side. I've got people that are wondering if they should chase their businesses across the border. The Member for Taber-Warner was talking about Rogers Sugar. We have a lot of businesses that are doing that right now. We know that they're coming back, that the energy sector is coming back, but can we get our stuff to market? When I started talking about energy corridors, one of the VPs from Enbridge that's on the liquid side had said that the energy corridors, the economic corridors change everything, because they're not talking about expanding and building anymore in Canada. The risk is too high, and the risks of costs of goods and services just get compounded. If we're going to reach that socialist euphoria where we get to 170 bucks a tonne, well, you better get comfortable with nukes really quick, unless we're just trying to drive this thing right to the bottom.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my leave, pass it on to the next member, hopefully, that'll stand up. What we have to do – hopefully, everyone in here will vote with us in favour of this motion. I thank the minister for bringing it forward. I really appreciate everyone's passionate speeches that were made to hear. There was the sound of deafening silence coming from the opposition. I really hope that they can break up the bromance, stand on this side of the House with us, and do the right things for Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Culture I would like to move second reading of the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Of course, this is an act to bring ammolite into Alberta as its official gemstone to join the other 11 emblems, including what I just learned about. Bighorn sheep is the mammal of Alberta, and the other one – rough fescue is the grass of Alberta, in case you were just wondering. There are others. The great horned owl as well. Of course, it's a unique item to Alberta, to southern Alberta. It has a history here unique to us, and to be able to bring it in as the gemstone, I think, recognizes that history as well and is something that Albertans can be proud of.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has moved second reading of Bill 6, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, emblems of Alberta. It's a brief bill. I will say that about it. I mean, I could literally stand here and count the words on it. That doesn't mean it's not important, but, you know, any time I see a bill that is this light, I always think that there are so many other things that could have gone into this. Again, much like the discussion that we had about the budget earlier, there are a lot of things that could have been placed in here. One of the things: there are so many emblems in Alberta that are important. We could sort of underline their importance and talk about why we need them, but we didn't. Anyway, we'll focus on what's in this bill.

5:40

This bill designates ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta. Now, ammolite is not to be confused with ammonite, which refers to fossil shells of ammonites. Ammolite refers to the gem-quality material made from fossils of particular species of ammonites. Ammonites, for those of you that didn't know at home and are curious, were marine mollusks that became extinct over 65 million years ago.

Now, ammolite, which is an opal-like organic gemstone, is found primarily along the eastern slopes in the Rockies. Why I bring this up about the Rockies is because we've had some really intense debates about protecting the eastern slopes. It's unfortunate that just earlier this week a private member's bill actually to protect the eastern slopes was not supported by the members opposite. I think we all saw a lot of actually nonpartisan public pressure in opposition to coal strip-mining on Alberta's eastern slopes when the UCP did some really sneaky things and changed some policies and changed some rules when they thought people weren't looking. I think the intense pressure caused them to backtrack a little, then do what they normally do, assign a panel and then go through all of those steps, which, you know: better than nothing. What they could have done is actually support this piece of legislation.

I'm going to reiterate what the leader of the NDP said earlier this week. She explained the four things that the Eastern Slopes Protection Act does. It would have immediately cancelled all exploration activities across the eastern slopes, which means a stop to road building and test pits. I think we all learned a great deal, when we did see all of the public pressure and push-back, about coal mining and pit mining.

The second thing it does is permanently prohibit new coal mining and related activities in category 1 and category 2 lands and cancels all existing coal leases on these lands.

The third thing that private member's Bill 201 would have done is prohibit coal mining and related activities in category 3 and category 4 lands pending the development of a thorough regional plan following extensive consultation with residents of the eastern slopes: Indigenous governments, elders, and communities as well as municipalities, ranchers, farmers, agricultural groups, tourism and recreational businesses in addition to representatives of other affected industries and economic sectors, the very people that this government neglected to consult before they forged ahead with their plan.

The fourth thing that this bill would have done is prohibit Alberta Energy Regulator from issuing approvals, including for water permits, in categories 3 and 4 and cancelled leases issued in conjunction with the UCP's cancellation of the 1976 coal development policy in May of 2020. So that is actually unfortunate.

The reason I bring this up, as I said a little bit earlier, is that, actually, the eastern slopes is the place that we find this gem, so you would think that this government would be invested in protecting this area.

Because this is a piece of legislation without a lot of substance – and that doesn't mean that it isn't important. There are pieces of legislation that are not very long that are incredibly important. I'm not saying that. But when you get a piece of legislation like this, it's a little bit difficult to find things to talk about, so I'm going to talk about something that I often talk about that's pretty important and that's somewhat related to this, and that is the science of paleontology, weirdly enough. So these are fossils . . .

Ms Hoffman: Tell us about your son.

Ms Renaud: I will.

Paleontology, for those of you that don't know, is the science of studying fossils of animals and plants. Now, I think most people, when they think paleontology, they think dinosaurs – they only think dinosaurs – but it is not limited just to dinosaurs; it's actually limited to plants. There are two major streams: there is vertebrate paleontology and invertebrate. Vertebrate is, obviously, extinct animals. We know that there's a spine. Invertebrate: there's no spine. No spinal cords. So it's pretty easy to tell.

You know what? Alberta is actually world-class for paleontologists, for researchers in this field. It is absolutely world-class, and the reason I know this – I know I've said this many, many times in this House – is that my son is actually a paleontologist. Right now he's in the U.K., in London. He's working as a researcher. But as he went through university here – he did a degree here, and he did his master's, and then he went to Toronto to do his PhD – I learned a lot from him and his friends, who were really into fossils and dinosaurs. I learned a lot about how important this field of research is. It isn't just about supercool dinosaurs, that you see at the Tyrrell museum, which is a world-class museum and amazing – if you haven't been there, you should go – or the Currie museum, which is in the Grande Prairie area, which is another fantastic and amazing museum. If you haven't gone, you should go. We have world-class scientists right here in Alberta that are doing really amazing research in this field, weirdly enough.

Sadly, though, one of the things that has happened over the last couple of years – and I know that the Minister of Advanced Education will frequently flick this off and just say: ah, that's not true. I do know that it is true. There is a brain drain going on, and people are leaving Alberta. People are leaving Alberta in this sector. They're leaving Alberta specifically because there is no place for them here or there are no funds for research here. They just don't see a future for themselves as a young family or a young person looking at their career, and that's unfortunate. I think if you

understood the passion of the scientists that are born and raised here, that study here, that learn here, that go on – they do their summer, their fieldwork here, they assist other researchers here, they invest so much time and energy here. They're such amazing people to represent this province, and those are some of the people leaving.

It's not just my son, it's not just a personal thing, but a lot of his friends are now scattered, actually, all over the world, from Australia to Germany to Japan. I'm trying to think. There's some in France. Like, they're just all over the place. These postsecondary institutions and, in some cases, museums are actually snapping up people from Alberta because we're so well known around the world for the kind of work and the researchers that we produce here. That's really a sad thing. Alberta is about – yeah. There's a reason that we have a little dinosaur on our drivers' licences. Alberta is really well known for the researchers here. I think if we have one leave, it's sad. If we have as many as we have had leave, it's kind of a tragedy. You won't get that back.

People aren't staying, and they aren't staying for a number of reasons, not just that tuition has been increased or that the interest on their debt has gone up. It's not just that. There are so many other things. When people look around them, they want to see their province, their government, their leaders reflect back the values that are important to them. Unfortunately, young people are leaving because they don't see those things in Alberta, which is actually a tragedy for us because our young people, the youth of Alberta, really are our greatest treasure, and they are vital for our future.

You know, I think it's great that we have an official gemstone and it is what it is. I know that ammolite, the history of ammolite, the importance of ammolite to Indigenous communities has been discussed in this House, and that's a great thing. I think that if those communities endorse this, they want this, that's great. It would have been great to see other emblems of Alberta given this attention and this respect. I can think of one, for example, and that would be the Franco-Alberta flag. It's unfortunate that this government chose to enact a policy so that when we have an entire month to recognize francophone communities in Alberta, the flag is flown for one day throughout a month, which is unfortunate. It's unfortunate that this government – they talk about not picking and choosing things, but they certainly do that.

Mr. Speaker, the long and winding road. I do actually support Bill 6. I think it's terrific that ammolite will be adopted as the official gemstone of Alberta. I recognize its ties to – you know, it is a fossil. The importance of paleontology and the fact that I got to say that word and talk about paleontology for a few minutes is a good thing in this place.

I think that, you know, we all recognize that we're famous for dinosaurs, the albertosaurus, the T. Rex, all of the big-teeth ones that are really cool, but we're actually more than that. There's so much more than that in Alberta. They unearth – all the time there are new dinosaurs that are found, new ones that are named for famous researchers that were born and raised here in Alberta and that are known sort of the world over, and that's pretty special. It's unfortunate, though, that a lot of that talent is leaving Alberta.

With that, I will end my comments. Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill 6. When it comes to the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, there is a special connection to Lethbridge and ammolite. That's a major reason I am compelled to support this bill. Did you know our province currently has no official gemstone

under the current emblems act? The city of Lethbridge does, and it's ammolite. All of the ammolite that is mined is found in southern Alberta. Lethbridge makes up a huge part of what was called and what is called the Bearpaw Formation. It's a geological formation covering most of southern Alberta and extends into western Saskatchewan and northern Montana. However, ammolite is mined exclusively in southern Alberta. Because of that, it is not only Lethbridge's gemstone but also, hopefully, will be Alberta's gemstone. Thanks to this amendment ammolite will be as much of an emblem to our province as the coat of arms, our flag, and the wild rose. I applaud this bill for recognizing that.

For those who may not know or missed it when the member opposite just shared this, ammolite is an iridescent gemstone formed from the fossilized shells of mollusks known as ammonites, which lived in an inland sea east of the Rocky Mountains. After sinking to the seabed, the mud that covered ammonites hardened over millions of years to become shale. The shell properties, combined with southern Alberta's unique geology, transformed many ammonite shells into the ammolite that is mined and used for jewellery today.

Also, ammonite shells have been collected by the plains First Nations for a thousand years and are still collected by Blackfoot communities for sacred purposes, and I want to thank them for sharing their land and their heritage with us in this special way. While ammolite received official status from the World Jewellery Confederation in 1981, the Blackfoot people have found pieces of the stone from as early as the late 1400s. In fact, some ammonite shell segments have been collected by plains First Nations for millennia and are still collected by the Blackfoot people today. They are regarded as sacred material. The stone is in demand world-wide for jewellers, collectors, and many others, all this interest from a mine or a few mines and a history unique to Lethbridge and southern Alberta. With so much interest and history attached to this Alberta gemstone, it is easy for me to support the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take time to talk about the Fair Deal Panel, a central campaign promise of this government. When many Albertans think of the fair deal in Confederation, they think of recommendations such as the provincial police force, scrapping the Liberal carbon tax, and rightfully so. However, this amendment helps affirm Alberta's cultural uniqueness, helping to fulfill recommendation 25 of the Fair Deal Panel. Promise made, promise kept, should this bill pass. As I stated earlier, ammolite is uniquely Albertan. A big component of the fair deal recommendations is recognizing our Albertan identity, and we would now have 11 emblems.

The ammolite mine that operates near Lethbridge is also a tourist attraction and a place of employment for several people in my constituency, including some First Nations individuals. There is also the value of the gem itself to consider. There isn't an infinite supply of ammolite in the ground. It is already sold across the country and even in various parts of the world to people who appreciate unique jewellery as well as museums and avid collectors.

There is a tourism market for collectors of gems who go all over the world seeking sparkling or unique additions to their collections. Passionate collectors already know where to find ammolite, and I could get very excited about the possibilities should Bill 6 pass. It would give ammolite the recognition of a true Alberta emblem. It would raise awareness of the Lethbridge area for something that we have had in the ground going back 70 million years.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this bill is a chance to share some of what makes Lethbridge so special. It furthers our Alberta identity. It increases tourism and awareness in my constituency. It follows through on a fair deal commitment. It promotes the Lethbridge economy and employs hard-working people.

When the Minister of Culture announced that this bill would be tabled, I couldn't help but notice his lovely ammolite lapel pin.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: it looks good on him, and it looks great when he shares it with me as well.

When it comes to our heritage and recognizing things that are unique to this province, it is a nonpartisan issue. I urge all members of this Chamber to join me in supporting the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, and I look forward to seeing more people coming to Lethbridge to find some ammolite for themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre with the time that remains.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 6, the emblems of Alberta act, and indeed I suspect my remarks on this will be relatively brief, perhaps five minutes or so.

The Speaker: Four.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, four and counting, I suppose, Mr. Speaker, certainly.

As I think a number of members have noted in this House, this is a bill, I think, that we can all support. We recognize the unique properties of ammolite, the innate connection it has for Indigenous peoples here in the province of Alberta, indeed the Blackfoot, who refer to ammolite as iniskim, the buffalo calling stone, connected for them to a cultural myth about the stone having been used, having been found by a community that was struggling, starving in the winter, and finding that the stone was of use in calling buffalo and helping them to provide for themselves. It's said to symbolize wealth, abundance, good health, and stamina. Indeed, for our province, I think, as we come out of this COVID-19 pandemic – we continue to grapple with the virus, but certainly as we are moving in many respects towards a recovery from the challenges that have come with that, I think certainly a symbol of wealth, abundance, good health, and stamina is a very worthy one for us to adopt as a province.

Of course, this brings Alberta in line with a number of other jurisdictions in Canada that have their own official gemstones. We know that British Columbia, of course, has named jade; Newfoundland, labradorite; the Northwest Territories, diamond; Nova Scotia, agate; Ontario, amethyst; and in the Yukon Territory, lazulite. But here in Alberta we have the relatively unique gemstone of ammolite.

I certainly appreciate the idea that is put forward here and certainly that was spoken of by the Member for Lethbridge-East, of wanting to express more about Alberta's unique identity. Certainly, ammolite, in being a multicoloured gemstone, I think, recognizes what is true about Alberta identity, that there is no one singular Alberta identity, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all of us as Albertans share many qualities in common, certainly we share some unique history, certainly we share some common experience, but I think we recognize that there is a vast diversity of background in Alberta, a vast diversity of heritage, indeed a vast diversity of opinion and political perspective as well.

At times, Mr. Speaker, I think we can get a bit fixated on particular ideas of what it means to be Albertan or what an Albertan looks like, and I appreciate that in this bill we do not have that, that what we have being brought forward here is indeed an emblem, I think, that can be enjoyed by all Albertans. It can be considered representative of all of us as Albertans and indeed, as I said, in its multicoloured facets reflects that reality that there are many, many perspectives on what it means to be Albertan and to represent our provincial values.

I appreciate the minister bringing this forward and giving us the opportunity to support this. I look forward to many more opportunities to discuss those values, that wide range of diverse

values that indeed Albertans hold, and how we each as representatives in this House can represent those values, the voices of our constituents, and indeed the diversity of our province.

I thank the Minister of Culture for bringing this forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 4 the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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