



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 30, 2022

Day 18

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Jason Kenney	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Mike Ellis	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Whitney Issik	Associate Minister of Status of Women
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Minister of Community and Social Services
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Transportation
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are very special guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I would like to introduce her son Joseph Homeniuk, accompanied by Caitlin Meneses, his girlfriend. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us today is Rinay Chand, nephew of the Member for Calgary-East, and he is accompanied by Nancy Narayan and Vishal Bijay.

We don't quite have a school group here yet, but they will be joining us as guests of the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, the Worsley central school from Worsley, Alberta.

Also in the galleries today is Madison Forster, a social work student currently doing her practicum in the constituency office of Edmonton-Strathcona, and Kelly Harris, a constituent and guest of the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Last but not least, I met some very lovely folks today touring the Legislature. I might just add that public tours are available again to members, their constituents, or members of the public. We have a guest visiting all the way from Toronto and another one from here in Edmonton. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Peace River.

Federal Climate Plan

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the eco criminal Liberal minister announced his new climate plan. Alberta's government made its position absolutely clear. This plan is insane and unworkable. I must say that the response from our opposition across the way was interesting. They came out and claimed for the first time in their political careers, in their lives perhaps, that they were opposed to Justin Trudeau. They claimed, in contrast to the entire time they were in government, that they were going to stand up for Alberta.

Well, this was curious because the truth is that this is the party that brought in the job-killing carbon tax before Justin Trudeau. This is the party that tried to meddle in our electricity markets and spiked the costs for Albertans to enable the ill-advised green energy scheme, bringing bureaucrats to change your light bulbs and shower heads. Well, I have an answer for Albertans. Just like celebrities at the Oscars on the weekend, the NDP are actors. They're acting, Mr. Speaker. They're acting and pretending that they agree with the

priorities of Albertans for purely selfish, cynical reasons. An old dog can't learn new tricks, and that's true for the NDP.

On top of the anti-oil rhetoric of the Alberta NDP, we can see their true position plainly and clearly now through the statements of their federal leader, Jagmeet Singh, who recently struck a new deal, a coalition deal, with Justin Trudeau. They had something to say on this last night. He said that this radical climate plan from the Trudeau Liberals was not radical enough, Mr. Speaker. He said that the NDP were going to use their influence in Ottawa in the coalition that they just formed to make the plan even worse and to make it more radical, to step up the attack on Alberta's ethical energy.

The Leader of the Opposition here in Alberta could come out and denounce her federal leader, she could disassociate from the federal NDP, but we all know that that won't happen. As the old Alberta adage goes, you can't suck and blow at the same time. You can't both be on the side of Jagmeet Singh and be against Justin Trudeau. You must pick a lane, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know which lane we're in over here in the Conservatives.

Cost of Living

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent the constituents of northwest Edmonton, and it is my duty to stand up and bring their concerns to this Chamber so that the government can take action. Right now my constituents are being hammered by the cost-of-living crisis created by this UCP government. Utility bills are at a record high, insurance rates have been climbing, school fees, property taxes, tuition, interest payments; the list goes on. And despite their claims, this government is using a sneaky income tax hike to take a billion dollars away from Alberta families. Making life more expensive for Albertans has been a constant focus of this government from day one.

I received a message from a constituent whose bill for electricity doubled to \$600. He's never seen, in his life, a bill this high. The UCP only offers \$50 cheques and a fake natural gas rebate in return. I've gotten letters from families who are now choosing between buying groceries and paying their power bills, families who are coping with more debt because they can't afford to make the full payment each month, families with two incomes that are worried about having their power cut off, and this government is offering them nothing even resembling support. That's not just from my constituents, Mr. Speaker. Albertans from one corner of this province to the other are struggling with these crises.

While each day the associate minister claims to be empathetic with the high cost of living, he also refuses each and every day to actually take action and provide anything that resembles relief, proving that Albertans just can't trust this UCP to step up for them. Albertans are struggling. They watch this government fail to respond, fail to show real compassion for the difficulties that they are in, abandoning Albertans when they need the help the most. My message to this government today is simple. Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that cares about them, and they sure don't see it from this UCP.

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

Military Children

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we approach the start of April, I'd like to remind this House that April is the Month of the Military Child, a time to recognize the strength and resilience of children growing up in military families.

As the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces I am honoured to regularly speak with the forces' members

and their families. Parents among them are quick to speak of their children and hopes for the future, yet many of these parents also acknowledge the challenges caused by frequent moves and faraway deployments that are a fact of life for the forces' members and their families. Members can face new assignments to different parts of the country and even sudden deployment that can take them halfway around the globe.

Mr. Speaker, service members can spend upwards of 25 per cent or more of their professional services away from their families. The impact of separation and relocation on children can be significant and lead to emotional and even physical issues. Civilian children, teammates, teachers, and other adults often do not fully understand their experience, which can leave these children feeling isolated, a reality that was confirmed in the 2013 Ombudsman report from National Defence. This is why it is so important that educators be trained and given tools that better assist military children and that we identify the services not only in education but also in health care that can help assist children and their families through frequent relocations.

I want to thank the government of Alberta for always having an open door to learning how we can take more action on these important initiatives. It is so important to be mindful of children who may be living with long separation from a parent and check in on them. Educators, coaches, other adults in the lives of military children can help by being a listening ear and ensuring that each child has access to supports and services they need to flourish as young adults.

Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of turmoil in this world. I ask that we consider and be mindful of the burden that military children take on. Some will have a parent deployed in Europe at this very moment, and others will know what a broader conflict could bring. Let's recognize and celebrate military children in Alberta communities and all that they and their parents contribute to our province and country.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets

Ms Ganley: We need to reduce our emissions. The science is clear. In order to do that, we need real targets, not aspirational goals. A real plan must protect Alberta workers and their families. A real plan must engage, genuinely engage, with Alberta's energy industry, and that's not what we saw from the federal government yesterday.

For all of that, we need a provincial government that can stand up and speak credibly on behalf of Albertans, that acknowledges the progress we need to make and advocates for real targets and real details. Alberta must play a leading role in the international effort against climate change, and we are proud to contribute, but Alberta deserves real support to build our economy of the future, and Alberta's share of \$9 billion is not going to do it, particularly when the energy industry is being asked to do a huge part of the heavy lifting when compared to others like transportation.

1:40

Alberta's energy industry has committed to net zero by 2050, a goal shared by Alberta's NDP, but to do that, we need real targets, a real plan with real details and real funding not just for technology but for people who will be displaced, real people with real families who deserve real support. These are reasonable requests, so why didn't they reach Ottawa? Maybe because the Premier of Alberta is not spending his time making that argument. Maybe it's because he's spending his time defending himself from various investigations. Maybe he's out selling memberships for his leadership review, or perhaps he's just too busy making Will Smith memes.

The UCP is incapable of having grown-up conversations about what is reasonable, what is achievable, and how to contribute to making real progress on the real issue of climate change, and the results are clear. The UCP is utterly preoccupied with their own internal political drama, and they are failing Albertans.

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

Lesser Slave Lake Constituency Update

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last couple of weeks I've had the pleasure of meeting with municipalities from across my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake at the Rural Municipalities association spring convention. We were able to meet with the ministers and discuss the rising needs in our area and look forward to following up and getting help to where it is needed.

There have also been exciting new developments happening in the riding with regard to health care. With the old High Prairie hospital demolition well under way, I am excited to see what AHS will plan for the future of this property. There are also plans to expand on the number of available doctors in the Wabasca area, helping reduce the workloads for doctors and improving the care we need.

I was happy to see that the East Prairie Métis settlement was awarded \$300,000 through the government STIP grant. This is much-needed funding and will go towards projects in the community. We're also seeing additional funding at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic academy in Slave Lake. This will help with the cost of much-needed repairs in the school, guaranteeing a higher quality of education for all in our community.

I'm happy to be seeing an increase of in-person meetings, community activities, and events popping up all over as the warm weather comes and daylight gets longer.

Three years ago, when I took office, one of the biggest concerns I heard from businesses was about the lack of work that was out there. I am now hearing from these same businesses that they are having troubles finding workers for all the work that they are getting.

With so many great things happening throughout Lesser Slave Lake and with its people, I am excited to see what will come next. With the pandemic behind us, the restrictions lifted, record investments, a balanced budget, and so much more, I can just feel that this year will be a great one.

Thank you.

Economic Indicators

Member Loyola: The UCP likes to make bold claims about the state of our economy, but they are strangers to the truth, and Albertans can't trust what they say. Here are the facts.

The UCP promised that if they cut corporate taxes, investments 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. The UCP doubled down on their corporate tax giveaway, even accelerating it. At the time the Premier said that companies would be irresponsible for not moving to Alberta.

Since then the number of head offices in Calgary has gone from 117 to 102. Now roughly one-third of office spaces in downtown Calgary sit empty, levels not seen since the Great Depression, and Calgary has had the highest unemployment rate among major cities in Canada. According to RBC Economics 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 even with the increase in capital investment this year, it is expected to be below levels seen under our government.

When it comes to investment in start-ups, the news isn't much better. Other jurisdictions saw massive increases in venture capital investment. Ontario attracted \$7.9 billion last year, a 295 per cent increase over the year before. Meanwhile Alberta attracted \$561 million in investment, a 23 per cent increase. Despite having 11 per cent of Canada's population, we only attracted 4 per cent of the venture capital investment in the country last year.

At the same time, wages aren't keeping up with inflation, and the UCP government is responding by piling on more costs to Albertans. In the end, Albertans are working harder and harder just to survive, and the UCP is telling them that everything is fine. Conservatives like to say that they are better for the economy, but life was much better for Albertans under the Alberta NDP. When we form government in 2023, we'll bring back real advantage.

Electric Vehicles

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, lately there's been a big shift towards green technologies and energy sources while reducing our consumption of fossil fuels. Yet again I seek to remind this House that there is an underlying cost and consequence to these types of technologies. One of these technologies is the electric vehicle. However, as so often with green technologies, the cost of these highly promoted initiatives is not always communicated.

The push for electric vehicles goes beyond purchasing the said vehicle and accessing its corresponding charging platform. A large influx of electric vehicles would create capacity problems in our electrical system. Notably, EPCOR found that a 15 per cent penetration of electric vehicles into the market would require a \$2 billion grid upgrade in Edmonton alone. Transmission and distribution costs already make up more than half of some Albertans' utility bills, yet it remains unclear how much an upgrade of this magnitude in Edmonton will cost them.

Further, Mr. Speaker, while a portion of the money we spend goes to taxes that upkeep our roads and infrastructure when we fill our gas vehicles, the same does not apply to electric vehicles. As gas-fuelled vehicles use roads extensively, it makes sense that they should help pay for their upkeep. However, drivers of electric vehicles also use our roads and don't pay upkeep taxes when they charge their vehicles.

As of April 1 we will temporarily remove this gas tax. However, in the future, if and when the tax is reinstated, it would be critical to find out how electric vehicles could contribute towards road maintenance. Going forward, I believe we need to be open and transparent with the consequences of such green technological advances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Well, in the past few days we've learned that it's actually 41 doctors that have left southern Alberta over the past two years. Half the folks in the region don't have a family doctor. Over the last 48 hours I've heard from patients who just got letters from two more doctors leaving Lethbridge. Now, two years ago, right before the pandemic hit, the Leader of the Opposition and I met with a large group of physicians in Lethbridge. They described how tearing up the doctors' agreement would hasten the collapse of primary care in the south zone. This group of physicians warned the Leader of the Opposition and I of a severe crisis coming to Lethbridge. I know these doctors said the same words to the UCP

Health minister, the Premier, and the UCP MLA for Lethbridge-East. They were ignored.

Everything that group of physicians said was terrifyingly correct. The UCP war on doctors has in fact destroyed primary health care as we know it in Lethbridge. We do not have walk-in clinics. You can't get your blood work sent anywhere. It's a disaster when it comes to referrals. I heard from Bryce a couple of days ago, whose dad just lost his doctor. Bryce says: "My dad has Parkinson's, is a cancer survivor, had a wonky hip replacement. Who's writing his prescriptions? Who's doing follow-ups?" And it's not getting better no matter how many times the Health minister stands in this place and fills this room full of velvet fog, telling the people of Lethbridge that he's strategizing to synergize the meetings for an approach to a strategy that may one day result in some more meetings.

The UCP has shredded trust in Lethbridge. I think folks all understand that governing during a pandemic is hard, but what people cannot forgive is systematic dismantling of primary health care and then turning around and telling us that there's no problem, that it's all in our heads, which the Premier did last week in response to a question from me. He said that there are more doctors, that there's nothing to worry about.

No wonder no one trusts the UCP. They are incapable of good faith. The UCP may have been the ones to dismantle primary health care in Lethbridge, but come 2023, they will not be sent back to this Legislature to be the ones to fix it.

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

Budget 2022 and Alberta's Future

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with grades 5 and 6 students at Belfast school in my constituency. I was asked many great questions, one of which came from a young lady from grade 6 who asked me how this budget prepared her and her classmates for success in the future. That's a great question, and here are a few key items I want to share with her and with all young leaders of tomorrow.

For starters, our government achieved a balanced budget for the first time in nearly a decade. A balanced budget means that there will be less debt for her to pay, which means that more tax dollars can go towards important things like health care, education, mental health. She will not have to pay for today tomorrow.

1:50

Our government is committing \$3.5 billion for health care facilities, equipment, and IT systems to expand health care capacity for Albertans province-wide, and this creates thousands of good-paying jobs, jobs she will have the skills and the knowledge to thrive in.

As we focus on moving forward, our government is committed to preparing young people for the jobs of tomorrow by providing \$600 million for skills and training development. The new initiatives will address barriers for K through 12, postsecondary students, employment for women, Indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented groups and make Alberta an internationally recognized technology and innovation hub so that she will have the opportunity to be trained and ready for the economy of the future right here in Alberta.

She and her classmates are very caring and concerned about the well-being of others. That was obvious to me. Budget 2022 includes \$1 billion annually for addiction and mental health care and additional funding of \$60 million for the next three years to build a recovery-oriented system of care. We continue to fund programs that are helping our most vulnerable. To the students at Belfast

school, these are just some of the important items Budget 2022 covers. I encourage her and everyone to see how this budget is helping you and our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Fuel Prices and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the high cost of living. Inflation is at a 30-year high, and for many Albertans the bills just keep piling up. Now, the Premier claims that his deferral of the gas tax will ensure at least a 10-cent drop at the pumps. The problem is that there's no guarantee this relief won't be swallowed up by retailers before it ever reaches motorists. Today our Energy critic proposed that an audit be done by a third party to report back in a month on whether or not this plan actually helped Alberta consumers. Will the Premier commit to doing that audit today?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll be closely monitoring retail response. We believe that retailers, many of which are mom-and-pop small businesses, will pass on the full savings to Alberta consumers. But you know where we really need an audit? We need an audit on the NDP-Liberal coalition plan to raise the carbon tax by 400 per cent. When the NDP sheds crocodile tears about higher fuel prices, it's like an arsonist crying about the fire that he set. They want gas prices higher and higher and higher. They want it to go up 400 cent in the next eight years. They could change their opinion, though, and vote for our motion against the carbon tax hike tonight.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows the biggest driver of the price of gas is the price of oil. Gas prices have already gone up 20 cents in the three weeks since his plan was announced. Drivers struggling with these spiralling costs deserve support in their pocket. Now, the Premier is expecting a windfall budget as oil prices stay high. Albertans, who are the owner of that resource, deserve to get some of the benefits, too. If he can't work with retailers or anyone to make sure that the price drops, why doesn't he skip them and put the cash directly into the hands of drivers?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa released their disastrous attack on Canadian families that will kill jobs, hammer Alberta's economy, that would imply not a carbon tax increase of 400 per cent but of a thousand per cent. Now, just based on the NDP's plan of going to a \$170 carbon tax, that would add 40 cents to the price of each litre of gas purchased by Albertans. Why, with 30-year inflation, does the NDP want to drive inflation even higher?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, for the moment the Premier is still in government, and he's the one that should be coming up with solutions. Instead, yesterday what he said was: "I don't know what more we can do. I really don't." Let me help. The Premier could bring in a real gas rebate, give more than 50 bucks on electricity bills, which are in the thousands, restore the cap on car insurance, restore the cap on tuition, scrap his plan to tax inflation, which on its own takes \$400 from families. If the Premier is serious, will he do any of these things in his control today or just shake his fist at everybody else?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, at 12:01 a.m. this Friday Alberta's government suspends the 13-cent-a-litre Alberta fuel tax. That, on an annual basis, is worth \$1.4 billion of consumer relief. But, more than that, it also means that the GST won't be charged on the Alberta fuel tax. That's another \$65 million of savings. Meanwhile the leader of the NDP has taken out her pompoms to cheer on the same Trudeau coalition in their plan to raise the carbon tax by 400 per cent. Why does she want to punish families that way?

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

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Starlight was 12 years old. She was Indigenous. She loved to paint. She was exposed to parental substance abuse and later died of a seizure. Barry loved music. He experienced homelessness and violence. He died of drug poisoning at age 15. Celeste was 19. She loved to dance. She experienced abuse and neglect. She was murdered. Now, these are just three stories of children who died in care, detailed in the final report of our current Child and Youth Advocate. These children matter. What is the Premier doing today to prevent the death of children in care?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, every death of a child is a tragedy, and it's particularly serious when we see a child in care for whom the government has some custodial responsibility. We thank the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for their partnership in supporting vulnerable children in Alberta. The Ministry of Children's Services will respond publicly to recommendations issued by the advocate within 75 days. We're committed to being transparent. We'll respond within that time frame. In addition, we're co-ordinating with external bodies like the advocate, the office of the chief medical officer, and the Fatality Review Board.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, more children have died this year than ever before. This is not a one-off. The Premier has seen these numbers coming for months. The advocate's exasperation with the UCP's inaction was heard in the report. "These issues are not new. Rather, they persist despite numerous recommendations to address them, which amplifies the need for stronger accountability." The advocate wants ministries to appear before an all-party committee and answer questions about actions taken and actions not taken. Will the Premier set this up? Will he put children first? Will he find a way to maintain accountability?

Mr. Kenney: Yes, of course, Mr. Speaker, we need accountability, particularly when it comes to the tragic loss of life of children in care. We also need to ensure the proper resourcing of those services, which is exactly why the budget just passed increases the budget for child intervention in the Ministry of Children's Services from \$796 million annually to \$842 million annually. We've allocated \$29 million specifically for the child and youth health services initiative and taken additional action to do everything possible to protect children in care.

Ms Notley: More children than ever have died this year, Mr. Speaker, and the advocate is calling for accountability from each ministry for his recommendations. More safe housing options separate from shelters, greater training for care workers, stronger action on the opioids crisis, earlier intervention with mental health supports: these recommendations and more should be a wake-up call for every member of this Assembly and every member of that front bench. One more time: why is this Premier refusing to set up

the committee that the advocate is asking for so that all members of this House . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that eight of the 15 deaths referred to were amongst children who, sadly, experienced drug overdoses or were victims of suicide. That is reflective of what we know is a broader mental health crisis amongst children and youth all across Canada. That is why we are investing in youth mental health hubs, the mental health capacity building in schools, the Kids Help Phone, the honouring life: Indigenous youth suicide prevention program, and much more to ensure that the supports are there for kids who are facing either addictions or mental health challenges.

Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, last fall this government filibustered their own Bill 81, and they did it to prevent one of their own caucus members from introducing an amendment. That amendment would have prevented changing the elections laws to allow the UCP to buy party memberships for people without their consent and without their knowledge of knowing that this was done in their name. Will the Premier tell this House whether he believes the UCP should have an Albertan's permission before enrolling them as a party member, and does this nakedly corrupt practice align with the Premier's personal values?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, that was a party, not a government, question, Mr. Speaker, but the answer is yes. That is why the bylaws of the United Conservative Party require that people purchasing memberships either do so directly or for a member of their immediate family, unlike the bylaws of the NDP, which include no such requirement. There has never been a statutory regulation of party membership sales. There has never been in our history, nor is there in any other province or at the federal level. The question is: why does the NDP not have a bylaw preventing that kind of activity?

Ms Gray: You couldn't buy memberships for people without their knowledge before their bill, and now you can, and this government's flimsy excuse for why Bill 81 needed to change that does not make sense. It was rejected by Albertans. It was rejected by multiple UCP MLAs who voted against that bill. Now there are allegations coming up that stealth members are becoming part of the UCP's leadership review. It's a concern Albertans and some UCP MLAs share. Will the Premier agree that changing the law to allow someone to buy a political membership in another person's name without their knowledge or consent is undemocratic and un-Albertan? Will he commit to repealing it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in their panic to prevent the creation of the United Conservative Party, the NDP went through, I think, four different iterations of elections law. In none of those bills – in none of them – did they seek to regulate the sale or purchase of party memberships, and I know why. It's because they give the unions in their party structure supervotes. Gil McGowan gets to choose 25 per cent of the delegates to an NDP leadership election. I want to know: what deal did the Leader of the Opposition make with him for his votes?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I will put the Premier's fantasy about how our party runs against the reality that they changed the law to allow

the buying of memberships without knowledge or consent. They did that after a thorough debate in this Chamber, and they did that after three UCP MLAs spoke against it, voted against it, and tried to amend it, but they wouldn't allow that to happen. Will the Premier bring forward a fix immediately to remain committed to the practice of upholding democracy, or will this Premier continue to increasingly embarrass and be desperate in this effort to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, neither Alberta nor the other nine provincial legislatures nor the federal Parliament have ever had a statutory provision with respect to the internal governance of party membership sales, but the UCP does. Section 4.1.5 of our bylaws says that members must "have paid the prescribed membership fee, personally or through an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent)." Interestingly, I have the NDP constitution here, and there is no such provision. You know why? Because they're run by the unions.

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

(continued)

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the office of the Child and Youth Advocate released another mandatory child death review report. From the beginning of April to the end of September last year 18 young Albertans died under this government's watch. In the report the advocate wrote: "We have recently seen an unprecedented number of deaths. This is the largest report we have released during a six-month period." The advocate has repeatedly called on this government to provide greater transparency on what their ministries are doing or not doing to improve outcomes for young people in care. Will the Premier step up and have his ministers finally answer the advocate's calls for transparency?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Any time a child dies, especially when they are or have been in care of the government or have come into contact with the child intervention system, it is a tragedy. We work closely with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to make changes where they're needed. Just a couple of years ago we did have an all-party panel on child intervention, which was very much needed because there wasn't any transparency within the system. Obviously, we saw that under the members opposite. Out of that came this new process, which will ensure accountability and transparency and make sure that changes are made where they're needed.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Premier of this province has spent the time, as I did last night, reading the 113-page report from the Child and Youth Advocate and if he read the stories of each of the young people who died last year. I'm going to say their names because they deserve to be on the record: Claire, Starlight, Suzie, Abby, Barry, Jay, Justine, Nicki, Odin, Joseph, Mariame, Celeste, Mark, Meghan, and Ray. These are real young people who lost their lives last year. The advocate's call is very clear: to provide transparency. Will the Premier allow his ministers to report to this House on their work?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that not only did I read the report that the member is speaking about; I read that report alongside every briefing note with details from the

ministry so that I could understand where changes need to be made. As I have said a number of times in this House, I am not going to wait to take action where needed. There is transparency. We follow the process put forward by the members opposite. I know the Leader of the Opposition was very invested in that process, that was implemented after the all-party panel. We'll continue to follow that, be transparent, and make changes where they're needed.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the trend that we are seeing right now of the rising number of young people who have died in this province has been reported since last year. This minister has said that she will not wait, but she has been waiting. Albertans have been waiting. And while she's been waiting, young people are dying. The advocate has been very clear in his recommendations. Allow those ministries to come before a committee of this House to report on the work they're doing. It's a simple request for transparency and accountability as Alberta faces a crisis. It is boggling to me why this government would not want to account for that work unless there is something to hide.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the reason why I asked my department for a detailed review of each and every one of these cases and to look for patterns that we're seeing is because we will make changes. Unlike the members opposite, who tried to make a media story go away – that is what the members opposite tried to do – we are investing in the recovery-oriented system of care, making sure that there are not 4,000 but 8,000 treatment beds, and I am working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to make sure that there are supports in place to help young people, because they need it, and they need it now.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Frey: Mr. Speaker, I'm not alone in this House when I say that members of my constituency tell me regularly that they're worried about an ambulance being available when they dial 911. That's especially true for rural areas, where the vast distances between cities, towns, farms, and the nearest hospital mean that every single moment counts. Last week this House approved the very first balanced budget in eight years for the province of Alberta, but to the Minister of Health: how does Budget 2022 address rural EMS concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the hon. member for the question. Access to emergency medical services, especially in rural Alberta, is a key focus of our plan to make sure all Albertans have access to the care they need when they need it. Budget 2022 provides \$64 million specifically to ease the pressure on the overall EMS system. We also created the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, whose work will guide how we can address these rural issues and issues across our entire province. We know there are issues with rural EMS in Alberta, and we are taking steps to address them.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that one of the issues we hear about often from paramedic crews is burnout and given that the number and length of shifts that they have to do coupled with the extremely difficult situations they're responding to is unimaginable for many, again to the Minister of Health: how does Budget 2022 address burnout and improve capacity, particularly within the community of Bassano, located in the riding of Brooks-Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's EMS workers face a high-stress environment as they save the lives of Albertans. Like others, they deserve a workplace that puts their well-being at the forefront. AHS began implementing its 10-point action plan this year to increase overall capacity and improve the system's efficiency. Point 4 of that plan specifically addresses the issue of worker fatigue. I'm happy to let the member know that Budget 2022 includes \$14 million for AHS's hours-of-work initiative to reduce worker fatigue in 14 rural communities, including the town of Bassano in the member's constituency, and I'm also looking forward for any recommendations coming from the advisory committee.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Minister. Given that another concern for rural constituents is the availability of air ambulances when we need them and given that I've been advocating for HALO to receive stable and predictable funding since day one of being elected and further given that I have raised this with you repeatedly, Minister, the fact that HALO is nearly totally reliant on the local community for support and are currently without a long-term contract to provide air ambulance services to Alberta, to the minister: can you please tell the House when HALO can expect sustainable, long-term, predictable funding so that southern Albertans can get the service that they deserve?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for her tireless advocacy for HALO air ambulance, based in Medicine Hat. As the member knows, Budget '22 continues \$28 million in supports for ground and helicopter air ambulance services. Last week I had the honour of joining the Premier and the Member for Highwood to announce \$15 million in sustainable funding for STARS air ambulance in Calgary, and I hope the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat and I will have the opportunity in the very near future to speak publicly about our government's support for HALO.

Fuel Prices

Ms Ganley: It has now been three weeks since the Premier announced that the government will no longer collect the fuel tax in an attempt to help Albertans, but simply not collecting the fuel tax doesn't mean the savings will be passed on to consumers. This Premier hopes that retailers will pass it along and that Albertans will see a 13-cent discount, but no one over there could provide any assurance. To the Premier: what specific guarantees do you have in place to ensure retailers pass the savings along to Albertans, or is this just another billion-dollar add-on to your corporate handout?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You can hear the insecurity in the voice of the opposition when they talk about this incredible fuel tax suspension measure. I'm confident that we have enough competition in our gasoline and diesel retail sector. We've reached out to retailers. We're confident that they will be providing relief, the 13, actually 13.6, cents of relief, to consumers. Again, we're taking real action to deal with the affordability challenge.

Ms Ganley: Given that earlier today I called on this government to provide a third-party audit to assure Albertans that vendors actually reduce their prices by 13 cents and don't just pocket the difference

and given that Albertans deserve to know that \$1.3 billion is going to support them, not pad bottom lines, to the Premier: will he work with us to put an independent auditor in place to make sure \$1.3 billion of relief make it to the pockets of Albertans?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, we will be monitoring how retailers respond to this reduction in fuel tax. I'm confident that they will be reducing the price of gasoline and diesel fuel by the 13 cents a litre. What we hear from the opposition is basically a plan of government intrusion, overreach, overreach that they would ultimately do to every business and every sector in this province. They had four years to do that. They chased out tens of billions of dollars of investment. Tens of thousands of Albertans lost their jobs. We will not do that.

Ms Ganley: Given that a recent study from the U.S. showed that fuel tax breaks often don't get passed on to consumers – most are just pocketed by corporations or retailers – and given that the American Road & Transportation Builders Association chief economist states that this type of tax holiday is often well intentioned but ineffectual, can the Premier stand up in this House and provide actual assurances to Albertans that they will see this relief? If not, why won't he commit to an audit?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we've reached out to retailers. We're confident that they will be dropping the prices by 13 cents a litre, and for any outliers that don't, they simply won't sell fuel. We have so many retailers across the province, and we will be monitoring it. But what's very evident is that the members opposite know that this is a real relief measure for Albertans. They're trying to create some criticism that simply won't stick. We're providing relief to Albertans today.

School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP has ignored the growing need for new schools in our province, especially in Calgary. Just one new public school over three years is not nearly enough when kids are being bused out of their communities to overcrowded classrooms. It's the same story for students choosing Catholic education: just one new school over three years. It's not nearly enough for young and growing families in Calgary. What does the minister have to say to parents in Nolan Hill, Walden, Redstone, who all need new schools? What about the kids in west Calgary, who are waiting for a brand new Calgary Catholic high school?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, we get approximately 400 requests every single year. They go through an auditor-approved process. It's a gated process, and all the requirements have to be met, and they rise to the list. We continue to build schools. We're spending over \$2 billion over three years to build schools right across the province.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the no-help budget failed Calgary families and given that students, teachers, and all staff deserve safe and welcoming schools to go to every day and given that more than half of Calgary public schools are over 50 years old – many have asbestos in them, are poorly insulated, and need to be overhauled or replaced – and given that research shows that kids have better student achievement when they're in clean, safe buildings, will the

minister tell Calgary public students, staff, and families why the UCP has failed to deliver for them?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our schools are safe. They are well maintained. We entrust that to school boards; 98 per cent of all the funding goes directly to school boards so that they can make sure that those spaces are great learning spaces. As I said earlier, the \$2 billion investment includes \$251 million over three years for 15 much-needed school projects right across this province. We're going to continue to build schools where they are needed, and we will continue to make sure that it's a priority.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Albertans can't trust this UCP government to put students first – the current government won't build the schools that families need, and they're keeping kids and teachers on the road instead of close to home in safe schools – and given that that's why our NDP government worked hard to catch up over the four years we had to address the neglect under Conservatives for many, many decades and given that the UCP government's no-help budget is funding less than a quarter of what we funded when we were in government, why does the UCP continue to destroy the trust of Calgary families?

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Member LaGrange: True. Mr. Speaker, fear and smear: that's all they do. They're so focused on the politics. They don't focus on the kids. We continue to focus on the kids, on school boards, making sure that we address the needs. We have an Auditor-approved process that they go through. We're spending over \$2 billion, 66 projects over three years where they only completed 60 over three years. You know, it's actually 60 over four years. Correction. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Member for Calgary-Klein has the call.

Pipeline Development and Energy Industry Advocacy

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago a poll in the United States showed that the majority of Americans, 71 per cent to be precise, would favour President Biden giving an executive order to restart construction on the Keystone XL pipeline. To the Minister of Energy: can you tell the House about the steps being taken by our government to try and convince the U.S. lawmakers to change their minds and reissue the border crossing for Keystone XL?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that in the United States as well as the rest of the world it's a growing acknowledgement that the world is going to continue to use oil and gas. In fact, demand for oil and gas is going up at the same time supply is going down with the need to weed out Russian barrels. The question is: where is it going to come from? Is it going to come from us, from North America, or is it going to come from regimes like Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Russia? We believe it should come from us. That's why we're engaging with the United States. That's why we've launched an advocacy campaign. That's why we've . . .

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that European countries also are

shying away from Russian corrupt oil, it also makes a case for an Energy East pipeline. To the same minister: can you update the House on any efforts to challenge federal Legislatures that land-lock our ethical oil here?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tragic thing is that the Energy East pipeline, if it had been built, would have been delivering 1 million barrels a day of Alberta oil to the east coast to serve markets in Europe and refineries in India, but it was killed by regulatory dysfunction in 2017. Alberta can be part of the solution to supply additional barrels across the world if we could get infrastructure built. That's why we are challenging bills C-69, C-48, and that's why we are going to continue to challenge the NDP-Liberal alliance's unconstitutional effort to . . .

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we want to see pipelines going east, west, north, and south and given that we know that when it comes to human rights and environmental standards for our energy, we are unmatched – federal government aside, our resources get attacked internationally. To the same minister: can you tell us about our government's recent efforts to remind the world why Alberta is a better source for our world's energy needs compared to, say, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, or Russia, just to name a few?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that the world needs more energy, and that energy should come from places like Alberta. That's why we've launched an advocacy campaign across North American and U.S. markets to say, "Look north; look north for energy security," and to emphasize that not all oil is equal, that ours is produced at the highest environmental standard. That's why the MLAs on this side of the Legislature will continue to point out the insanity of the NDP-Liberal coalition production cap, which is actually a production cap even though it's charading as an emission cap.

Site Rehabilitation Program

Ms Sweet: In the latest report from the Auditor General on the site rehabilitation program a number of concerns were highlighted about the government's performance. The federal funding was meant to save jobs during the challenging times of COVID. While B.C. had allocated 97 per cent of their available funding as of October 2021, Alberta has less than 60 per cent spent by the end of 2021. To the Minister of Energy: how many Albertans in the oil service sector were unemployed and how many companies went bankrupt during COVID because the government failed to spend their federal support?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're actually really pleased that the Auditor General reported that the government has successfully and is successfully implementing the SRP program and specifically highlighted that there was an effective process for awarding funding, accurate and timely reporting, monitoring to evaluate performance, and that it was meeting all responsibilities under the federal-provincial agreement, including creating jobs.

Ms Sweet: Given that the oil and gas industry is facing challenges with the labour force and given that many workers left the industry because they could not find work during the pandemic – jobs in this program could have been created – and given that the minister's delays have prevented well cleanups, job creation, and job security for the oil and gas industry, can the minister explain how many projects were delayed or are not going forward because of the government's failure to move forward on this program?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can actually report some really good statistics on the SRP program. In fact, over \$750 million has gone out the door to date, and in fact 3,500 jobs have been created. Over 9,000 reclamation sites have been under work, 18,340 abandonment sites. This program is putting Albertans back to work. It's providing much-needed jobs in the service sector during a downturn. It's very successful.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that the report also highlighted that Alberta is at risk of losing this federal money and given that the grant has been allocated to be used by the end of the month for Alberta to be guaranteed to leverage all of the money provided by the federal government and given that it'll be a huge disappointment for industry, for landowners, for Indigenous people, and for all Albertans if the government loses this federal money when it's supposed to be creating jobs in Alberta, can the minister guarantee that all the money that's been issued to the government through these grants will be spent by the end of the month and we won't lose it back to the federal government?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is now so concerned about creating jobs and so concerned about cleaning up inactive wells. Why didn't they do anything during the four years that they were in power? The inventory of inactive wells skyrocketed during those four years, and they did nothing. Zero. Nada. They did nothing. They didn't bring in a liability management regime. Instead, they saw the inventory of inactive wells growing. That's why we're putting that money to work to clean it up, and we're very proud of the work that's being done by our Indigenous advisory council and the industry advisory council to get people back to work.

Addiction, Mental Health, and Social Supports

Ms Sigurdson: A recent study by the Canadian Mental Health Association has shown that Albertans are feeling more stress and financial uncertainty than people in any other province. More than a third of Albertans have stated that they are feeling stressed, angry, lonely, isolated, and sad. This pandemic has shone a light on the major limitations and failures of the mental health system here in Alberta, and the UCP has made things worse by limiting access to services and supports. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: how will he correct this failure and improve Albertans' mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, Budget 2022 actually continues a commitment to invest over \$140 million over four years to enhance the recovery-oriented system of care that we are creating. I think it's important for everyone to understand that recovery can be substituted for "human," or it could be substituted for the words "wellness" or "holistic." This is a complicated

problem with no single solution, but we're committed to funding the system and ensuring that everyone has access to health care.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that root causes of these struggles can include a lack of access to affordable housing, addiction services, and community supports and given that Albertans were more likely to use substances as a way of coping with pandemic stresses, with 20 per cent saying that they increased substance use during the pandemic compared to 13 per cent nationally, and given that the UCP ignored medically proven best practices, made it harder to access addiction services, affordable housing, and community supports, will the minister accept responsibility for all of the additional hardships and pressures the UCP has imposed on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, what we will accept is being the first jurisdiction in North America to create a recovery-oriented system of care. This is taking actual action. If the members opposite had their way, they would be giving drugs to pretty much anybody who wants them, taxpayer-funded drugs. The policies that the NDP want have failed all throughout the west coast, and when that member had the opportunity, guess what she did?

Mr. Feehan: You are so antiscience it's embarrassing.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Ellis: She quit.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at both 2:26 and 2:27 or thereabouts.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the survey found that 42 per cent of Albertans have mental health struggles related to financial concerns and given that 54 per cent of survey respondents said that they could not afford to pay for mental health treatment and given that we have presented the government with a plan to provide every Albertan with access to five sessions with a mental health professional, to be covered under the provincial insurance plan, will the minister take this survey as a wake-up call and immediately implement the NDP's plan to ensure that every Albertan has access to a mental health professional when they need one?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to our recovery-oriented system of care, which is focused on people with mental health and addiction problems. We have made unprecedented investments over the last several years: \$53 million in the COVID response, \$20 million additionally in this most current budget. We've created accessibility through 211, amongst many other services. There are well over 200 not-for-profits within Alberta that we're supporting. We're continuing to help people.

Driving Back to Work Program

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, truckers play a critical role in keeping our economy rolling. In 2019 the government brought in mandatory entry-level training for all class 1 drivers. This has made the cost of truck-driving training increase substantially, causing shortages of class 1 truck drivers. Our government recently announced funding for the driving back to work program. Can the Minister of Transportation please advise this House how this new funding will address the need for class 1 truck drivers in Alberta?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, transportation is a critical sector, and there is an impending shortage of 4,000 drivers by 2023. That's why our Minister of Transportation is directing \$30 million over the next three years to get women and men affordable training required to allow them to earn a living while keeping our supply chains moving. This support will cover the cost of 90 per cent of the training under the driving back to work program.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that class 1 truck drivers provide an essential service, ensuring that goods are able to move from place to place, and given that a shortage of class 1 truck drivers can have a negative impact on product availability in stores and given that the recently announced driving back to work funding will assist eligible class 1 truck drivers with the cost of their training, can the Minister of Transportation advise this House on what the eligibility criteria are for this funding?

2:30

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are laser focused on economic recovery. We know that supporting truck driver training is critical, so to qualify for our driving back to work, Albertans must be at least 18 years old and underemployed or unemployed and ready, willing, and able to partake in training. We want Albertans employed in the commercial trucking industry, and already 8,000 Albertans have received funding to complete their training and testing to become class 1 drivers.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that many farmers either need to obtain a class 1 driver's licence themselves or need employees to get this licence to drive their products to market and given that some farmers have paid the exorbitant costs for their employees to get their class 1 only to see these employees leave shortly after as long-haul trucking companies offer them \$15,000 signing bonuses, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: how will the recently announced funding for a class 1 driver's licence help farmers?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is great news for farmers, for the agriculture sector. This is going to mean more drivers in Alberta broadly, which will help the sector, more young people getting qualified to be behind the wheel of trucks. It's an essential service in Alberta. It'll help, with less poaching from the commercial truck-driving sector taking these young people that we need to take grain to markets. This has been an extreme challenge for the agriculture sector and one we'll continue to work towards.

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

COVID-19 Testing

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the hardest on at-risk Albertans. While our pandemic response is shifting as Albertans adapt to a new reality, there are certain measures that should remain so we can fully understand the current context of COVID-19 and ensure that Albertans are protected. One of those measures is PCR testing. With the closure of the Edmonton Expo Centre and, I suspect, some other sites to come, we will have less understanding of the current context and transmission of COVID-19. Why is the Minister of Health moving to make PCR testing less accessible to Albertans?

Mr. Copping: I want to thank the hon. member for the important question in regard to PCR testing. Mr. Speaker, I was asked by the media last week on this exact issue. We closed the Expo Centre because, quite frankly, it wasn't needed, but we actually have additional sites here in Alberta to continue with PCR testing. We will continue PCR testing for high-risk individuals and people working in high-risk settings. It's important that we actually continue this to understand what potentially may happen with the next wave of COVID. As the hon. member knows, we haven't moved to stage 3 yet, and we're continuing measures for high-risk settings as well.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that omicron BA.2 is now spreading in Alberta – the chief medical officer of health has admitted that it's expected to trend upwards in coming weeks, so reliable PCR tests will be crucial to maintain accurate infection monitoring – and given that at-home tests are not as accurate as PCR tests, especially with new variants, it's important to have capacity to do reliable testing. Given that this UCP government has often acted too fast to declare victory over the pandemic, giving reason to question why some of these practical processes like reliable testing are being eliminated, especially with hospitals over capacity, can the minister clarify how many sites will remain open?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, we are not eliminating PCR testing. That will be maintained for high-risk settings and for high-risk individuals. When we moved our focus of PCR testing during the fifth wave with omicron BA.1, this was a move not only that was undertaken by Alberta but was taken by every single jurisdiction across the country, because that was necessary. What we know about BA.2 now is that it is potentially more virulent. It can be passed on easier than BA.1, but we understand that it may very well be less severe, and we are watching the numbers closely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that multiple jurisdictions offer more accessible testing, including walk-in and drive-through sites, and given that some are raising concerns about increasing levels of COVID in waste water in communities in Alberta and given that many Albertans are still looking for more support, reliable tests to ensure they're protecting their friends, their families, their communities from a disease that's still, tragically, infecting people and taking lives and given that many are worried that rapid tests don't necessarily provide the certainty and accuracy needed, will the Minister of Health guarantee that PCR testing will remain available for all Albertans that need it to protect themselves?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated to the hon. member, we will retain PCR testing for high-risk settings and for high-risk individuals. I'm very pleased that, you know, rapid tests remain available to all Albertans to be able to pick them up. I urge Albertans to continue to pick up the rapid tests and use them because they are very effective for those with symptoms in terms of determining whether or not they have COVID. We are using the same approach that we used successfully through the omicron wave 5, and we'll continue to monitor things closely.

Provincial Campground Cancellation Fees

Mr. Schmidt: Tomorrow this government will double the reservation fees for Alberta campsites. It's part of this government's on-

going mission to make it more expensive for Albertans to access natural places, with their tax on access in Kananaskis, their failed plan to sell Alberta parks, and their plan to tear down the Rocky Mountains and strip-mine them for coal. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks explain his objection to Albertans camping or enjoying the beautiful areas of this province? Will he use this opportunity today to pause his doubling of campsite fees?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP sure do love to make things up, but in regard to the doubling of the reservation fee, that is correct. That has been done at the request of campers who utilize the system. We were seeing campgrounds being reserved and then people not using them and, unfortunately, families going into our campgrounds and seeing the best spots stay empty all weekend. Then we had lots of campgrounds being scalped on Kijiji. We heard loud and clear from people that use our parks system that they wanted to see the reservation fee modestly increased to make sure we could stop that behaviour.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this government has already created an affordability crisis in this province and refused any real relief for Albertans and given that just as Albertans are looking to plan their summer vacations, this minister is stepping in with a hike to fees that means that families who are struggling to make ends meet might not be able to afford to access the natural spaces that belong to them, how can this minister justify this latest cost hike to families already struggling under the weight of this government's out-of-touch decisions? Is he trying to make this the worst summer ever for Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I should provide some clarification. The hon. member is confused. I did say that it was the reservation fee, but it's actually the cancellation fee. What the parks system has done, at the request of the people that use the parks system, is increase the cancellation fee to make sure, again, that families who come and enjoy our beautiful parks all across this province don't end up spending the weekend watching the sites that they wanted to reserve stay empty the entire weekend because people never followed through on their commitments to reserve those campsites.

We continue to invest heavily inside our provincial parks system, Mr. Speaker; in fact, increased provincial park funding by 15 per cent this year.

Mr. Schmidt: The minister better check those numbers because he's not anywhere close to a 15 per cent increase to park funding.

Given that the UCP is deeply focused on ensuring that natural spaces remain inaccessible to the Albertans who own them and given that the Minister of Environment and Parks is deeply untrusted by Albertans following the debacle of the UCP's plan to sell Alberta's parks, mine our mountains, and tax the great outdoors, will the minister pause his fee hike, or will he just admit that Albertans simply can't trust him?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had bothered to stick around estimates instead of leaving only 45 minutes into it, he would have been able to find out that, in fact, we have increased park investments by 15 per cent.

No, I'm not going to reverse the cancellation fee because, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of users of the system have asked us to do this simple measure to make sure that Albertans can enjoy their campgrounds each and every weekend and throughout the summer and the important, busy times of the year. They can rest assured that, no, we won't listen to the confused NDP; instead, we'll listen to user groups inside our provincial parks.

Education Concerns

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, education is the number one thing we can do as a government to help future generations be successful. To accomplish this, we need to invest significant capital on upgrades for schools that need renovations. One of the projects that needs attention is the Spruce Grove composite high school. It's the largest school in Parkland region, and in order to support the demand in my riding, it needs significant upgrades, which are long overdue. To the Minister of Education: where does this project fall on the government's priority list?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the member for the question. Each year school divisions submit their three-year capital plans, and each year we receive approximately 400 capital requests. As was done under Budget 2022, school capital submissions will be carefully reviewed through the Auditor General approved gated process, and priority projects will be selected based on health and safety concerns, enrolment pressures, building conditions, functionality in programming, and legal requirements. I look forward to seeing the school's capital plan being submitted in the near future.

2:40

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that many families in Alberta have children with special needs who require support and given that this government announced more than \$700 million for children over the next three years and given that special-needs programs like PUF require school authorities to step in on families' behalf to assist with special needs in schools, to the same minister: what supports are currently available for families with special-needs children, and what new supports are coming in as a part of this budget? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government believes that all children in our province deserve an education that prepares them for success. That's why Budget 2022 includes \$1.4 billion for learning support funding to support our most vulnerable students and includes grants like the specialized learning support grant. This funding will allow school authorities to provide a range of supports and services for students in an inclusive learning environment. I was a rehab practitioner, and it's very important for me that our most vulnerable are our most looked after.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that teachers play a critical role in developing and growing our children and given that many have felt the burden and challenges of teaching both in person and online during the last two years and given some reports stating that there are fewer teachers today than before the pandemic began and given that school boards feel like they need more help to be able to teach our kids to the best of their ability, can the Minister of Education please share with Albertans what this government is doing to increase the number of teachers to support the need expressed by schools and parents?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are providing \$342 million over the next three years to help school authorities address cost pressures such as staffing, inflation, increasing insurance, and enrolment growth. Additionally, school board reserves are continuing to increase to \$464 million in operating reserves as of last August. We are providing a 1 per cent increase to base and operations and 1 per cent to maintenance as well, and we are also providing a 4.6 per cent increase to transportation, these increasing costs to retain teachers and support staff and for maintaining clean, healthy schools. We're making sure they are well supported.

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

Prior to rising, if I could beg the indulgence of the Assembly just for one brief moment.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: I mentioned earlier, during introductions, that the school from the community of Worsley would be joining us. They now have. I hope that you'll join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. the Minister of Education.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

This bill creates a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies. If passed, the measures enabled in Bill 13 will ensure that Alberta remains a growing destination of choice for financial services and financial technology companies and that Albertans benefit from innovative products and services for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

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

Bill 14 Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

It's so important that we provide a safe environment for victims and their families within our courtrooms. Bill 14 will require the Provincial Court judge applicants to complete sexual assault law and social contact issues education before they are eligible to be appointed. It aims to reduce the risk of victims of sexual violence from being revictimized during a trial and helps ensure that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. I look forward to discussing the proposed amendment to the Provincial Court Act. With that, I move first reading of Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Highwood, do you have a bill introduction, or are we moving it to tomorrow?

Mr. Sigurdson: No.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the requisite number of copies of a piece that was highlighted today in the *Calgary Herald* around: Limited Funds for New Schools Force CBE to Refocus on Modernizations. That's an interesting characterization. Nonetheless, the story goes on to highlight the desperate need for schools in Calgary.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2021; pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report 2019-20.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

The Speaker: Hon. members, at approximately 2:26 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order, and that was followed by the Opposition House Leader.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today on this point of order. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time that the point of order was called, the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was speaking and answering a question, and while he was answering that question, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford very clearly said, "You are so antiscience it's embarrassing." Now, this is language certain to cause disorder in this Chamber, and referring specifically to an individual member in this Chamber is unparliamentary given the context. What I also find ironic about this is that it is coming from a member of a caucus that, when asked to provide evidence on such a matter to support their policy decisions, just quit committee. I would say that this is, in fact, a point of order, and I ask the member to apologize.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this would be a matter of debate if the member had said that the UCP are antiscience and that it's embarrassing given that we've seen a rejection of harm reduction and safe consumption sites that goes against current science, expert advice, and medically proven best practices. That being said, the difference between "you" and the "UCP" is a very small one, and I did not hear the comment myself, so I could not say for sure what the member said. It may be a matter of debate, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I am often reluctant to rule on comments made off the record as sometimes it is difficult to hear those. However, I do believe that I heard the hon. member say, "You are so antiscience it's embarrassing," and that is also what the Blues did pick up. I would find this a point of order and not a matter of debate. As such, the hon. member can apologize and withdraw.

2:50

Ms Gray: On behalf of that member I'm happy to apologize and withdraw.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:27 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the same interchange between the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the minister, on the record I do believe – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues – the minister said, "If the members opposite had their way, they would be giving drugs to pretty much anybody who wants them, taxpayer-funded drugs." Under 23(h), (i), and (j) and specifically *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623, I rise on a point of order not because the minister specified a specific member but because I believe that that comment crossed the boundary of what is parliamentary, particularly because he was accusing the Official Opposition of wanting to traffic in controlled substances, accusing us of wanting to commit a criminal offence. While it was not directed at a specific member, I believe that that was an unparliamentary thing to hurl at the Official Opposition while we are talking about such serious matters as the mental health supports for Albertans during a pandemic.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I do not find that this would be a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate, primarily because that is a general policy of the members opposite, to give drugs. This has been a subject of conversation many times in this Chamber, specifically about safe supply. I don't believe it is a point of order, and in fact when the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was making this comment, there were some head nods that appeared to be coming from members opposite. I don't know necessarily where individual members stand on this issue, but as a caucus I do believe that there is a case to be made that they would support legalizing and giving government-funded narcotics to members of the public.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I think that this point of order is proof positive that this is an ongoing matter of debate that has a wide variety of opinions at this time. I would suggest that the hon. associate minister's comments were a point of order and not a matter of debate although many people may adamantly disagree with the position that he holds.

If I could offer a small tip to my good friend, colleague, and hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika: when arguing points of order, very regularly you will find more success if you throw less heat during that, in the extension of that debate. But in this case you are correct. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 5 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: I see the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled today to rise on behalf of Alberta's amazing Minister of Transportation to move third reading of Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

This bill will allow the government to improve safety on our roads for roadside workers. I'm very pleased and reassured to hear many members in here express strong support for this very important legislation. This bill is intended to provide improved safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for our valuable first responders. We live in a province that can see extremes in weather and highway conditions at any time throughout the year. Everyone has stories about driving through storms and blizzards and the dangerous situations that can arise.

Just think about how hazardous it is to work in these conditions as a snowplow operator or a highway maintenance worker keeping our roads safe and clear. Every year there are dozens of collisions and near misses with snowplows on our roads and highways. Between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows contracted by just Alberta Transportation. The Alberta Motor Association reported that since December 2019 there have been 36 near misses and at least 13 serious roadside incidents involving Alberta tow trucks and passing vehicles, collisions resulting in injury, hospitalization, and, yes, death.

Bill 5 seeks to reduce the collisions and risk of injury and death these workers are up against each day on the job. Last year we consulted with Albertans and our stakeholders on safety for roadside workers. Alberta's traffic safety advocacy organizations and those who work in highway maintenance wholeheartedly agree that more needs to be done to protect roadside workers and make our highways safer. About 15,000 Albertans responded to an online survey from March 16 to April 6, 2021. Respondents were very supportive of extending existing protections to snowplow operators and other roadside workers.

Michelle Chimko, president and CEO of the Alberta Motor Association, strongly endorses the changes Bill 5 will provide. A quote from Michelle:

We applaud these changes as an important first step in improving the safety of these essential workers and look forward to our continued work in further improving their visibility and safety.

Ron Glen from the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association also advocates for stronger safety measures in Bill 5. He says:

Alberta's road construction and maintenance industry puts worker safety first. This legislation is greatly appreciated because we need drivers to slow down and do their part to make their highways – our worksites – safe and efficient for all.

I've also heard consistent support from municipalities for this bill, Mr. Speaker. The highway maintenance industry also stands behind this bill because it will protect their workers and it aligns with their corporate commitment to safety and excellent client service.

From Ledcor Group, one of Alberta Transportation's seven highway maintenance contractors, they are happy about the changes in Bill 5. Ledcor employees are working on our highways and roads every day, and they need the protection that Bill 5 will provide to do their jobs safely and effectively and, of course, get home to their families safely every single day.

Albertans will learn more about the speed limit requirements in the months ahead if Bill 5 passes. We are planning an extensive education campaign that will run during the summer, fall, and winter months until the proposed changes come into force next year. We'll take the time that's required to educate and prepare the public for changes under Bill 5 and help them to adapt their driving habits.

We will work closely with industry partners like Ledcor as well as safety advocacy organizations and law enforcement agencies to inform Albertans about Bill 5 changes. Albertans will also see highway signs throughout the province that reflect the speed limit changes under Bill 5. These new signs will clearly communicate what the changes are so that drivers can obey the new rules.

Bill 5 will improve safety for first responders and many other roadside workers who currently have no legislated protection. I thank all colleagues in this House for engaging in debate on this bill, and I ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this important piece of legislation, which will keep Alberta workers safe when they are on the side of our roads and highways.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see no reason to engage in any opposition to this piece of legislation because, of course, it's something that is a very common-sense addition to the Traffic Safety Act, to give protection to roadside workers, snowplow operators, who know because of the near misses that have occurred over the past number of years how dangerous it can be to be parked along the roadway in your vehicle or perhaps even outside of your vehicle while performing work on the roadway. So I certainly welcome this piece of legislation. We support keeping workers safe.

There are an ongoing number of reforms that could have been done on top of what this Bill 5 actually does that we wonder about, Mr. Speaker. For a number of reasons unknown to me, the minister has kind of stopped short and made this amendment a very singular one, perhaps in reaction to lobbying and certainly forthright and worthwhile efforts at lobbying from members of the public who are involved in keeping our roadways maintained. But there was an opportunity when opening up the act, Mr. Speaker, that I think was forgone, to take a wider view and to bring in some other measures that perhaps are equally as pressing as the matter of keeping our roadside workers safe during their work on the highways.

3:00

I think we know, Mr. Speaker, that there were a number of concerns raised during the Coutts blockade. The minister was called upon by myself to exercise authority under the act to revoke the operating licences of people engaged in that illegal activity. It was a good idea and one that we believed was feasible. However, at estimates the minister said that they did a legal analysis, and she believed she needed more authority under the act to actually be able to revoke the operating licences of illegally parked vehicles on the roadway involved in a blockade such as the one we experienced at Coutts and that the act needed to be amended in order to grant such powers to her.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the act is open, and no changes were made in this regard. We're wondering about that. It was a perfect opportunity, given recent circumstances, to allow the minister to in fact do something that the public wondered why she didn't do during the Coutts blockade, and that was to create some difficulty for those involved in the blockade to actually continue to operate a commercial motor vehicle as a result of their actions in blocking the roadway. While I think members of the public think this is a pretty good idea and thought that the minister was acting in a rather toothless fashion, if indeed the minister felt it was necessary to bring forward legislative change to empower the minister to actually revoke the operating licences of folks engaged in the illegal Coutts blockade and similar blockades that might occur in the future, then the perfect opportunity was now for the amendments to be made to the act to give the minister those powers, but nothing like that is happening.

It appears that the government is more worried about alienating members of their caucus that supported the illegal blockaders than actually ensuring the safety of the roadways and keeping the borders and supply chains open. It was a missed opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and we do encourage the minister to consider bringing forward additional amendments to this act to address the situation the minister herself thought needed legislative amendments.

There are also other elements to this act that could have been expanded to involve more than it actually does. It involves, of course, vehicles parked on a roadway: highway maintenance vehicles, snowplows. Certainly, there have been an abominable number of crashes into snowplows and highway maintenance vehicles. Anybody that has had to stop on the side of the highway to repair their own tire if they've had a flat tire realizes just how dangerous it is to be on the highway. Mr. Speaker, I've certainly been involved on the side of the highway for thousands of miles, hitchhiking across this country. I've ridden a bicycle on highways, and I know that it's a dangerous place to be.

I certainly welcome the elements of this legislation that will make it safer on roadways for our public roadway workers. But while the act was open, I thought – and I mentioned this to the minister also in estimates – why indeed we couldn't see some changes to the legislation that would involve other facets of situations where traffic is being impeded or there's a slow-moving or stopped vehicle on the side of the road or on the shoulder.

I speak right now, Mr. Speaker, of vehicles which are required by law in Alberta to display a slow-moving vehicle decal, a triangle, that we see on the backs of many vehicles, whether they be commercial or farm vehicles, and I'm wondering if indeed, while the act was open, we could not have addressed that situation, to keep those farmworkers safe, those commercial vehicle drivers safe, who are driving either roadway construction equipment or farm vehicles or other vehicles that are required to display the triangular slow-moving vehicle placard in Alberta, if indeed similar types of slow-down-and-move-over requirements could have been imposed upon drivers who were passing such slow-moving vehicles.

On top of that, I think another measure that might have been wise to bring forward in this legislation, that perhaps the minister might consider doing as an amendment, would be to take a look at the oversized vehicles that are on our roadways. Numerous corridors exist, Mr. Speaker, for the safe movement of large, slow-moving, oversized vehicles, sometimes with pilot vehicles, certainly, to increase the safety of those movements, but not always. You can have a large, slow-moving vehicle that may not be piloted. But even if it is, I think there should be very clear rules that should be enshrined in the legislation in the same way that the slow-down-and-move-over legislation is enshrining that drivers must slow down and move over to pass stopped roadway maintenance vehicles on the shoulder.

If you're passing a large vessel that's being pulled by semitrailers on a roadway, as you quite often will when you're travelling up to some places in the oil patch or up to Fort McMurray, it's a dangerous situation. It's, I think, incumbent upon drivers to slow down and move over, but the law doesn't prescribe that. There are no prescribed penalties when passing the slow-moving vehicles or the large vessels, oversized vehicles on Alberta's highways or the slow-moving vehicles that display the placard.

There are a number of instances, Mr. Speaker, where I believe the act, now that it is open, could have had its scope widened. There were a number of other situations where indeed highways are impeded by either slow-moving or stopped vehicles. This act could have described further situations that mandated drivers to slow down and move over and also included penalty provisions for those that failed to do so.

The substance of the act, of course, we don't have any difficulties with. I think it's pretty clear to Albertans who have loved ones who are employed on roadside maintenance crews or who themselves have actually had to fix their own vehicle while on the side of the highway – it's very noticeable how dangerous it really is. I know for certain. A friend of mine, that I worked with, had to pull over on highway 2 to the shoulder because of car failure, and the car was rear-ended by another vehicle that came forward from behind. It was written off. They, luckily, weren't killed. It's a dangerous place to be, the side of our roadways.

The Alberta Motor Association, of course, notes that there have been 36 near misses and 13 serious accidents involving tow trucks in Alberta. I'm just wondering if indeed the government has any analysis or assessment on how many serious accidents are likely to be prevented by the implementation of the changes that are contemplated by Bill 5.

I know that it may seem like it's common sense, Mr. Speaker, to slow down and move over if there's a vehicle parked on the side of the road. I know also that before indeed legislation was changed, it was a common sight to see people not doing so and putting at risk the lives of first responders, who were first covered under a former change to the act. Now roadside maintenance workers are also being given the protection of this legislation.

I think there should have been a wider scope and more thought given to who could have been included, what range of vehicles or slow-moving vehicles could have been included in this act. There's still time potentially to do so, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is willing to consider amendments that might be undertaken while the act is open right now and give further protection and perhaps save even further lives of Albertans who are using our roadways who must find it necessary to either stop along the roadway or to move slowly along the roadway and not necessarily a major highway.

3:10

We know that a fairly significant amount of agricultural equipment is moved on our secondary and even our gravel roads or

county roadways. There are some pretty dangerous manoeuvres taken to pass tractors pulling pieces of equipment on smaller roadways as well, which, I think, bears some scrutiny and perhaps even legislation. For example, Mr. Speaker, it may be wise to make it incumbent upon those who are moving a load that is three-quarters blocking the roadway that they must actually stop and pull over themselves to allow traffic to move around them. There are elements that this legislation could've focused attention on to this slow-down-and-move-over concept that weren't added into the legislation, and I think that they should have been. I say that it's a missed opportunity if indeed the minister doesn't consider adding some amendments. Perhaps it's something that she'll see as an opportunity before the bill actually reaches the final reading in the House.

Other jurisdictions have all passed legislation requiring drivers to slow down and move over for emergency vehicles. Now, maintenance vehicles, of course, are not emergency vehicles – they're more the amber-light-displaying vehicles – but equally they are required to be on the side of the road for their working purposes, and they are significantly at risk because of the location next to high-speed traffic. It will be noted, of course, that the snowplows – they're, obviously, in motion for a lot of their time frame, and the slow-down-and-move-over requirement means that they have to slow down and move over while the snowplow is moving and performing its operations. That's why I thought it might even be wise, given that it already applies to moving snowplows, to include other slow-moving vehicles such as those that are required to display the triangular orange and red slow-moving vehicle placard that we see on vehicles in Alberta. It's something that construction vehicles and farm vehicles and commercial vehicles of various types are required to display.

It's not seen as a necessity, let's say, by many drivers to actually slow down and then pull over when they see a vehicle that is slow moving. We've all witnessed, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that many drivers will see it as an opportunity to gauge the distance of oncoming traffic and perhaps to speed up and pull over and pass the slow-moving vehicle unsafely in that manner rather than to slow down and move over. It should be something that is mandated in the same way that the Bill 5 before us mandates drivers to slow down and move over for highway maintenance vehicles, including snowplows and dump trucks or what have you, that might be on the roadway.

Now, I'm sure this legislation will benefit the operators of snowplows and construction equipment or maintenance equipment, and it's something that family members will welcome as well. The fines are significant, and they should be significant, Mr. Speaker, because it's an irresponsible act to go blasting by a snowplow or a piece of roadway maintenance equipment or a first responder, for that matter, who is doing their job at the side of the road. Of course, the rate of speed – the faster you go, the more that your ticket is going to be, and that's as it should be.

I hope the public education campaign that the government puts together does include multimedia platforms as well as, of course, radio and television spots, radio being one that sometimes is forgotten. Some of our rural media as well is sometimes forgotten when the government is trying to advertise new changes. But I think in this case, given that one of the places that we listen to radio most often nowadays is in our vehicles, if indeed the rollout of the public education advertising on the matter before us in Bill 5 doesn't include radio advertising, it would be a missed opportunity.

Now, I don't think we need to be reminded, but it is a sad fact that between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows. Now, that's a three-year period – that's only 36 months – and we had 128 collisions involving snowplows.

That's a horrendous statistic. Many Albertans will be surprised to learn how frequently snowplows are hit by vehicles on our roadways, and that's a high degree of irresponsibility. Even in the worst of conditions, if you're moving slowly enough, snowplows are visible to drivers who are going slowly enough to move around and avoid colliding with them. It speaks to the wisdom of bringing forward this legislation to protect those operators and to raise awareness in the community amongst drivers that it is totally irresponsible and totally unacceptable to be rolling by at full highway speed when you're passing a roadway maintenance vehicle or you're passing a snowplow.

I think there are other classes of vehicle operators that deserve the same respect and should have had it accorded through their inclusion in this piece of legislation. Unfortunately, they haven't been. I know that for each element that you want to include in a piece of legislation, if you want to include another class of vehicles, it certainly takes a whole lot more investigation and work and deliberation. I understand the minister may have been responding to advocacy from those who were working on the side of the roads, operating snowplows and highway maintenance vehicles. Be that as it may, it might have been appropriate, I think, to try to expedite consultation with other classes of vehicle operators to see if indeed, at the same time, this legislation could have included them as well. I think it would have been a good use of time and probably would have been able to be done within the same opening of the act as right now.

With respect to the revoking of commercial licences of those who would use a commercial vehicle or a farm vehicle to block a roadway with the intent of getting greater awareness for their protest, this is something that I think the minister clearly should have done. We've got a huge, glaring example of the necessity for that type of a tool in the hands of our Transportation minister, and it could have solved what might have ended up in a violent confrontation using weapons by people involved in that blockade who were intent on using them to kill RCMP officers. Indeed, many Albertans were screaming, like, "Do something, for crying out loud, to get the vehicles off the roadway; stop this blockade," yet the minister was claiming: "No. I can't do that. The legislation doesn't allow it." Well, let's make it allow it. Let's amend it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to join debate.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to follow my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, who I think raised many good questions with regard to: while Bill 5 is before us, why are we just dealing with one aspect, an important aspect but just one aspect, when there are other issues that have come to the fore of late, notably commercial and farm vehicles being used to blockade; for instance, at the Coutts border crossing, which had a significant effect on the movement of goods down into the United States and the disruption of supply lines?

The opportunity, obviously, is here to consider that and to put some teeth in the Traffic Safety Act that would dissuade people from using their vehicles in that fashion, which was problematic for Albertans and also, obviously, people in other parts of the country. The Windsor bridge – I can't remember the name of that bridge, the bridge going between Windsor and Detroit.

3:20

Mr. McIver: The Ambassador Bridge.

Member Ceci: Ambassador Bridge. Thank you for the generous offering of help from a former city councillor, who didn't offer that

much when we were city councillors together. But he may have a change of views, Mr. Speaker. He may have a change of heart with regard to my presentation here today.

Anyway, I want to recognize, of course, that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was correct in pointing out that many see the opportunity of an open bill as a way to improve the situation for Albertans, and I would just underline that it's unfortunate that the minister hasn't considered this as a necessary action. In my estimation – I certainly hope I'm wrong – we may see more instances, going forward into the future, of people using critical infrastructure in that fashion and trying to make a point of protest. Certainly, they have the right to protest but not in a way that negatively impacts the lives and livelihoods of Albertans and addresses critical infrastructure in that way.

We do have a bill, I just want to point out – I believe it's called the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, something like that – that was just passed here maybe last spring, Mr. Speaker, and which could have been used in this regard in Coutts, in Alberta's case. Perhaps other provinces, like Ontario, have similar things, and the Ambassador Bridge could have been opened sooner than it was. But subsequent to the federal government, as we all know, passing the Emergencies Act, I think it was called, that bridge was opened up expeditiously, quickly, because of the federal government stepping in.

Not so here in Coutts. That was delayed, in terms of any action, more than 18 days. A Traffic Safety Act that had protections in it, as we're suggesting, for Albertans and for trade could have dealt with that though we did have an act called the emergencies act, and the government failed to use that act – for whatever reason I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but they did – and it was problematic for all Albertans.

What we see before us is an amendment to the Traffic Safety Act which would require, obviously, drivers to slow down, where possible, when passing roadside workers, including snowplows and maintenance workers, when a vehicle is passing on the same side of the highway. If there is a two-lane highway and those vehicles are in the other lane and you're passing them, you have to slow down and move over when their lights are flashing and they are stopped on the highway. You know, it's a small thing for the driving public to do. I don't consider it onerous at all. We are seeing it happen with regard to emergency vehicles at this point in time, and this act would spread that out, so we're talking about snowplows and roadside workers as well.

Mr. Speaker, we've all seen those signs on the sides of highways, particularly around areas where the roads are under construction or being worked on. I think the contractors put them up. They say things like, you know: slow down because we want these workers to get back to their families at the end of their workday. No one can disagree with the importance of that happening. That's a form of education, obviously. Now, this amendment will put some greater teeth into the request of that sign because it'll be against the law, and fines can be levied against people who dangerously – I don't know if that would be the word – pass people working on the roadside or, in fact, cleaning snowplows and other kinds of things.

You know, when I was reading the bill – it's not very long – and thinking about it, I was thinking about other kinds of municipal and county workers that are out there who are just wanting to get home at the end of their shift. While I was a city councillor, there was yearly a memorial that would take place to memorialize workers who had died at the city of Calgary during that year. There are similar kinds of memorial events across this province, Mr. Speaker – I know that it's in the hundreds each year, not a couple of hundred but between 100 and 200 – for workers who, unfortunately, in this

province die in their workplace as the result of an injury or an accident.

That's the kind of tragedy that can be ameliorated by doing more. It's not a lot to expect the travelling public to pass safely. If they can't pass safely, then they should learn through a stiff fine. That's obviously something, I think, that's built into this as well. I see that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung talked about that those fines for failing to slow down when passing snowplows or maintenance workers will now apply. That fine would be in a range from \$136 to \$826, and that variance is based on the speed of the offending vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the municipal workers that, certainly, I'm aware of, they see many things on the roadways. It's not just plows, and it's not just tow truck operators or emergency vehicles on the sides of roads. It also includes, like, people who are maintaining roads, people who are painting lines, line crews on roads, crack-sealing crews. But in those cases, you know, there's a greater attention to slowing traffic down. There are often sign and signal people. There are often moving-over kinds of things so that they'll make only one lane available.

You can't pass those kinds of workers on roadways and not take a look at the equipment that they're using. Sometimes there are these huge vehicles that are set up to absorb crashes. You kind of wonder how often they're pressed into service as a result of people, in a distracted way, not knowing, you know, that there's a lot of danger with a pickup or a vehicle hurtling down the roadway at potentially 120 kilometres an hour and the impact. You get a sense of how they're trying to protect their lives by these crash-absorber kinds of vehicles they tow behind their other vehicles to kind of keep everybody safe.

3:30

While I have no concerns with this legislation – I think everybody here wants to keep workers as safe as possible wherever they are, whether they're working on the roadside or they're working anywhere – and I see no issues with the substance and the write-up of the aspects that are amending the existing Traffic Safety Act, I do think there was an opportunity to include other initiatives in this bill, and we've made that clear. I do think there is a great deal of support for what's in this bill. The Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about the survey and the consultation that was done and the agreement that Albertans had with that.

I do think that a public education campaign is a good way to start Albertans to recognize that there needs to be a change in their behaviour. The behaviour that they have towards tow trucks and emergency vehicles needs now to be extended when they see flashing lights, whether they're amber or blue or blue and red. That public education campaign will ultimately lead to a safer roadway for Albertans.

That's really how municipalities change things anyway. If they have a new bylaw that they want to bring in – we used to have our Mr. Bruce. We used to call him Bylaw Bill. He would urge us to ensure that we had a good lead of education. He would sit down and explain that to council. He would explain to the public, through any opportunity he had to be in the media: things are going to be different in the future; we're not going to change it right away, but please recognize that there will be a difference in the future. We always did things to improve the safety, protect the public.

That's what this is all about, you know, that families can know that their loved one will be home at the end of their shift instead of potentially injured or worse. I, too, was really astounded that so many snowplows have been hit – it must be quite a shock for the operators in those situations to be involved in collisions, and 128 of those collisions occurred – through Alberta Transportation advising

the government and us being aware of that through the information that was published or made available in support of this amendment act.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance this afternoon to provide some comments for the first time, of course, around Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. You know, as somebody who spent a considerable amount of time before being able to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Decore in this House – safety was certainly one of the topics top of mind for me, spending much of 20 years co-chairing my workplace health and safety committee, spending several years on my union's provincial health and safety committee, trying to find ways to help workers work safely, improve those conditions for members, not only in my own work site but across others that belong to UFCW 401 members. Certainly, when I see legislation that comes forward that increases safety for Albertans, Alberta workers, I'm always absolutely in favour of that.

I'm certainly not in favour when we start to reduce those things, like, of course, we saw earlier in this Legislature around, I think, reducing the effectiveness of workplace health and safety committees. You know, those kinds of things I'm not very excited about. I don't have any issues with promoting and voting in favour of Bill 5, but I think there were certainly some opportunities that we could have taken to, I guess, make things better.

Certainly, some of the members in this House: I have not spent probably as much time as they spend on the highways, you know, getting back to their constituencies. But I've certainly spent my share of time either travelling on the highways, pulling a 24-foot travel trailer behind my truck, and, shall we say, with some of the interesting situations that have cropped up on the highways, either observing or even being a part of those situations.

I guess maybe we could have taken the opportunity with this act being opened to address things. You know, I'll bring this up because it literally happened yesterday coming back from Calgary. On kind of a dark part of the road right around Bowden, what looked like a garbage bin or container of some kind off to the side of the road right near a small bridge and kind of really close to that – and, yes, there were some safety cones out there, but those cones were very dirty. They didn't have the reflective tapes around them, so until you're almost on top of it, you can't really see this sort of thing. Perhaps we could have looked at ways to promote a better, safe situation for drivers around that sort of thing. That's something that just occurred yesterday, so it's top of mind, obviously, for me.

I know one of the things that I heard quite a bit – and this, of course, goes all the way back to the 29th Legislature, when I served in there with a lot of folks – was the concerns from tow truck drivers and the challenges, very unsafe challenges, that they face when they're on the roads. You know, again, as early as yesterday seeing a situation on the road, not only do you have somebody trying to help a stranded driver with their vehicle, but it also requires another vehicle further down from that just to, I guess, try to provide some kind of visibility in terms of either slowing down, moving over. The funny thing, Mr. Speaker, is that even despite that, individuals who were in the lane right beside that still didn't move over, which kind of leads me into this point where they're going to commit to an educational program.

When I started my remarks here on some of the situations that I've come across on the roads, observed, been a part of – I think we're really going to have to take a very hard look at how we're

educating because the reality is that we're still seeing situations where drivers are either not paying attention or they're just careless or whatnot. I mean, a simple act of a stalled vehicle on the side of the road stopped, whatever the reason is: if you're on the highway, it's really not a big deal to move over to the passing lane, giving that person a lot of space. We just don't know if they're going to open up their door and walk out. You know, some of our shoulders are not that large, and it doesn't accommodate for the entire vehicle to get as far away from the roadway as possible.

The education for these changes: I really think we need to up the game on that, especially with new drivers, you know, so that they understand the risks on the road. Is it something that we need to, for instance, start applying at the high school level, in grades 11 and 12, where we have new drivers that are going to be coming onto the road, to get them young and open-minded so that they learn these types of habits when they do get on the roads and they do get onto the highways?

3:40

It's unfortunate to say that I've been witness to and, you know, stopped for accidents involving new drivers, and unfortunately a lot of times it was due to carelessness. I think we could have had an opportunity with which to look at those things, address those types of training aspects for drivers just so that we can make our roads safer.

That kind of leads me to sort of the safety that some of my colleagues were talking about earlier around our unfortunate recent experience at the border crossing at Coutts. You know, I've seen a bit of an inconsistent approach to these sorts of things. I mean, I've seen responses to individuals who happen to block a roadway – they didn't even have vehicles; they had a couple of bicycles, and there was a very, very stern reaction to that – yet it was a little bit of a lackadaisical response with what, unfortunately, took place down in Coutts. With such a fresh experience in all of our minds, have we not lost an opportunity to learn and make something better for that? My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had kind of started to touch on this.

I think back, again, on my days in the labour movement, and I've certainly visited, you know, many strike lines. I've been a part of strike lines with my duties through UFCW and even been on my own strike line for a week. The reality is that there is blocking of traffic that happens, whether it be into a business or possibly even a roadway. When I think about that, usually the result is – it's either through a labour board decision and/or even the courts, but it usually happens within about 24 hours. Thinking about my experience on my very own, of course, obviously, we're blocking traffic from getting into the Macdonalds Consolidated, Lucerne ice cream parking area and whatnot. The labour board quickly issued, saying that we could only hold up traffic for five minutes at a time, so for each successive car or truck we could only hold them for five minutes.

When I look at those situations, I can't help but wonder: did Alberta not have the ability to duplicate that kind of a process where they could have gone to the court system, simply got a decision saying that you can't shut down the entire border, that you can only slow things down? I'm speculating here at this point, you know, Mr. Speaker, but clearly the response that we had here was completely ineffective. Is there an opportunity through Bill 5 to be able to look at a situation like that and to be able to handle it differently going forward from here? Just a thought around that and how maybe we could have done something a little bit different.

I guess, as some of my colleagues had mentioned some shocking numbers that we've seen come out around incidents and near misses that have happened, I'd like to be able to maybe say that I was

shocked, too, but frankly, actually, I'm not. Again, just my work in promoting health and safety and safe workplaces – these kinds of things are preventable. You know, going back to some of my earlier comments around tow truck drivers, did we have an opportunity? I know the industry has lobbied very significantly over the years about changing from the amber warning light to blue. We have seen some of these changes in other jurisdictions. Was that not, again, an opportunity that we could have taken advantage of to try to protect our tow truck operators along with the education piece about moving over, things like that, slowing down? Perhaps, even though we're in third, we might get an opportunity to hear from the minister around why some of those things maybe weren't addressed in this bill.

Perhaps maybe there are plans for another bill coming up that could address those types of things, which kind of led me a little bit to – I guess I don't really want to call it a concern – a question, maybe. Again, just diving into some of the language of Bill 5 on page 2, subsection (ii), “in subclause (v) by striking out ‘emergency vehicle or tow truck’ and substituting ‘vehicle,’” I guess I'm wondering: did that maybe get a little bit too broad? I know we're trying to encompass things like snowplows and whatnot, but do we now start to cloud – you know, are people going to say, “Well, what's a vehicle?” and things like that. I guess that was more just a thought that I had when I was looking at the legislation and wondering why we didn't choose instead maybe to be a little bit more prescriptive in terms of what we want to refer to or if by doing that, it kind of boxed us in a little bit in terms of trying to increase that safety level, be it for workers on the road or tow truck drivers, things like that.

Did we miss maybe an opportunity, like I said, when we have a vehicle that's broken down on the road? How do we potentially create a safer situation where perhaps we have an immobile vehicle? I made a reference to this kind of bin that I saw late last night coming back from Calgary. You know, I think about when somebody is hauling something of great length out the end of their vehicle. They're required to have a flag on that. It has to be very, very visible so that people can see it. Could we kind of take that sort of thinking where: if something has to be left on the road, does it need to be somehow very quickly identifiable so that you can see it and you can react to it on the road?

I've certainly seen many, many times where vehicles have struck others on the side of the road. I mean, probably everybody has seen those YouTube videos where an officer has pulled somebody over. They've still got all their safety lights on, you know, the orange lights trying to point everybody in the other direction, and you still have an accident. So what kinds of things have we learned from those, and did we have a chance in Bill 5 to maybe address some of those things? Again, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo said, it's all about safety.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. I've been thinking, as I've sort of been reading through the bill, considering it, listening to members speak, about some of my own experience related to this field. I've held a lot of different jobs in my lifetime, and during the period when I was pursuing my degree in music performance at Grant MacEwan here in Edmonton and indeed during my dozen or so years working as a musician and studio engineer, I worked a lot of other jobs on the side to help pay the bills

and help pay for that schooling. A number of those jobs were, in fact, in road maintenance and construction.

Just out of high school one of my first big summer jobs was working for the county of Strathcona. I got hired out there to work on one of their road crews, actually, a number of their road crews. That was in the summer of 1992, so way back when.

3:50

Member Irwin: Were you 10?

Mr. Shepherd: Nineteen ninety-two, indeed.

In that work I did a number of different things. I worked on a cold-mix truck. That's working with sort of cold asphalt mix, and that's just literally going out with the truck and a few shovels on the many rural roads around in Strathcona county and just patching holes in the road out there, just driving over them with the truck wheel to pack that down.

I also had the opportunity to work on some of the maintenance and construction crews. I got a chance to drive some big pieces of equipment. I got to drive a couple of the wheeled bulldozers. That was mainly in the yard, sort of filling trucks and that sort of thing, but occasionally moving them from site to site with some of the road jobs. Also, driving the large road packers: those are basically just great big giant water tanks with rubber wheels that you use to pack down the roads. I had one incident with one of those packers that scared me a bit, trying to get down and pack the edge of the road on a bit of a steep grade and actually having the side of the road collapse a bit. I ended up, luckily, being able to steer into it and ride that packer down into a farmer's fence without incident, but certainly my heart was in my throat. Admittedly, most of that work was out and off the main roads with that, so I didn't really run into too many incidents like we're talking about with this bill.

I did also follow that up then with a few summers where I worked for the city of Edmonton. That experience allowed me to get on with some of the crews here. Again, working for the city of Edmonton, I had the opportunity to work on a number of pothole crews. When you start out as the new guy on the pothole crew, you get to be the tar man, which means you carry around, literally, a bucket of steaming tar and a broom. You put on the face shield, and you go out and you put tar around the edge of the pothole before you put the asphalt in and pack it down to make sure it's going to stick.

I did also have the opportunity to work with some larger crews in some other situations. I did work with some crews that were doing paving and others, so sort of grinding out the road and then laying down new asphalt. That was in circumstances anywhere from working in back alleys to working on some side streets, all the way up to working on the Yellowhead Trail. I did have some incidents where I was working out beside traffic, at times moving at some higher velocities. Indeed, I had the opportunity on many occasions to do the much less exciting work of being a flagperson. That involved, many times, standing out on rural roads or sitting on rural roads waiting for traffic to come by to sort of let them know if they could go through or not or just simply that that rural road was closed. I certainly got some good reading done in those times.

Certainly, at times, you know, in the safety training we heard some of the horror stories as well about tragic circumstances where individuals who were doing that work, unfortunately, were seriously injured or lost their lives by drivers who were driving too fast. They failed to slow down, were not paying attention, and indeed, unfortunately, on occasion then would find themselves plowing through construction sites. So I can well appreciate the intent behind this bill and the reason for bringing it forward.

I also just reflect, Mr. Speaker, that I'm also well familiar with the dangers of high-speed traffic from my many years as a cycle

commuter. For a long time that was my main way that I got around, and that was here in downtown Edmonton but certainly other parts of the city. That was at a time when we did not have any significant cycling infrastructure in the city, no protected or even painted bike lanes of any kind. I got quite adept at, as we called it, playing in traffic, riding as a cyclist in the midst of vehicles. Certainly, when you are out in that position and you are exposed, when you're having people pass within a few feet of you at high velocity, you come to appreciate just how dangerous a vehicle can be.

So, certainly, I understand and support the intent behind this act and indeed the act itself because I recognize the danger that folks that are out doing this important work, that are supporting the ability for all of us to be able to get around the province, to get around our cities, municipalities, different areas – I recognize the need to ensure those individuals are protected.

I know for myself, Mr. Speaker, even as someone who has, you know, been a cycle commuter, who has been on the side and felt the danger that there can be from a vehicle passing by, it can still be easy to lose that sense when you are behind the wheel of a vehicle yourself. It's part of the challenge of it, the psychology of driving and how that sort of removes us sometimes from the impact that we could potentially have.

You know, I think back to the times when I've been driving down highway 2 and I come in past Leduc and I come down the road and I hit Edmonton and it changes from 110 to 90 and then all the way down to 60, and all of a sudden 60 kilometres feels like I'm barely moving at all. But it could still do an incredible amount of damage to an individual. Certainly, when we have situations, then, where we are indeed asking people to reduce their speed, potentially in a highway district or area, you know, from 110 or – admit it. Let's be honest here; 120 is what most folks are doing on highway 2. I'm sure no one here would do that, Mr. Speaker. When we're asking them to slow from that to less than half of that or potentially even a third, that doesn't quite feel right as a driver. It feels very slow. But it is essential to ensure that we are providing protection for folks that are doing this crucial work.

This bill would require that drivers slow down wherever possible when they are passing roadside workers, whether that be snowplows – I think we've all encountered that, all of us as MLAs and some here more than myself, who have to make that regular trip up highway 2 in the midst of winter and the snowstorms. Certainly, we have run into the snowplows. We've been caught behind them, perhaps quietly cursed them at times as we've been in a hurry but recognize the incredibly important work they're doing, that they should have that respect when we are approaching and passing them on the road. Indeed, that would also apply, then, for roadside workers, maintenance workers when those vehicle lights are flashing and they are stopped on the side of the highway.

This basically just affords them the same protections that are given to first responders and tow truck operators. That just makes sense, Mr. Speaker, because they face exactly the same danger. When they are stopped and they are doing their important work by the side of a highway, they are every bit as much exposed as a tow truck operator or a first responder.

So I certainly support the plans, then, to raise the fines, to change the fines for failing to slow down when passing snowplows or maintenance workers, to range from \$136 to \$826, based on the individual's speed. I think that's appropriate as well, to vary. Certainly, the faster we go, the more danger we present.

I just got my own ticket the other day for driving a little bit over the speed limit on St. Albert Trail and duly went to the Alberta website yesterday and paid my fine of \$116. I believe it is appropriate that we have a scaled penalty, particularly for individuals that choose to pass at a real excess of speed. Certainly,

I think we've all encountered a few of those individuals as we've made our way along highway 2 as well.

Now, I understand that the government is saying that as part of this they will undertake a public education campaign to let folks know before enforcement would start in the spring of next year. I'd say that's also fair. It's good to give folks a good heads-up of what's coming down the pipe, the changes that are going to be made, so they have the opportunity to respond and change their behaviour. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we would hope that folks are already taking that precaution, already showing that respect to vehicles, but certainly if we are going to be increasing fines and potential penalties, we should be giving folks due notice.

Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in support of this legislation though I would echo some of the comments that have been made by some of my colleagues just noting that the Minister of Transportation did suggest that she was encumbered from taking steps during the recent illegal blockade at Coutts, that she was unable to take some actions. She did a legal analysis and said that she needed more authority under this very act.

Nothing could be fresher in mind. I think the billions that we lost to our provincial economy should certainly be at the forefront of all of us here as legislators and taking steps, I think, to prevent that kind of action in the future through an illegal blockade. Indeed, many members of this House have spoken at length about how they oppose such things, at least in some circumstances other than the Coutts situation. That does seem to be the general consensus.

Certainly, there would have been an opportunity here to make appropriate changes to this legislation to ensure that all such blockades would be able to be dealt with in, I think, a much more expeditious manner than we saw that this government was willing to take in this particular situation.

But that aside, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I certainly support the substance and the intent of what the minister is trying to do here, so I will be voting in favour of Bill 5. Thank you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 5?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 28: Member Loyola]

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this House. Just let me get my glasses on so I can read. I haven't yet had the opportunity to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I believe it's actually the first bill that's been fully sponsored by the status of women, so as the critic for status of women I'm quite happy to rise and to share my thoughts on this one.

I am going to preface my comments a little bit here, but I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I will get back to the content of the bill. I just want to frame my points a little bit. You know, I want to start by actually talking about how the comments that will likely happen

today around this bill could be presented with a content warning or with a trigger warning. This is really timely, that I mention this, because – and maybe the teacher in me will just talk a little bit about what a content warning or trigger warning means. A trigger warning is a statement that's made prior to sharing potentially disturbing content. That content might include graphic references to topics like sexual assault, self-harm, violence, eating disorders, and so on.

I think everybody in this Chamber would agree that the topic of FGM, female genital mutilation, is something that could be absolutely traumatizing and triggering to somebody listening, somebody tuning in. You know, believe it or not – I know I like to joke about people listening to the Chamber – there are people who tune in and watch. I think it's really a good learning experience, a good teaching opportunity – again, it's the teacher in me – that we should take content warnings and trigger warnings seriously whenever we talk about potentially quite traumatizing, triggering topics such as this one, that we join together and acknowledge the impact that it could have on people, on survivors of female genital mutilation.

This is why I do want to just point out that we've seen from this Premier multiple times – I didn't get a chance to fully search *Hansard*, but he did it this week on Tuesday, I believe, made light of trigger warnings and mocked them. Of course, you can do a little bit of research and reading on trigger warnings and content warnings, and you may find that some people – there's actually a lot of research that says: I'm not so certain if trigger warnings and content warnings are the best approach. Regardless, making light and mocking sensitivities like that I don't think is the right approach. I would think that most folks in this Chamber would agree with that, just as, you know, if we were talking about residential schools, as an example, when you talk with elders and you talk with survivors, you often preface those conversations with the possible retraumatizing effects.

I did actually have the opportunity – I don't think he'll mind me saying it – to talk with the Finance minister yesterday. He mirrored the Premier in making light of a trigger warning. I was actually really pleased that the Finance minister talked to me and said, "I didn't know," and he said that he won't do it again. That was pretty great to hear, and I really appreciated that. I also chatted with the Member for – oh, my goodness, I may get a riding wrong – *Chestermere-Strathmore*, and she also said that it's not something that we should be doing.

I'm doubtful that the Premier is watching me speak right now, but on Sunday – yep. I'm getting back to . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm just going to remind all members that it would be inappropriate to comment as to whether or not other members . . .

Member Irwin: Oh, good point. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. It wasn't quite exactly, but I thought – I think we're all on the same page.

Member Irwin: Yeah. No. Thank you. I really appreciate that.

I just did want to highlight that, you know, I may not have much of a life because I did watch the press conference on Sunday and actually watched it with much interest. That was on human trafficking. One of the reasons why I watched it with much interest: the Premier was there and the Minister of Children's Services and, I believe, the Minister of Justice and perhaps someone else. Apologies. Why I paid such attention to that is that one of my constituents, Kate Quinn – she's the head of CEASE, the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation – was there. She made the trip down from Edmonton, from Treaty 6, as she said in her remarks. She went down with April, who is a

survivor of human trafficking and someone who's been an incredible advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks, and she cofounded the Stolen Sisters movement.

So I watched with a lot of interest, and I saw the Premier standing there and supporting and saying that this government was going to do all they could to end human trafficking and to take those issues seriously. You know, I felt hopeful. Then on the next day he posted a meme trivializing assault, and then on the very next day he made light of trigger warnings. I'm urging this government, this Premier to do better and to be better. I think he has an opportunity to do so and to allow all of us to really believe his words. I hope to see that with action here soon.

Let me get back to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. You know, I said that I had the opportunity to speak with the bill's sponsor, and I know it's something that she's quite passionate about. She shared with me just the number of stakeholders that she's reached out to on this bill. I think we can all agree in this Chamber – and I shared this in my response to this bill as well – that, absolutely, FGM is a horrific human rights abuse, and we need to all call it out.

You know, I actually recall as a high school social studies teacher in rural Alberta – and the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon would recall as well – social studies 10, that human rights is an important component there, and I remember actually this topic coming up in class. I think it had been mentioned in an article, and one of the students asked: what is FGM? I still remember it so vividly. As social studies teachers, as topics come up organically, we address them, and I remember saying: okay; folks, I'm going to tell you what this practice is, but I'm just warning you. It was actually before I knew the language of content warning or trigger warning because this was, gosh, probably about 10 years ago now. I remember saying: I am going to tell you what this is about. I actually had a student faint in class. I still remember that. I remember it so vividly.

Again, as a teacher you embrace these learning opportunities, and actually then that same student did a project on this issue, so it sort of came full circle, because it was something my students, at that time in Bawlf, Alberta, hadn't heard about. I can imagine that many folks in this very Chamber haven't heard about it as well. We know that it is absolutely horrific, and we know that it is already illegal under the Criminal Code, as it should be.

I'm probably already running close to out of time here. I'm not going to speak a great deal about the specifics around it. I know that in debate yesterday there was some specific detail given from the sponsor of the bill as well. My colleagues will have a lot of specific questions; I'll say my two lawyer colleagues, who will provide some legal analysis of this as well, I know, who will be speaking here shortly, too.

4:10

But I do have to get on the record here as the critic for status of women that when I saw that a piece of legislation was coming forward, like I said, the first clear bill directly coming from the ministry for which I am the critic, I was really hopeful, especially when I heard that it was going to be about protecting women and girls. I thought: ah, interesting; I wonder what this is going to be about. I heard that it was going to be about women's health. I must say that while – again I'm going to be very careful on how I phrase this – we know that FGM is absolutely horrific, I want us to all condemn it, it's not an issue that I hear about from my constituents.

There are so many issues related to women's health, health of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, specifically trans health. It's certainly on my mind, as we head into the Transgender Day of Visibility

tomorrow, March 31, just how much work we have to do to advance and support trans health in this province and globally as well.

You know, I think about some folks who've reached out to me, sharing reproductive health concerns, endometriosis, as an example. It's actually Endometriosis Awareness Month. I didn't get a chance to talk about it in the Chamber yet, and we're almost at the end of the month, so a good opportunity to do so. This is a condition that affects thousands of women across this province. I shared an article from someone named Meghan, who shared her story about endometriosis. In her story she talked about the debilitating impact that endometriosis has had on her life, and when I shared it on social media, I had countless people, women, weigh in, sharing their own issues, many of them experiencing wait-lists in getting treatment. It is something for which treatment is not simple, and there is no specific cure, so to speak.

A number of women shared their lack of access to health care. Endometriosis is just one example of many. During the Bill 207 debate the number of women and gender-diverse folks I heard from around this province who encounter barriers when accessing health care – this is not ancient history. This is November 2019, I believe, when we were first talking about it. I could have my dates wrong. Memories are confusing during a pandemic. I've heard from countless people, women in particular, even in urban areas. I remember one woman in an urban area who said that she was being denied birth control from her family physician, right? This is still happening. I give those as a couple of examples of some of the significant health concerns that women and gender-diverse folks have raised with me.

Again, it's not to diminish the critical importance of speaking up and speaking out against FGM, but I do wonder, of all the pressing concerns facing women and girls in the province, that this was this government's priority. I'd love to hear – and I do hope we'll have folks rising on the other side of the Chamber to just perhaps talk a little bit about, you know, why it was that this topic area was so critical. Like I said, my staff probably think I'm a little bit too nosy, but I pay a lot of attention to my inbox because I really do want to know what issues are top of mind for my constituents. I mean, like, I'm sure that all of us in this Chamber don't just hear from our constituents. We hear from folks in other constituencies, folks who might not be getting the support they need. As a critic for status of women and 2SLGBTQ-plus issues, of course, I hear from women and members of the community from all over the province, and I've not had an e-mail about this topic. I'd love to hear a little bit more as to the why – right? – as to why this government felt that this was such a significant priority for this government.

All right. I'll get a couple of questions here on the record, but again I really wanted to present that, because, hey, as I said in my response to this bill when it first was released, if this government, if this minister, the Associate Minister of Status of Women, are looking for any ideas of key priority areas where we could really be supporting women and girls and, hey, specifically women and girls' health, I've got a lot of ideas. I know I've worked closely with our Health critic, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, too, on both the issues of women's health and LGBTQ2S-plus health, and there are a lot of tangible things that this government could be doing to support those areas. Again – I've got to mention it because I may not get a chance tomorrow – trans health is a big one. I had the pleasure of raising some concerns around trans health in government estimates, and I shared in that room that when we're talking about delays in accessing trans health care, delayed health care is deadly health care for the trans community.

The stories I could share with you. Talking about e-mails, I could share with folks in this Chamber countless e-mails from members of the trans communities sharing just how incredibly challenging it

is to access health care. The barriers are many: wait-lists, of course; lack of psychologists. We hear that there are six psychologists across this province who are able to provide referrals, and we've asked Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to expand the list of professionals, the list of people who are able to provide referrals. We know that access to surgery itself is a huge, huge barrier as well.

With that, thank you for the time. I appreciate the rapt audience.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

We're on second reading of Bill 10. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 10. I'll start, as my colleague did, by providing a content warning for anyone who might be watching because we will be discussing some troubling things in this particular bill.

The bill is intended to ensure that health professionals are not involved in the performance of female genital mutilation, or FGM, and that's obviously a good thing. It's rendered illegal by the Criminal Code, so, I mean, I suppose it already was illegal, but it's not necessarily a bad thing to have multiple avenues by which to approach behaviour that we want to curtail. I think that that can be important, providing – for instance, in a criminal court the standard of proof tends to be a lot higher than in other proceedings, so providing other avenues is a good thing. I am glad to see that this government is speaking out against this practice and is taking the steps that are within their control. I think that's a good thing.

I do have some questions about the legislation, particularly the wording of the legislation. The definition is provided for in here. The question I have about the way the definition is framed is: what steps have been taken to ensure that this definition doesn't impact trans folks trying to access health care? Because the definition is – I mean, to prevent the harm, I understand why the definition is broad. I'm a little curious why an explicit exemption for a trans person was not provided in the definition, because I think that that would have been possible, especially in light of the sort of exemptions that are already in there. I think that that is something that could have been added to this bill, and I'm a little curious why it wasn't because we certainly know – I mean, obviously, again, this is another thing where we talk about how, you know, you can take steps forward without solving the problem. Let's put it that way.

I was very proud in our time in government to introduce a bill that prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender expression and gender identity. That was certainly a big step forward, but we know that it wasn't enough. That's why we continued to work with the community to bring in other things. One of the things that I hear frequently about is about access to health care.

4:20

In part it's about physicians maybe not feeling competent or able to manage in the area. I've heard from some trans folks that, you know, you go in for a broken arm – and a broken arm is a broken arm. People will not decline to provide care but be reluctant to provide care or ongoing care because the individual is trans. The doctor or the other health professional doesn't necessarily feel that they're sort of prepared to deal with that. That could certainly be dealt with by way of sort of requirements in the curriculum.

But there are also direct problems on sort of the provision of surgeries, for instance. There's a very long waiting list. There are a lot of hurdles to be overcome, but even when you overcome those hurdles, it's very, very difficult to access, and it has been made more difficult to access. Part of this is because it's bureaucratic, and

people want to see protections in place, but sometimes these things have unintended consequences, I guess, is my concern.

I am concerned that this bill might have those unintended consequences, so I would very genuinely and very seriously like to hear from the minister, you know, about the legal opinions they got to ensure that this definition, as provided in the legislation, isn't going to have that impact. In particular, I'd like to hear why there's no specific exemption put in for surgeries performed for trans people. I'm really concerned.

These are people who have an incredibly difficult time accessing health care, Mr. Speaker, and it can have incredibly tragic results. I mean, imagine living in a body that doesn't feel like your own, that doesn't feel reflective of who you are and going through the process of coming to terms with that and sharing it with the people around you, the sort of emotional difficulty and resilience of that, and then add on to this potentially, you know, years of additional appointments and being questioned and being asked if you really know who you are and having to jump through administrative and bureaucratic hoops. I've had people in my office to notarize paperwork, just to sort of change names or change gender identifiers on legal documents, and it was piles of paperwork. We were sometimes notarizing for half an hour. The barriers to this and the sort of length of wait for surgery can be incredibly emotionally traumatic to people. And given those barriers already being in place and given the difficulties that people face already, I think this House deserves to understand why the definition was written this way and what protections are in place.

I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that the government has an explanation, that somewhere there is a legal opinion that states that this will not create a problem and that it can be shared with this House. This isn't a situation where "trust us" is going to cut it because this really is something that has a huge impact for a lot of people. I hope that the minister can come forward and answer those questions. I hope that there is a detailed explanation for why that sort of explicit exemption wasn't required in regulation, why this definition won't catch trans people seeking health care. That is the thing I would like to ask on that.

The other question I have – and, again, I'm not saying that this is a bad bill. I am supportive of this bill, but I do have questions about other areas of women's health care, especially in light of the fact that this government has sort of taken steps around talking about, like, the necessity of certain procedures and whether certain procedures are necessary and whether they're kind of – I mean, honestly, in their communications material the government almost suggested that these things were a burden on the health care system and that certain things should be deprioritized, and those things affected primarily women.

You know, even something like saying that carpal tunnel syndrome isn't sort of a priority surgery: well, that affects primarily women, right? That's the sort of information you find out if you don't scrap the GBA plus analysis that departments used to have to do when we were in government. You find out that those things are disproportionately affecting women. As well, there are a number of surgeries. There's some level of controversy over whether hysterectomies are medically necessary in certain circumstances, and that can have a real impact on women seeking health care.

We know as well the sort of impacts of intersectionality on people seeking health care, whether they are believed, whether their symptoms are believed, how seriously the medical system as a whole takes their concerns. We can see in the data the impacts of that on longevity, not just on women but particularly on women who are marginalized in other ways.

This is a good step forward, but I feel like there are so many ways this government could have acted to protect women's health. There are so many ways that it could have been sort of possible to move

this forward, and I kind of wonder why some of those are missing here.

I think that in the pandemic we have truly seen what it is to say that an otherwise neutral circumstance has a disproportionate impact on certain populations. The pandemic is ostensibly neutral, but it had a disproportionate impact on women and their lives. It was women who more than anyone else had to stay home, who more than anyone else had to reduce their hours of work or leave the workforce. I suspect, though I do not yet know, that when all of the sort of data analyzing is done at the end – I'm curious to see the impact not just of the pandemic itself but on the sort of, like, cancellation and delay of health care that people have experienced, whether that impact fell equally on every population. I suspect that it didn't.

We know, again, that women and especially women of colour are less likely to get timely access to medical care for a whole series of reasons. We do need to recognize that. We do need to recognize that that is a reality, that intersectionality exists, that these are real things that have real impacts, impacts not just on someone's health but on their life or death.

I do think it's good that we are moving forward with this bill, but I feel like it really could touch on so many other areas, Mr. Speaker, and I feel like there are a lot of missed opportunities here in terms of supporting women's health care, in terms of ensuring that we are supporting equitable access to birth control, that we are supporting equitable access to abortion, that we are ensuring that we are providing equitable access to women so that women's health concerns – endometriosis was one of them that was mentioned.

I believe it's Endometriosis Awareness Month. I mean, this is a real concern. It's a concern that affects women. It's incredibly painful and difficult. It interferes with the quality of life in just about every aspect, from work to enjoyment of their home time, and it tends to be undertreated in our medical system. It tends to be particularly, again, be undertreated in women who are more marginalized, for instance women of colour, Indigenous women, women of sort of lower incomes or lower education levels because it often requires that the person go back to their medical professional over and over again with the same complaints before they receive treatment, and they're sometimes not taken as seriously as the health concerns that come forward from men.

4:30

When our systems have these disproportionate impacts, we need to recognize the existence of those disproportionate impacts, and we need to do what we can to equalize things. That's why gender-based analysis plus is so important. Having that come forward when we were in government was, I think, always incredibly useful information, because it's not always immediately obvious on its face, especially if you're not super familiar with an area, what impacts a certain apparently neutral rule will have on different populations.

Yeah. I think my two main concerns with this bill are why there's no explicit exemption for trans health care and whether we're very, very certain that this definition isn't going to catch that – those are folks who really do not need any additional barriers, in fact, quite the opposite – and, you know, why these other women's health concerns are not addressed.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak today to second reading of Bill 10, the Health Professions

(Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this bill. I want to begin by saying, as I think my colleagues have already mentioned as well, that we do support this bill. Certainly, moving forward with any actions we can take to prevent, to address issues of female genital cutting is deeply important. We support this bill and are happy to do so.

As I understand it, the bill does a few things. Of course, we do know that female genital mutilation is already contrary to the Criminal Code of Canada. I believe it's under section 268 of the Criminal Code, which specifically makes female genital cutting a criminal offence. This bill purports to – well, it does a few things. Of course, it adds a specific definition, as my colleagues have mentioned, for female genital mutilation.

Actually, before I go further, Mr. Speaker, I should say that I know there is a difference in terminology that's sometimes used. The bill uses the terminology "female genital mutilation." I have certainly heard and I understand, at least, it to be the case that a number of survivors would prefer to use the term "female genital cutting." Actually, I note that one of the recommendations that I believe obstetricians and gynecologists give when supporting women who have experienced this is to respect the terminology of the survivor as to what they'd like to use. I'm a bit more comfortable myself using "female genital cutting." That's the terminology on which I had done some research and experience in my past on this issue. I appreciate, though, that the bill actually provides a definition around female genital mutilation. It describes it as the "excision, infibulation or mutilation, in whole or in part, of the labia majora, labia minora, clitoral hood or clitoris of a person, except where valid consent is given."

The bill also requires health workers to report cases of female genital cutting to both law enforcement and their professional regulatory body. Of course, these are changes that are being made specifically to the Health Professions Act, so it's really covering a number of health professions, not just physicians and surgeons but, of course, all of the health professions. I believe there are – I can't remember exactly – 62. Maybe that's a little high in terms of the number of health professions that are covered under this act. But it applies to all of those professions, and it does require that any health workers who have been convicted of FGM in any Canadian or international jurisdiction are prevented from, basically, practising in their profession and from holding permits or professional licences in Alberta.

Again, I don't take issue with this bill. I understand Alberta will be the first province bringing forward legislation like this, but I suppose that speaks to part of the questions I have around the necessity for the bill. I'd love to have the mover of the bill bring forward sort of some information around, you know: how many occurrences do we know of female genital cutting happening in Alberta? Are there limitations with respect to the effectiveness of the Criminal Code provisions? I'm not entirely sure – I've done a little bit of a review of the Health Professions Act – but generally when a health professional has been convicted of certain provisions of the Criminal Code, they automatically can no longer practise. I'm not sure if this is in addition to that. I know that sometimes within the Health Professions Act specific provisions of the Criminal Code are highlighted, and section 268 does seem to be mentioned, I believe, once in the Health Professions Act.

I have a few questions about how much of an issue this is in Alberta. Now, I respectfully acknowledge that this may be an issue that we don't have a lot of data about. Specifically, part of the concern around female genital cutting is that it does happen in the shadows, and we may not have a lot of data about it, so we may not be able to conclusively say whether or not it is a pressing issue in Alberta. But, certainly, to stand in solidarity, I suppose, with the

idea that we completely condemn female genital cutting is appropriate, and I support that.

However, I also do share the concerns raised by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View around how female genital mutilation is defined in here and whether or not it will inadvertently capture some medical procedures that may be part of a gender reassignment surgery. I'm not professing, by any means, to be an expert in the medical and surgical aspects of such a surgery, but that is a question I have. I would certainly anticipate that it is possible to consider that it could be captured by how this bill defines female genital mutilation.

As my colleague mentioned, any potential increased barrier for trans individuals to access health care should be considered and wholly rejected. We want to be very clear. We know that trans people already suffer significant barriers and challenges in accessing appropriate health care, and we would not want to be unintentionally – and I certainly hope there's no intention to do so; I don't perceive that there is – creating an additional barrier for trans people to seek health care services.

I do hope that we will hear some conversation around that from the mover of the bill to understand a little bit further the protections that are in place. Now, I appreciate that the definition does include that there's an exception where valid consent is given. It's certainly, though, my concern that there is a perception that gender reassigning surgery would somehow be considered captured by this definition. We want to be very clear – and I believe we should be that clear in legislation – to make sure that that is not captured by that. I hope that we will have some conversation around that.

I've had the opportunity, like, I know, many members of this House, to travel the world and to experience and live in other countries even, and I did have the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time in South Africa. That's where I got a little bit of an understanding of and exposure to some of the discussions around female genital mutilation. But, of course, we know that those issues are not just issues that happen in other countries around the world, that they are concerns that we have here in Canada.

But, again, I am slightly concerned that we are focusing on this issue where there are already significant Criminal Code protections. We do know that there are also already requirements under the Health Professions Act that if a practitioner has committed and has been convicted of a Criminal Code offence, they automatically lose their ability to continue to practise and in many cases cannot be reinstated.

This feels like an opportunity to really discuss other pressing issues around women's health. I know my colleagues have spoken about it, but I think we need to speak about it because of the issues that are pressing in women's health. I know of many women and I've received many contacts and e-mails and messages from constituents and Albertans who have concerns about a lot of things when it comes to women's reproductive health, not only accessing current services.

Actually, I'm struck by – my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood might remember this. There was recently an excellent thread by a doctor, and I'm apologizing that I can't pull her name right now to my mind, because I do want to give her credit. She did a great Twitter thread not too long ago talking about the limited access that women may have to – and I always pronounce it wrong – Mifegymiso. You know, this is an important drug that for many women is an important part of their reproductive health. This is a drug where I'm proud that, when we were in government, we supported it being covered, because we knew it was important for women's reproductive health. It's an important drug, but in this thread by this doctor – and I promise to find out her

name and get back to the House on that – she talked about how few pharmacists, for example, made that drug available.

4:40

Member Irwin: Dr. Emma Herrington.

Ms Pancholi: Dr. Emma Herrington. Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

It's Dr. Emma Herrington, and I want to give her credit because she canvassed a number of pharmacies around Alberta to see whether or not those pharmacies made this drug available. She was shocked to find out how few of those pharmacies knew that it was available and made it available.

So when we talk about access to reproductive health services and treatment, we should be talking about this issue. This is a pressing issue that many women access and should be able to access, yet in Alberta apparently it's not widely available. That's something that we could certainly talk about.

I'd also like to talk about – you know, I know that for women that I know in my life, access to important surgeries such as a hysterectomy is often very important and even things such as breast reductions. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointing out that I believe it was this government that had a report brought out – I believe it was an Ernst & Young report; there have been so many reports; it was before the pandemic – which talked about a number of surgeries and procedures that were deemed to be not medically necessary, and breast reductions, for example, were considered one that was not.

If any of you have experienced this or know women in your life who have experienced it, breast reduction surgery is critically important to a woman's health in many circumstances. It can alleviate significant pain and discomfort. There are many associated problems that go along with that challenge, so that is certainly very important to women's health, having access to breast reduction surgeries.

When we're talking about access to women's health, we have to talk about the surgery backlog, really, that so many Albertans are facing and that, certainly, Alberta women are facing. We know that the mismanagement by this government of the pandemic has resulted in tens of thousands of Albertans, including women, not having access to necessary treatments and procedures and surgeries. That should be a top priority, I believe, for this government.

I also want to talk a little bit about postpartum depression and anxiety. You know, when I looked at the throne speech for this government, there seemed to be a lot of focus on women reproducing up until the point of having a baby but not as much conversation about medical health supports and mental health supports that are necessary after a child is born, not only for the mother and even the father but also for children. I think we should be talking about greater access to mental health supports for women, for example, who are experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety, a very common issue that can negatively impact not only the woman's health but also the baby's health and a family's health and well-being. These are the kinds of issues that I believe should be raised and should be highlighted.

I also want to talk about – you know, we do understand that female genital cutting may exist in the shadows. We may not have a lot of data about it, and that speaks to how important it is to collect good data. I'm very proud that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward a private member's bill, that I'm very much looking forward to debating in this Legislature – and it will hopefully have the support of all members of this House – to collect race-based data in all areas of services that the government delivers, and that includes health care. That can

help us inform, I believe, some of the practices and supports and highlight those communities, those individuals, those racialized individuals who may need additional supports.

When we see this bill come forward, I hope that means that there will be some support for this private member's bill, which will really speak to helping to get into that data that may be living in the shadows. Let's try to focus on trying to pull out those pieces of information, because that's important to developing strong policies and practices going forward and legislation and making funding decisions. Again, it also speaks to why gender-based analysis is critically important. We know that when policies and legislation and funding decisions are made that appear to be neutral, they may not be neutral in their impact. That consideration should be made before those policy decisions are made.

I think that this bill appears to be a fine bill. There are a number of questions that, I think, I and my colleagues have raised that I really do hope we will have an opportunity to discuss further in this House, but I also hope that we will see this bill as an opportunity to consider other serious health concerns that women face in this province and how we can address those not only – it's not just about funding; it is about data, and I very much welcome that.

You know, the members of the Official Opposition believe strongly in evidence- and data-based decisions and making decisions based on what we know will best serve the people it's intended to serve. I see this as an opportunity to really get into those issues of race-based data. Maybe it will reopen a critically important conversation in this House around gender-based analysis. I think we're doing a disservice to the women of this province when we fail to consider their lived experiences and the impacts of policies and funding decisions that are being made on them simply because it's an oversight by this government.

It is important for intersectional work as well. I feel it's important that we talk about that. Especially in the context of female genital cutting, we are often talking about intersectionality. We're talking about how race and gender and sexual orientation and sexual identity and income and ability all come together. My understanding is that the intent of this bill is to really protect, and if we are hoping to protect, we need to consider all the various identities and vulnerabilities that people experience and women experience.

I hope to have a fulsome conversation and to hear from the movers of the bill on some questions around the necessity of this particular bill, how many women and girls it's hoped to protect. I hope to have a really good discussion about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading, and I want to thank all of my colleagues this afternoon who have spoken before me on this important piece of legislation. Certainly, I'd like to begin by just stating my support for Bill 10 as a piece of legislation that I will be pleased to vote for in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10, just to quickly summarize what we are doing in this piece of legislation, is going to enhance the protections for women and girls against the practice of female genital mutilation, which is defined in this legislation. As my colleagues have, I will begin my remarks by simply saying that the topics we are covering in this bill debate are very sensitive and potentially triggering for those who may be listening. We know that there are

women and girls here in Alberta who have been subjected to this practice and family and friends who love them who may also be impacted by this, but even just hearing these topics discussed can certainly be really upsetting, because we're talking about something very, very damaging, very sensitive at this point.

The Bill 10 as announced by this government would do a few different things. It will ensure health professionals who are convicted of performing, offering, or facilitating female genital mutilation in Alberta will be removed from the practice, Bill 10 will prohibit individuals convicted of this crime elsewhere from practising in Alberta, and Bill 10 will require health profession regulatory colleges to adopt standards of practice, including education, awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training, to better support the physical and mental health of women and girls who may have undergone female genital mutilation.

Now, it does that, in part, by starting off with a definition of what female genital mutilation means, and as my colleagues have noted, I will also note that sometimes the language can change when we're talking about this issue. The act talks about female genital mutilation; it's often referred to as female genital cutting as well. It is internationally recognized as a human rights violation, Mr. Speaker. FGM denies women and girls their right to health, security, physical and emotional integrity, and it violates their right to be free from torture and cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. Certainly, we know that this practice is incredibly physically damaging up to and including that it can kill the women and girls who are forced to undergo FGM.

4:50

Now, since May 1997 female genital mutilation has been against the law in Canada and is in the Criminal Code of Canada. I would point out to this Assembly – and I believe that it has been stated by the mover of the bill. Let me pause to simply say thank you to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing forward this bill, for the work that she has been doing on this issue. I know that she has spoken with hundreds of women and has been consulting and raising awareness on this issue for quite some time. Certainly, for the seven years that we've been colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, I know that this has been a topic that she has been incredibly passionate about and has been speaking about. That member has done an incredible amount of work on this as well as not just Bill 10 but also in creating and recognizing the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on February 6, a day to recognize the practice, to raise awareness, to commit to efforts to prevent further victims of FGM. And now today we have the legislation in front of us for debate.

I mentioned the Criminal Code of Canada, before I was struck that I needed to thank the mover of the bill, because my understanding is that we have not seen cases of physicians practising in Alberta. But one of the things that we know happens is young girls being sent out of Canada for FGM to be performed and then being brought back here, where certainly health professionals need to know how to support them. I also want to mention that I understand the Criminal Code of Canada can be used to control the transportation of female children who are being moved out of the country for the purposes of obtaining FGM. Knowing that the Criminal Code of Canada has provisions that have been protecting women and girls from this I think is very, very important. Anyone in Canada who is convicted of mutilating female genitalia faces a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

As my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View mentioned, particularly when we're trying to curb behaviour, we're trying to eliminate a dangerous practice that threatens the health of women and girls: having multiple legislative avenues to do that. So while

the Criminal Code of Canada exists and does make illegal these practices, including transporting women and girls out of the country to have this done, we know that the practice still does exist and does happen. We need to acknowledge that. I think Bill 10 moves us forward in the steps to preventing and supporting the women and girls who've had their human rights violated. Now, certainly, female genital mutilation is primarily a method of sexual control. We see it quite often as a manifestation of deeply entrenched gender inequality.

With the changes that are in Bill 10, the requirement to have health profession regulatory colleges adopt standards of practice that include education, awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training to better support the physical and mental health of women and girls: I see this as a very positive thing. Now, I know that the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta have had standards of practice forbidding the practice of FGM since, I believe, the '90s. Certainly, this is an issue that some of our health profession associations and regulatory colleges have been aware of. One of the questions that I have perhaps for the mover of the bill or one of the government ministers is that I'm curious if we've asked all of the health profession regulatory colleges that will be impacted by this bill what the current state of their awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training is.

I'm very curious on the size of the impact that Bill 10 will have. Will this assist to reinforce the importance of things that are already in place? Will regulatory colleges and others impacted be needing to create new procedures, practice, and materials from scratch? That's something that I hope to learn as we join in the debate through this process and particularly as we get into Committee of the Whole and we're able to do a bit more going back and forth. It's clear to me, in doing some initial research on Bill 10 and trying to understand the impact of this piece of legislation, that this is an issue that Canada and our Canadian health system has been aware of and taking steps to try to address for some time, and I'm very, very curious to know more about how that has impacted each of the different health profession regulatory colleges throughout Alberta.

Now, there are some additional questions that we have as we go into this debate, including: what tools and resources will be provided to women and their health providers when they identify a need for supports when they have experienced female genital cutting or genital mutilation? I note from research done by the opposition caucus that there have been guidelines provided for female genital cutting here in Canada through the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada*, recommendations that include things like making sure that health care providers are careful not to stigmatize women who've undergone female genital cutting, even just things like making sure you understand the language that the person who's had this happen to is using and adapt to their language in talking about it.

As I read more about FGM and think about Bill 10, I think it's very clear that the stigma can be crippling and is a major factor when it comes to these women and girls seeking out health care, so it's really important that our health care professions and professionals are well trained and resourced and know how to support women and girls that this has happened to. Certainly, making sure that we are all advocating for the availability of and access to appropriate supports and counselling services, I think, should be a part of the conversation that we have around Bill 10. Some of my colleagues have talked about the challenges our health care system has been going through particularly with the pandemic. I'm curious under that context if women and girls impacted by FGM, I imagine as all of our health care system has been disrupted, if their access to health care may have been disrupted as well.

I am not aware of any cases where FGM has taken place in Alberta or any charges related to, but that is certainly something I'd be curious to hear more about as we go through the debate and find out more. Currently my understanding is that health care workers need to report cases of FGM to their professional regulatory body, and my understanding is that with Bill 10 we will now ensure that all the health professionals will be required to report to law enforcement as well, and certainly anyone found to have performed this will not be allowed to practise in Alberta going forward.

There's certainly a great deal of discussion about the issues around FGM and female genital cutting through the debate on Bill 10. I appreciate that everyone appears to be approaching this debate in a very sensitive way and to be trying to reflect the respect that we have for this conversation and the importance of the topic that is under debate. Again, I will reiterate my support for this piece of legislation.

That being said, I do want to echo some of the comments my colleagues have made around the important, critically important, need to support all aspects of women's health and the challenges that women have been experiencing through the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to accessing important services, everything from basic health care to birth control to oncology supports. Certainly, we've seen a disruption to our health care system that's impacted women to a strong degree.

5:00

I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to speak to Bill 10, to offer my support, to put on the record some of the questions that I have for the mover of this bill and/or the government ministers who are working to support this move forward. I thank those within the government of Alberta who've worked on this issue, and I look forward to hearing more debate as this bill continues to proceed. I hope that it is going to have the positive impact with which it was drafted and introduced.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, as we continue on with this debate, I actually was wondering: am I able now to move to adjourn debate? Can we do that again successively? I move to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Actually, as is sometimes the case in Committee of the Whole, often there is an intervening proceeding with regard to this; therefore, no, you cannot, but you may speak to it. Then perhaps somebody after would look to adjourn debate. I see the deputy government whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all the debate this afternoon as we work through a topic around female genital mutilation or, what Edmonton-Whitemud brought up, female genital cutting, and make sure that we are not only identifying . . .

Mr. Turton: Intervention.

Mr. Rutherford: Yes.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much to my good friend speaking. I was just hoping that perhaps he can elaborate on some of his experience and contacts in his professional environment before and tell a little bit about his experience working, obviously, with some of these more critical female issues in his previous line of work.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the intervention and the question around my 10 years in law enforcement. Yes, I did respond to a number of calls regarding human trafficking, domestic violence, people who were sexually assaulted, abused, child abuse, you name it, everything that could exist, unfortunately. I am not going to get into those personal stories or details as they are, you know, for those individuals a sensitive matter. They can be talked about broadly, but I would resist wanting to bring up their personal stories that they shared with me and expected me to treat respectfully as well. I thank you for the intervention and for asking about that.

Mr. Speaker, I will relinquish the rest of my time.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. To the prior speaker here as well: I appreciate that. As a father of three young girls I think that this legislation – I think every group can agree to this, that it's very important. It's terrible that these things have to take place, but it's good that we can come together on items like this in the House and close it.

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

An Hon. Member: Move to adjourn debate.

Mr. Getson: Move to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: I think I knew what you were getting at.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, for years now Albertans have asked the Ministry of Health to re-examine our continuing care legislation and address challenges in the system. We made a commitment in early 2020 that we would review the legislation and address those concerns. This review led to the development of the new Continuing Care Act, which I am proud to move forward today. The proposed legislation establishes a framework, a much-needed first step, to transform our province's entire continuing care system. It will enable a modern, flexible approach to home and community care, supportive living accommodations, and continuing care homes that will serve Albertans now and into the future. It will provide a foundation for enhancing the quality of life Albertans have in continuing care. The act will create system-wide efficiency and improve service delivery for Albertans. It will also support the health system's accountability and sustainability.

Without this new act we risk gaps and inconsistencies that remain in current legislation, and we would be unable to make transformational shifts required for system improvement. Our current continuing care legislation dates back, in some cases, to 1985 and includes content in six acts, six regulations, and three sets of standards. As of today, what we know about continuing care service delivery is that it has evolved over time. Our legislation needs to catch up to a modern world. Existing legislative requirements do not effectively reflect present-day practices, services, or settings, nor does it adequately reflect the changing needs and expectations of Albertans. Albertans have told us that they want new, client-focused models of care. The act would enable this to happen going forward.

Provisions in our existing legislation are outdated and fragmented. They add layers of complexity and inconsistency to how the continuing care system is governed. The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed these system gaps. The proposed legislation will address these limitations in our existing laws and bring them up to date in one streamlined act. This new legislation will help transform the continuing care system to reflect the importance of resident and client quality of life and a person-centred approach to care and services. It will enable shifts to expand home and community care, improve care within continuing care homes and in other settings as well. The intent is to create enduring legislation that will enable and support responsiveness to changing system demands and contexts now and into the future.

While much of the detail will be in the regulation and standards with respect to service provision as it is done today, staffing, and other operational content, the act itself contains significant content on compliance, monitoring, and enforcement. The intent is that while there will be flexibility in the continuing care system through regulations and standards, there is strong oversight and authority for the ministry to ensure compliance to legislative requirements, including standards, and that will be in the act.

Having one overarching piece of legislation will provide consistency and alignment across our entire continuing care system. It will establish clear and consistent authority and oversight for licensing, accommodations, and delivery of publicly funded health care in the continuing care system, and it will allow us to support the implementation of recommended actions identified in our reviews of continuing care homes and palliative and end-of-life care. The proposed legislation will strengthen system sustainability for years to come. I'm also proud to say that if this act is passed, Alberta will be the only province in the country with integrated legislation for its entire continuing care system.

But, more importantly, we are doing this for Albertans. The new legislation supports our larger commitment to Albertans to increase access to continuing care and meet demands on the system over the next decade and beyond. As indicated in Budget '22, Mr. Speaker, we're creating 1,500 new spaces in the coming year alone with that funding increase, but we need to do much more. Our review of continuing care showed that the demand on our system will increase by 60 per cent by 2030.

At the same time, we should be helping more clients live independently for longer to avoid or delay admission to a facility. That's better care for the client. It's a better use of resources so we can serve more clients. The review recommended increasing long-term home care from the current 30 per cent of total clients to 40 per cent by 2030. We're starting that strategic shift now with more funding for home care this year, and it is just the beginning.

We're strengthening our continuing care system to meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond through this legislation, the review, and the funding in Budget '22. Therefore, I move second reading of the Continuing Care Act.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, and I appreciate the brief synopsis from the minister laying out what he is looking to achieve with this legislation. Certainly, I think all of us as members in this House have heard from constituents about concerns with the continuing care system and indeed care for seniors in the province of Alberta. As the minister noted, this is a

growing concern. We have an aging population. We are expecting to see an increasing demand on capacity in that system. Certainly, we have all seen that there are real concerns with some respects in how that care is provided and what is available and what is accessible, and certainly we have seen some of those cracks in that system in much more vivid detail under the pressure that's been put on it through the COVID-19 pandemic.

5:10

Certainly, this government has been ambitious in its promises and the commitments that it has put forward and said it was going to make and the action that it said it was going to take. This is the first opportunity that we have to review actual action from this government in terms of following through on those commitments. Now, the minister talked about the facility-based continuing care review, a review that was completed in April 2021 and then made public in May 2021. That report laid out 11 policy directions, 42 recommendations.

As the minister noted, one of the key commitments, recommendations in that review was to shift the current share of 61 per cent long-term care residents and 39 per cent in facility-based care to be a ratio instead of 70 per cent home care and 30 per cent facility care. Certainly, that is an incredibly ambitious goal, Mr. Speaker, but certainly one I understand and support. As the minister just said, certainly, supporting more seniors to live independently in the community as opposed to in a facility provides a better quality of life for those seniors. Absolutely. That in turn will have a significant impact on their continuing health. It certainly should be achievable at a lower cost to the system overall. Certainly, I am in agreement there. Indeed, that report projected that the shift could save about \$452 million annually, which it then recommended should be redirected to increasing direct hours of care in long-term care to four and a half hours a day and also increasing the hours of direct care for designated supportive living as well.

Now, the former Minister of Health said that of those 42 recommendations there were some he could act on immediately, others that would need to develop an action plan, others that would require some further study, but the commitment we heard from the government at that time was that the recommendations on staffing and hours of direct care would be reviewed over the summer and acted on in the fall. Things were delayed. Admittedly, I recognize, of course, that the COVID-19 pandemic likely had some impacts on that. Certainly, we have had robust debate, and I have made much comment about what role the government played in the severity of that and the, I guess, length of that delay and how that might have played out in this, but I'm not going to go into that again here.

What I can say is that we find ourselves here now with this government's piece of legislation specifically to follow through on these commitments, but we see nothing here about those particular issues. We see nothing about the recommendations on staffing. We see nothing here about the recommendations on hours of direct care. Now, I recognize, in listening to the minister as he just opened second reading here, that he stated that staffing and other operational content will be in the regulations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that indeed there are many things that need to be done through regulations. Indeed, for example, I know that with my own private member's bill, which I am bringing forward, certainly there is a lot that I've got in there to say that would be taken care of in the regulations, say, around setting data standards for the collection of race-based data, the reason for that being that that would require considerable consultation, certainly with racialized communities in particular, who do not have a long history of trust in government in handling information about them.

In this case we have had the entire review which was conducted and the recommendations that have come forward, and indeed the government has had time since then to do some robust consultation, yet we see nothing here about the specifics on that. We see that the government does not seem to be in a position to actually make any statements or take any action or indeed make any commitments on a significant piece of what's required, I think, to make reforms in our continuing care system and indeed on an area that has been the subject of, I think, the majority of the concerns that I've certainly heard brought forward. [interjection] I see the minister would like to intervene. I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much to the hon. member. The hon. member raises some very good questions. I just want to take a moment to respond to some of those, and I'm sure we'll have the opportunity for more debate as we actually talk about Bill 11. The hon. member is quite correct that the FBCC review was done. My predecessor was examining through that. Changes happened. The hon. member also . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. However, it's come to my attention that this is actually only just the second speaker. The second speaker is given the opportunity for the full 20 minutes themselves, so I will pass it back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification. I look forward to the opportunity for some more collegial interaction, I guess, at further stages of debate on the bill.

As I was saying, certainly, I have some concerns that we are not seeing clear information here about what the government's intentions are in terms of fulfilling some of these extremely important aspects, I think, of the review. As I was saying, the concerns that have been brought forward to me as an MLA have certainly often been around the direct number of hours of care that residents of continuing care and designated supportive living are receiving. Indeed, the concern has been that, particularly in privately owned and operated facilities, the drive to ensure the profit that's needed to be for the stakeholders can often come at the expense of care for the residents.

Certainly, I think a number of Albertans would really like to see some more robust information from this government about their intent. Again, putting things in the regulation: I can appreciate when that is necessary and functional at times but also recognize that that means those pieces are much more easy for government to make changes to without having to come before the Legislature, without having to even necessarily be overly transparent about doing so. When it comes to things like staffing ratios or hours of care and other things that are of very real concern to many Albertans about their loved ones in care, those are things I think that Albertans would like to see very clearly codified and requiring perhaps more scrutiny for government to make future changes to once those commitments have been enshrined.

But I won't belabour that point, certainly, particularly given that the minister is not able to rise and respond at this time, and I will look forward perhaps to an opportunity to hear from him further on his reasoning for doing this within the regulation process. I'd be interested to hear what is going to be involved in that, indeed if there is further consultation that will be required, then, before they can move forward with those regulations and the timelines that might be involved in that. I think those would be some of the pieces that Albertans would be interested in hearing about as they consider what this government's actions and steps in regard to this legislation are going to be.

I appreciate that the minister spoke of additional funding that they are providing for home care. Certainly, again, that is incredibly important. I would note that also within the legislation it spoke of the need to increase staffing. The review mentions that close to 6,000 more staff would need to be hired in order to meet what they are recommending for proper staffing to provide the level of care that should be provided for Albertans within the continuing care system. That is a significant number of staff, Mr. Speaker.

We know already that we are still facing constraints within our system, I think for a number of reasons, certainly, a large part of that being the exhaustion of our health care staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw the effects of that beginning last spring as we were still just coming out of the third wave, before we went into the best summer ever and the deep, deep impacts of this government's neglect in the fourth wave. Certainly, we know that we have had care facilities such as the Galahad seniors' care centre, which still remains closed – 20 seniors have been displaced for coming up now on one year – because of a lack of nursing staff to be able to provide care. As we are looking forward, I think we need to hear more from the government about what their intents are to meet this need.

5:20

Certainly, I appreciated the opportunity I had to discuss this with the minister to some extent during the estimates process and also with the Minister of Advanced Education, and I am pleased to hear that they are indeed taking some action to try to open up more nursing seats and opportunities for that training around the province. I certainly appreciate their efforts to consider how that could be done in rural communities, as was brought forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul in his motion on Monday, recognizing that that is an essential part of ensuring that as we train these folks, we have the folks to help provide that care in rural areas. Indeed, recognizing that we have seniors across the province, we certainly, again, want to ensure that those seniors can remain in their communities as long as possible, whether that's independently or whether that's in the continuing care system.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But, certainly, I think a number of the other actions that have been taken by this government are not going to help with hiring those nearly 6,000 full-time equivalents that are going to be required to be able to provide the level of care that's going to be needed. While I certainly appreciate that they eventually arrived at a mediated settlement, which provided some increases for nurses in the province of Alberta, that was hard fought and hard won and came as this government spent a significant period attempting to grind nurses down, requesting wage rollbacks of up to 5 per cent in the midst of the ramp up of the fourth wave.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that while, again, I appreciate how legislation functions, I appreciate the need of regulation, I appreciate the complexity of the pieces that are moving here, there is a significant deficit of trust between Albertans and this government when it comes to the operation of our health care system. Certainly, on something so important and so essential as the care of seniors, our elders, our family, our loved ones, Albertans are going to have a lot of questions for what this government intends to do.

Certainly, this is a government that we know has had a serious deficit of transparency. We have seen them attempt to move things through quietly in regulation in the dead of night, as we saw with coal mining in the eastern slopes, which the government then spent well over a year and a half or so attempting to tap dance around before half-heartedly finally accepting the results of the committee

that they put together to try to take the heat off the issue, and they still, Mr. Speaker, have refused to actually put that in legislation because they are rather fond of always leaving themselves a back door to try to get around what Albertans actually want them to do and exit from their commitments. Again, a reason why, while I can appreciate some of the steps that they are looking to take within this legislation, Albertans have good reason to question and want to see a lot more specifics up front.

I have nothing against the overall housekeeping intent of the bill, and I recognize that Alberta is taking leadership, as the minister noted, in integrating the legislation, certainly, having everything together in one place. I have no issue with that. That is reasonable and practical, but that does not in and of itself address some very real and concrete issues that we know exist within our long-term care system. Certainly, I can appreciate why, I think, indeed many health care providers would be questioning this government on their intent and what their plans are when we consider even just through the pandemic the impacts that had on our long-term care system.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that one of the biggest challenges we have in access to continuing care is indeed that access to beds, which leaves individuals stuck in beds in acute care in hospital because the beds in continuing care are not available, and I know from speaking with front-line health care professionals that during several stages of the pandemic that problem was deeply exacerbated by the fact that we had outbreaks and other situations, which made it impossible to transfer people out of acute care into continuing care or other seniors' facilities. Again, as I have gone on at length – and I'm sure members would appreciate if I did not go into detail on it again – this government repeatedly chose to act last and act least on this pandemic, which made those waves worse, which exacerbated the pressure on all aspects of our health care system, including long-term care.

I think there will be a number of questions that we'll be continuing to ask, and certainly I do look forward to the opportunity, when the minister is able to intervene, to hear his thoughts on the record. Certainly, we will be, I think, asking about the other recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review, why this government is choosing to delay on taking actions on those or choosing to do these pieces in regulation, particularly given, Mr. Speaker, that we know we are approaching the next election. We have to recognize the reality that as we get closer to an election, governments in general are able to do less in terms of concrete details, significant action. We have seen how caught up this government and its members are in their own internal political drama already, so one has to question how much capacity this government is actually going to have to follow through on the commitments that it says are going to be in the regulation but, again, which we do not have in any significant detail for the actual scrutiny of this House.

We will have questions indeed about the amounts, what actions are going to be taken to increase the amount of home care provided to work towards that ratio that has been laid out in the facility care review. We will certainly have some questions about what steps this government intends to bring into place to improve the working conditions for continuing care staff. Mr. Speaker, one of the big issues we have had – and, again, this is largely in the privately owned and operated seniors' care facilities – is that we have a large number of staff who are unable to get full-time hours at a single position, so they are left having to cobble together an assortment of part-time hours with no benefits, at low wages, which, as we saw in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly compromised the safety and health of seniors in the province of Alberta.

We have seen this government take no action to address this. We have seen the government make no comment on the record so far if they intend to take any steps to address that. Indeed, what we have

seen from this government instead is that they have a seeming drive to increase the amount of private profit in our public health care system, which would, I believe, only exacerbate this problem further. Certainly, we would be interested to hear more from the government about their intent there and how they intend to go about increasing the number of full-time staff because, Mr. Speaker, I think we all in this House should be in agreement that the folks who provide care to the elders in the province of Alberta, those who built this province, our own family and loved ones, deserve to be able to make a full-time wage with benefits.

We're certainly going to have some questions. You know, I think some of these questions – it would be helpful if the government simply shared the consultation report on this bill itself given that there are these moving pieces, that there are all of these commitments this government has made. Indeed, at some point, I imagine, when the minister is able to intervene or speak again, he will likely lay out why he feels this needs to go to regulation or at least that so many pieces of it do or other actions, but certainly having access to the actual feedback he received, the consultations he undertook that brought him here would help, I think, in debate and consideration of this bill, in building trust in this government and their intent as it moves forward.

That said, we are in early stages of debate on this bill, and as I said, there is a lot of information that isn't quite here. There's certainly a lot of broader commitments that have been made by the minister, and he has so far only had a brief introduction in second reading to lay out his intent. So I look forward to hearing from him further and having the opportunity to dig further into this bill myself. We'll be doing some of our own consultation with our stakeholders. I look forward to further debate on Bill 11.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to the Continuing Care Act. I'll note off the top that all of us have had or do have parents and grandparents, and all of us in the House are at least of a certain age where they may be getting on in age. It's a piece of legislation that is germane to everybody's life in this province, and it's something we hold very dear to all our hearts, and that is the long-term care of our senior population.

5:30

But not only that, Mr. Speaker, in our long-term care facilities often not spoken about very much is the number of individuals who are there at a younger age receiving care for any number of long-term or chronic issues that they might face and that require them to be in a long-term care facility or require long-term care on an ongoing basis from a younger age. Let us not forget that it is not only seniors who form the bulk of the individuals who receive long-term care; it is also a significant number of younger people who are also involved in receiving the benefits under the Continuing Care Act, that is contemplated by Bill 11.

I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, as we continue debate on Bill 11, if we might always keep in mind what the minister stated as the central and core objective of the legislation. An underlying approach would be, as he termed it, a person-centred approach, which was their objective or goal in framing this legislation. We'll put this legislation to that test, Mr. Speaker, as we continue on debate in second reading and in future readings as well. It comes to my mind that there are, I think, a number of things that anyone in this province who has an elderly parent or someone who is in care

– that is the person-centred care approach that one would always like to see put in place.

I had spoken in this House about some of my earlier involvement in the long-term care world as a nursing orderly trainee at the young age of 17, working in the geriatric ward of the old Colonel Mewburn nursing home, as we would call it then. Also, of course, now later on in life I'm looking after now passed on grandparents and great-grandparents. Every family will face this prospect as we see our loved ones grow in age or if we have somebody who requires permanent long-term care assistance.

The amalgamation of various different components of long-term care into this Continuing Care Act and under the one rubric is not something necessarily that one would oppose in and of itself, but it certainly bears scrutiny. Whether or not the amalgamation process that this act undertakes is in and of itself something that was necessary is, I think, a question that is fair to ask.

You know, the UCP during the pandemic has failed our long-term care residents, and 1,600 continuing care residents passed away from COVID-19. That's a tragedy that is not lost on anybody in this province, Mr. Speaker. Just doing a short calculation, it's a horrendous amount of people who passed away unnecessarily and probably as a direct result of COVID-19, many of whom would still be alive even if they had other chronic conditions.

That is one of the reasons, I believe, that the government is undertaking a close look at continuing care in this province, and rightly so. Whether or not this bill will address the failings of the long-term care situation in this province during the pandemic is something that we'll try to ascertain in our discussions throughout the debate of this bill.

Now, one of the major elements, Mr. Speaker, that I have seen and that jumped out at me is something that maybe contravenes the minister's claim that this is a person-centred approach to long-term care. It's found in the transition, let's say, or the stated objective or the goal the government has to increase the number of individuals who are receiving care in long-term situations versus through home care. The minister's stated goal is that they would be looking to have a shift, a significant shift, of about 9 per cent, an overarching goal to have a shift from continuing care to home care. Specifically, the goal is to shift the current share of 61 per cent long-term home care residents and 39 per cent family-based care residents to become 70 per cent home care and 30 per cent facility care, a 9 per cent shift.

Now, on the face of it, Mr. Speaker, that may be something that's a laudable goal. Of course, most people want to live at home as long as they possibly can, provided their physical functions and mental capacities and so forth and family abilities allow them to do that or even, you know, with assistance and help that may be provided through government home care. That's a significant number of people, though: a 9 per cent shift from the current 70 per cent home care to 30 per cent facility care.

In looking at that, the government has said that there would be a saving of \$452 million a year, close to half a billion dollars a year, that they say would redirect to long-term care, increasing direct hours of long-term care, a laudable goal in and of itself. However, indeed, the devil is often in the details. If you're looking at extracting \$452 million and having that money available, it's coming from somewhere. So is it actually something that's going to be a saving to the government, or is it just a download onto the families of individuals who will now be expected to pay the difference in the long-term care of their loved one at home?

It will most likely end up being a significant privatization effort on the part of the government, and this is where they expect, I believe, their savings to come through. It will come through the lower wages that individuals might receive working in home care

versus what you'll see in a long-term care facility, where you may have public servants working and serving the individual family members who happen to be in the long-term care.

I really have a significant amount of concern, Mr. Speaker, about this so-called shift of residents from long-term care facilities, or government facilities, into a home-care situation. I don't imagine that the government is going to be looking to move people who are in long-term care right now into a family situation unless, you know, that is something that's possible to do. But over time and gradually this is their effort, to shift away from a long-term care situation. My concern is that this is being done with the priority in mind of saving money and not necessarily realizing or giving full value to the burden that it may be placing on families.

Indeed, I'd be concerned if the government was looking to counsel families to opt for a situation of home care, which may save the government money but may not necessarily be a workable solution for a family who would dearly love to have their loved one live with them but doesn't necessarily trust that they're going to end up being supported as well as they need to be if the family member does actually stay at home receiving home care. Once again, the devil is in the details. There is an assessment that will be done, of course, to determine how much money an individual in home care receives in supports so that they are assisted and they're able to function in the home. It's a debatable point, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not the rules will be tilted in such a way that it makes it difficult for the hours of care that an individual needs at home to be actually adequate and that the shortfall, the extra burden of care, will be shifted onto the family members in a way that they are really not capable of adopting, but the government is encouraging that to save money.

5:40

I think a valid question, Mr. Speaker, to ask is: will family members be faced with a difficult situation where the government is hoping to encourage them to avoid a long-term care institutional situation and opt for a home-care situation? Yet until that family actually experiences the amount of money they'll get in support or how many hours of care they can expect in support or how much indeed it's useful – I think it's something useful to ask. [Interjection] I see the minister wishing to intervene. I happily give way.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for raising some of those issues. Some of them I'm happy to speak to as we go through the debate. I recognize this is a new act that's just being seen and assessed by members of this House. I greatly appreciate the members on all sides understanding the importance as we move forward for this.

On a couple of issues, you know, I fully appreciate that the act is just that; it's a framework. It's just that: a framework. A lot of the items that the hon. member is speaking to in regard to the specific levels of care, the hours of care, how that care specifically is going to be provided: that will be in the regulations, Mr. Speaker. We've already started working through the regulations with continuing care providers and community care and home-care providers, all of the above, recognizing that we need to make the transformation, and this is the first step.

One of the advantages – oh, I'd like to point out to the hon. member that in the preamble there's a lot detail which actually focuses on what's important.

The Speaker: Maybe perhaps the hon. member would offer you the opportunity to intervene again, in which you would have another additional minute.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd invite the input of the minister at a future point in debate as well should he have other interventions to make and bring some greater detail to the subject at hand.

I once again will express my concerns, though. I realize that there will be regulations governing much of the questions that I'm asking about, but these are concerns, Mr. Speaker, that are something that any Minister of Health, when bringing in such a piece of legislation regarding the care of our seniors in particular, had better pay attention to. It's a very, very sensitive matter and something that every voter in this province and their grandchildren will want to know is very, very carefully being treated as a person-centred matter, as the minister claims.

If indeed there is a hint that services are being downloaded to families who are possibly ill equipped to handle them or will be unfairly burdened or won't be properly compensated to allow them to provide the services in a home-care situation that their family member needs, there will be a huge outcry, Mr. Speaker. We all know that there's a plethora of studies that are done to show how burned out, particularly now, home-care providers and family members who are providers of services to individuals who need care at home are feeling. It's not a situation that is – it needs the compassion of everybody here in this Legislature to understand that certainly everybody wants to be living at home, where we're with family members as long as possible, but that costs money there, too, and it shouldn't be something just downloaded. [interjection] The minister indicates he wishes to intervene. I happily give way.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep my comments within a 60-second time frame. I greatly appreciate the comments of the hon. member, who is raising concerns about, you know, the support of family members and friends, who are critical to supporting our seniors and those with needs who are going to be looked after in this space. I'd like to point out the preamble where, you know, one of the key elements is: "whereas family and friends who act as caregivers play a significant role in the lives of continuing care residents." Mr. Speaker, we are recognizing that in the preamble.

One thing about this act: what it does is that it actually pulls in not only continuing care but home care and designated service living, all these acts in different places into one place. Now, much of the detail that the hon. member is looking for is in regulations. I would like to point out that they're already in regulations today, but as part of our commitment to additional home care we see in Budget '22 and our response to the FBCC, we'll be able to provide more details at that point in time.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that information. Now, given the \$452 million in savings that the minister is claiming that the shift would save annually, I'm certainly looking forward to a breakdown of that number, to see exactly where those savings occur and what the shortfall, if any, in care is the result of those savings, of that \$452 million, nearly half a billion dollars, taken out of the system. Who's making that up? Is the burden being placed on families, or are there going to be fewer services offered? Will there be criteria that make it difficult for a family member to qualify for the same level of services that they've received while in long-term care? It begs the question: if there are savings of that amount, what is the breakdown? How are those savings happening? Is it because you're not using a professional labour force in the long-term care facility that costs more than somebody you might hire in your home? Is that indeed where that saving happens? That's something I think the public would like to know. [interjection] The minister may intervene.

Mr. Copping: If I could provide a direct answer to that question. You know, I assume you're referring to the FBCC report. Really, what it is, you know, so the hon. member knows, is that there is currently about 20 per cent, ballpark, of individuals who go into a continuing care setting, into a congregate care setting who don't actually need to be there if they had more support at home. It is actually more expensive for them to be in a continuing care setting because, quite frankly, the reason that they're there is because they either don't have supports for providing food, shovelling snow, that type of thing. They don't actually quite need the level of health care supports, so if we can keep them at home longer, then there will actually be savings.

But so that the hon. member knows, the overall cost to the system will actually be going up, right? It's savings of – if we don't change the model, those costs are actually going to be higher, but the reality is that we'll need to put more money into this model for continuing care and to provide care for individuals at home, but the savings are by shifting the model, and we're going to reinvest that into health for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member has a minute and 40 seconds remaining.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister's remarks, and I do believe he does have the best interests of humanity at heart, of our seniors and those in long-term care under his jurisdiction. However, sometimes, when creating new mechanisms, it's not the minister's heart that's involved in it; it's the Treasury Board and Finance minister's knife that gets involved. Those two can act at crosspurposes. I want to make sure that the minister knows that for those family members who are receiving care right now or other family members of those who are receiving the care, there's no wrath that is greater than a family member who sees that their senior citizen has been wronged. I think that we can count on the minister keeping that uppermost in mind, and we certainly will do so as we look forward to more details and debate on this incredibly important piece of legislation that touches every family in this province.

You know, as far as far as the nuts and bolts of the operational side of things, I'll certainly get into more detail as we progress in various stages of debate. We can look at how the government handled the outbreaks in some of the continuing care facilities, which resulted in significant deaths, what the fines for operators were, what reporting responsibilities there were, but there's lots more to dig into.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Interventions

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I could indulge the House just for one brief moment, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Health and the Member for Edmonton-McClung. It is so nice when interventions can actually help raise the level of decorum. [some applause] I'm not sure it was that good, but I do appreciate it when interventions are used in the most appropriate way and the level of decorum is raised.

I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore rising.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps if that keeps going, I will attempt to keep that momentum moving around interventions.

5:50

Debate Continued

Mr. Nielsen: You know, Mr. Speaker, I must admit, as our time winds down here this afternoon, that I do rise in a little bit of

frustration with Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm always interested in reading the legislation. What does it say? What doesn't it say? And, more importantly, what are we saying about it? So I was listening very intently when the Minister of Health gave his opening remarks on the bill. One of the first things I heard was that these are some of the first steps towards changing things.

Well, I know that my colleague and critic for seniors kind of brought this up a little bit earlier: there was some touting before this bill was brought to us around some transformational changes. I'll be honest. Bill 11 is not transformational – okay? – especially since the minister started with the opening comments of, you know, first steps.

The other comment that I caught that, you know, I'll be honest, always tends to give me some concerns is around the word "efficiencies." That tends to sometimes be an excuse to do as little as possible, and when we're talking about our seniors, the folks that built this province – and we get to enjoy everything that they have built – I think we should be striving at every opportunity to be able to provide them a level of care that they deserve, that they've earned. So when I hear that word, "efficiency," I must admit that I get a little nervous.

You know, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was talking a little bit earlier about, some of the money that might become available as a result of some of these changes, it's just part of my nature to ask: well, how did we get there? What did we do to be able to free up this money, and what were maybe some of the consequences of that? I certainly hear – you know, Edmonton-Decore is blessed with six different facilities of different levels. I have a very significant seniors population. I get a chance to try to interact with them as much as I humanly can, and I always hear a little bit about some of the shortcomings, you know: well, it would be great if we got that.

I know the pandemic has certainly shown a level of shortcomings, I guess, in terms of how we need to be looking at things. You can certainly look, from an economic perspective, around just simply the health care workers that are at these facilities and some of the only part-time positions that are available. You know, as the pandemic progressed, we saw where we literally had to shut the door on employees being able to work at multiple facilities. I've always said that when a person has a full-time job, they're paid reasonably well and they have benefits, things like that, the economic argument for that, but there's also that safety argument. You have workers simply at one facility. Does that mean, then, that we have to be able to provide those facilities the type of funding that they need to be able to maintain that type of workforce?

As my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre talked about earlier, you know, our seniors population is going to be growing. There's going to be a larger need for that in the future, and we have to be able to provide that level of service. We certainly heard in news reports over the course of the pandemic where, you know, maybe seniors were only getting one bath a week. I really think that we can do better than one bath a week.

I've certainly heard concerns that have come into my office over the years where, you know, a resident has needed something, and because of a lack of staffing it was several hours before they were

actually able to get to that individual. I'm certainly not blaming the employees. They're doing whatever they possibly can, but as they say, there's only one of them with two hands and there's only so much that they can handle. I think we really need to look at that.

One of the other comments through the intervention that I listened to was about rolling out through the regulations in terms of how things will go. Now, I'm not necessarily going to beat up on the minister on this one, but I certainly heard in the past from members of the government and the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature, when roles were reversed, who were very, very, very critical of the government at the time when they would say: well, you'll see these changes come out through regulations. And here we now have the shoe on the other foot, and we certainly see a lot of things that are coming out in regulations. I suppose that's just me getting a little bit hung up again on the language. Again, it just always gives me pause, because once the legislation is passed, there's not much that I can do in terms of, you know, a regulation coming out, and maybe that's not exactly going to fit, and I'm not able to really address that matter going forward.

One of the things that I did key in on with my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, of course, was the review that was completed in 2021. He brought up a number of points about what was in that review. I hate to say this, Mr. Speaker, but I have seen a little bit of a pattern here, you know: how many more panels do we need to strike? How many more reports do we need to commission, to then have them get placed on a shelf to collect dust, and we don't do anything with them? When we're looking at that review, I'm not seeing that reflected in the bill in terms of, you know, the things that we need to do.

Frankly, I can't remember if this was in that review or not, but one of the things that I've heard loud and clear, through people and organizations, is around a seniors advocate. I know we rolled that into the Health Advocate, but that position has fallen significantly short of what seniors need. Because that position now is basically – there's too much to try to pay attention to around that whereas an individual specifically dedicated to advocating for seniors is able to focus in on that. Unfortunately, I think the position as a whole has kind of drowned that voice out. You know, I really would have liked to have seen – and I certainly know that the government has heard about this – a move towards reintroducing a seniors advocate as an independent office. They have the ability to be able to advocate for the rights of seniors and not be held back in their comments.

At the end of the day, this is about creating a living standard that we can offer to our seniors, again, who built our province. So I'm hoping that that call has been heard and that perhaps we might get an opportunity to be able to have a discussion maybe during Bill 11. Maybe there's something that we can look at putting in there. I know that I would certainly work with the minister on that to re-create that seniors advocate . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1)(c) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	525
Introduction of Guests.....	525
Members' Statements	
Federal Climate Plan.....	525
Cost of Living.....	525
Military Children.....	525
Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets.....	526
Lesser Slave Lake Constituency Update.....	526
Economic Indicators.....	526
Electric Vehicles.....	527
Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge.....	527
Budget 2022 and Alberta's Future.....	527
Oral Question Period	
Fuel Prices and Cost of Living.....	528
Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations.....	528, 529
Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase.....	529
Rural Emergency Medical Services.....	530
Fuel Prices.....	530
School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary.....	531
Pipeline Development and Energy Industry Advocacy.....	531
Site Rehabilitation Program.....	532
Addiction, Mental Health, and Social Supports.....	532
Driving Back to Work Program.....	533
COVID-19 Testing.....	533
Provincial Campground Cancellation Fees.....	534
Education Concerns.....	535
Introduction of Guests.....	535
Notices of Motions.....	535
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act.....	535
Bill 14 Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.....	535
Tabling Returns and Reports.....	536
Tablings to the Clerk.....	536
Orders of the Day.....	537
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 5 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.....	537
Second Reading	
Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022.....	543
Bill 11 Continuing Care Act.....	550
Statement by the Speaker	
Interventions.....	555

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca