



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 30, 2022

Day 18

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

Government Motions

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

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

[Adjourned debate March 29: Mr. Nicolaides]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 18? The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak on Motion 18 and to add to the comments of my colleagues on just how damaging a carbon tax is to the lives of everyday Albertans. I'm proud of the many things that our government has done, but our first act as government is on top of that list. Our first act, as promised to Albertans, was to repeal the NDP's job-killing, investment-crushing carbon tax. Promise made, promise kept.

Now here we are three years later with a carbon tax forced on Albertans once again by a government even more out of touch with everyday families than the NDP were. The audacity of the federal Liberals to raise this tax now when the cost of everything in Canada is going up. Record inflation, just inflation, and their response? "Let's make it more expensive," Madam Speaker.

Now, I just want to make it clear: climate change is real. Human activity has contributed to the changing of the climates. There is no dispute on that; what there is dispute on is how we approach it. You can be pragmatic or you can be ideological, but make no mistake; there is a huge difference between pragmatic and ideological. They're not the same. If you're pragmatic, you're a practical individual. That means you're solution focused. Examples of this are what we've done in the oil sands. We have seen innovation and technology come together to reduce emissions in meaningful ways. Those are pragmatic solutions, Madam Speaker. Some examples are carbon capture, utilization, and storage. We are global leaders in CCUS technology. That is a solution to climate change. That is a real, meaningful, actionable solution, carbon capture, utilization, and storage.

Some other exciting things that we've done to demonstrate this pragmatic approach to climate change are the partial upgrading to avoid diluting the bitumen, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas emissions; advanced oil sands recovery to utilize less natural gas. This is what responsible energy producers do. This is what Alberta energy producers do, Madam Speaker. You know what else we do? You know what else is a practical solution? Taxing real emitters. You see, Alberta was actually the first jurisdiction to tax carbon. The difference was that we did not tax Martha and Henry for heating their home in February. That is so dysfunctionally wrong. But what they did do is tax the real emitters, and that's how

Albertans and Conservatives put a price on carbon. That's a practical solution.

But you know what's not practical? That which is ideological. Ideologues embrace the cult of personality, and in the course of doing so they end up worshipping on the altar of a teenage girl from Europe, idealizing and living vicariously through every tweet. That's what ideologues do, Madam Speaker. [interjection] I'd like to defer to the hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Speaker and to the hon. member. I was enjoying your remarks, and the difference between being practical and ideological: that makes sense to me. I know that you know that the folks across the way haven't seemed to have learned a thing. One of the big reasons they got fired after one term in office was because of the carbon tax, and they seem to be a big fan of it still, so they haven't learned a lot. I mean, you can talk about whatever you want, but I would like to hear about something that you have spent a good part of the last couple of years on: your area of expertise, your ministry, how this affects natural gas and electricity prices and just how the carbon tax works into that. I think it's a matter of great interest for whatever Albertans are watching, and maybe the rest of us will learn something.

The Deputy Speaker: A quick interjection from the Speaker. Just a reminder to all members that even on interjections you are to speak through the Speaker, not directly to another member.

The hon. member.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the intervention. Yeah. This is a great question because, in fact, it is this childlike enthusiasm for a carbon tax that has been extremely detrimental to the natural gas and electricity industry. I'll tell you why, and I can sum it up in one statement, one question. Do you know who loves a carbon tax? Vladimir Putin. He loves a carbon tax. Do you know who else loves a carbon tax? The dictators in Saudi Arabia, the dictators in Venezuela, the dictators in Syria. They love a carbon tax because that makes companies in western democracies reluctant to invest in thermal energy, because of, like I said, this childlike enthusiasm for job-crushing carbon taxes. That then makes us tied into autocrats like Putin. In fact, this is – you know, it is Ukrainian blood that flows through those pipelines, because Europe is addicted to Russian oil. We can't get off Russian oil because we don't have global energy security, and we don't have global energy security because of the radical left. That's why we're here today, and that's why I ask everybody to embrace supporting Motion 18.

You know, I want to go back to where I was on the ideologues. There are some other things we have to talk about. When you're an ideologue, you do things like invite Extinction Rebellion into the classroom. That's what an ideologue does. By the way, the Member for ...

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Nally: Exactly. Shame.

... Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said that ideologically radical activist groups like Extinction Rebellion have a place in the classroom. Ideologues want Extinction Rebellion teaching our children. Well, here's what they teach our children, Madam Speaker. They would teach them how to block rail lines. They would teach them how to shut down air travel with drones. They would teach them how to shut down subways, how to vandalize public buildings with red paint. Bringing Extinction Rebellion does not move the needle on climate change.

It also brings us to the question of – ideologues think that we should charge Martha and Henry to heat their home in the winter, and we think this is so fundamentally wrong.

That brings us to the whole question of utilities. We've seen some exciting conversations in here. You know, everybody in Alberta knows that the NDP raised the price of everything when they were in government, and nowhere was that more true than electricity. Everything that they did had the unintended consequence of raising prices. They got rid of coal.

Mr. Reid: Intended.

Mr. Nally: Intended. Thank you.

They got rid of coal. And what was the consequence there? Well, the price of electricity went up. I won't dispute the fact that there are benefits to getting out of coal. What I would dispute is the pace at which they made us get out of coal. It was a pace which Albertans could not handle.

Then they come in here, Madam Speaker, and gaslight us. They stand up in this House, after bringing in the carbon tax and making utilities more expensive, and they gaslight us by saying: how can you drive up electricity prices? They try to blame the members on this side of the House. Well, I've done a lot of door-knocking. Apparently, so have the NDP. If the NDP did half as much door-knocking as they do talking about it, they would actually know that Albertans have good memories. Albertans know who brought in the carbon tax. Albertans know who made everything more expensive, the Alberta NDP.

Now, when I was younger – I don't talk about this piece very much. I was 21 years old. I was a single dad. I was raising a little girl on my own. I went to school full-time. I worked part-time. I didn't live paycheque to paycheque, Madam Speaker; I lived hand to mouth. I remember the humiliation of having \$16 in the bank. You can't take that out at an ATM, so I had to go in to the teller, and I had to say: how much can I take out without closing the account? And she said: \$15. So I took out 15 bucks, and I went to IGA. Remember, IGA wasn't the cheapest grocery store. But I could walk there. I didn't have to start a vehicle and spend gas driving to the cheaper location.

I remember what it's like to live hand to mouth. I remember the difference that \$50 on your utility bill because of a carbon tax makes. You know, Madam Speaker, I don't think that they remember on that side of the House, and part of the reason is because there are too many champagne socialists.

Now, if you're sitting here wondering what a champagne socialist is, I actually looked it up in Wikipedia.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Wikipedia?

Mr. Nally: I know. I know. Unassailable are the definitions in Wikipedia.

Now, "it is a popular epithet that implies a degree of hypocrisy, and it is closely related to the concept of the liberal elite." Does that sound familiar?

7:40

Mr. Jason Nixon: Google the socialism.

Mr. Nally: Well, one and the same: that's them.

Now, we're talking about individuals that like to wear \$15,000 watches. I know you're thinking of Jagmeet Singh, and you're also thinking about his expensive rocking chair. In what world is it acceptable for a politician to accept a gift of an extremely overpriced and expensive rocking chair? But that is the fallacy of the champagne socialists.

Mr. Jason Nixon: That's the leader of their party.

Mr. Nally: Exactly. That's who they take their marching orders from. And let me tell you: that leader, while he sits in his overpriced rocking chair, supports the carbon tax, because he wants to make it more expensive for everyone.

Now, on April 1 it's April Fool's Day, and we will see another increase to the carbon tax courtesy of the Alberta NDP and their friends and allies Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh. Let me tell you: it's not going to be a joke, Madam Speaker. It is going to make everything more expensive for Albertans.

Now, this is awkward for the NDP. This is awkward because they try to champion themselves as the champion of the everyday Albertan, and they're trying to bring up the cause of inflation and cost of living. Well, this is their opportunity to demonstrate that they represent Albertans, but if they support our motion, then they will effectively be admitting that their carbon tax was wrong and ineffective. But the other side of the coin is that if they vote against our motion, then they'll be talking through both sides of their mouth because they'll be standing up in the Chamber saying, "Why are you making everything more expensive?" but they'll be voting to support a carbon tax. Madam Speaker, where is the manufactured outrage that we know they're good at? Where is it? The silence is deafening.

Let's be very clear. The very intent of a carbon tax is to monetarily incentivize different behaviour. Now, I don't know about you, but when it's cold in February, you can't monetarily incentivize me to turn the heat down, and you can't monetarily incentivize Martha and Henry to turn the heat down. It simply is a broken policy, and it doesn't work.

I'm all for seeing emissions reduced, which is why our government does have additional charges on large emitters. That's the pragmatic solution that I mentioned, Madam Speaker. But what I do not and never will stand for is taxing a single parent for heating their home in winter or taxing seniors to heat their home in winter. The irony: claiming to care about the affordability for families while backing a policy that at its very core is meant to make life more expensive.

Now, I'm going to take you back to the last campaign, Madam Speaker. If you recall, it was buried somewhere in our campaign commitments that we were willing to support tolls in appropriate situations, where it made sense. The NDP took that message of being pragmatic and using tolls where it made sense, and they went on – I think they were on Minister Schweitzer's tour bus. They rode across the province . . .

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'll just remind you that names are certainly not appropriate in this Chamber. I'm sure you'll just apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Nally: I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: They were on that tour bus, and they were driving around the province, Madam Speaker, and they were talking – and they were actually doing more of the gaslighting, because instead of telling Albertans that, you know, we supported it where it made sense, they were telling Albertans that they were going to have to pay tolls to take their kids to play soccer. Do you remember that? Soccer moms were going to be tolled to go to soccer practice.

Hockey dads were going to be tolled every time they went to hockey practice.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's the carbon tax.

Mr. Nally: Absolutely. You nailed it. That's exactly what they did. What the Leader of the Opposition forecasted at the time was the carbon tax, because Albertans are currently tolled. We're tolled when we start the car. We're tolled when we turn the heat up. Madam Speaker, everything is more expensive because the NDP implemented a toll on everything that we do.

Madam Speaker, we'll go back to the discussion of energy security. The truth is that this raise could not come at a worse time. In fact, along with this raise comes more of the ideology from this angry left, and they have actually – the federal NDP have adopted the same policy that the provincial NDP are supporting, which is a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. It's really quite disturbing.

I'm going to share a story with you. Minister Guilbeault was actually in Calgary consulting with the generators on a clean energy future, and Minister Guilbeault said: what can the federal government do to incent more renewable energy to come to Alberta? Do you know what the generators said? "You can do nothing – do nothing – but get out of the way because there is literally a tsunami of renewable energy coming at this province. They're coming here because of our market-based approach, and the worst thing that you could do is take away that incentive for them to come here."

Well, guess what, Madam Speaker. That's exactly what they did, their ideologically driven agenda. They will take away the incentive. They will get rid of the market-based approach that we have. The one thing that Minister Guilbeault should not have done to incentivize renewable energy he did by bringing forward the net-zero 2035 electricity grid, which, by the way, is the exact same policy that the NDP brought forward. There is no path forward for a net-zero electricity grid except through higher prices and decreased reliability.

Madam Speaker, I cannot support this left-wing, ideologically driven agenda to support a carbon tax that makes everything in this province more expensive for Albertans. I encourage everyone on this side of the House to support Motion 18, and I would like to encourage the NDP to support Motion 18. I would encourage you. Stop looking at your feet. Stop looking at your screens. Look up and engage and embrace Motion 18, because you will send the message . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Your time is done. However, just a reminder that you are to direct your comments through the chair and not to other members of the Assembly.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 18? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Motion 18, which reads:

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

Thanks to the minister for sponsoring this motion.

Madam Speaker, Albertans have been faced with numerous challenges, especially over the past two years from the world-wide pandemic. The increase of the federally imposed carbon tax by the Prime Minister of Canada will only hurt families and businesses even further. Calgary-East constituents will be ever so devastated

by this action and the imposition of new and additional taxes. Many members that are supported by provincial programs and benefits will be mainly affected by this decision.

Madam Speaker, the increasing carbon tax is going to result in inflation, which will have a significantly negative impact on households and businesses who are already stressed to make ends meet. In this time of increasing inflation caused by the federal government's inflationary policies, the economic and fiscal costs of this planned carbon tax increase will be significant for all Albertans. It's unacceptable that our federal government is thinking of increasing the carbon taxes, especially when families are recovering from the effects of the pandemic. The anticipated 25 per cent carbon tax hike will no doubt harm Albertans and the economy at a time when the province is still recovering.

Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer recently revealed the terrible impact of the Liberal-NDP government's growing carbon tax on Alberta's households, demonstrating that once the impact of the carbon price hits the economy, the majority of Albertans will be faced with financial challenges. The rise in the carbon price is mainly a penalty for Albertans who heat their homes in our cold winters, drive their kids to school, run a business, and contribute greatly to the economy.

7:50

This goes to show that the majority of Albertans will end up paying much more for their bills and daily expenses, which is unacceptable. A greater carbon price will cause the Canadian economy to decline by 2 per cent, resulting in the loss of approximately 184,000 jobs in Canadian employment as well as a \$1,540 income loss for the majority of Canadians. A higher carbon price in Alberta will mean a 2.4 per cent drop in Alberta's GDP, which is an \$8.3 billion loss and anticipated 30,139 job losses by 2030.

The carbon tax hike of \$50 per tonne of carbon dioxide from April 1 will add around 2 cents per litre to pump prices and will rise yearly to \$170 per tonne in 2030. According to the Bank of Canada the projected rise in the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne would boost inflation by an estimate of .5 per cent despite the fact that inflation is already at a 30-year high. The federal government and their cohorts from the NDP must abolish their carbon tax hike and stop adding more challenges for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, just recently it has been announced that beginning April 1, 2022, Albertans will see the price of gas and diesel drop by 13.6 cents per litre with the removal of the provincial tax. Furthermore, the Climate Leadership Act has been repealed by the provincial government as an act to remove spending restrictions on the existing carbon tax revenue.

Through the introduction of this motion we want the federal government to know that we are fully opposed to the proposed carbon tax hike. The Alberta government is not ready to slow down the economic progress that we are seeing. Our balanced budget and striving to support all Albertans will not be defeated by this insane tax hike.

Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program to help Albertans manage higher natural gas prices. An increase in the budget for the next three years will support teachers and address cost pressures in transportation as well as growth in enrolment. Most importantly, Albertans will be provided education and training opportunities they need to prepare for the workforce and for postsecondary operations.

Madam Speaker, we can clearly see that Budget 2022 ensures that Alberta remains one of the most affordable provinces in Canada to live and work in. Alberta's lower cost of living, combined with relatively high average earnings and the lowest overall taxes, means

Albertans keep more money in their pockets. We want the federal government to hear our message loud and clear, that what Alberta needs right now is not additional carbon taxes but to focus on Alberta's economic recovery and find ways to make it possible for Albertans to have more money in their pockets.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 18?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks to close debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to talk about my motion today. Thank you to the hon. members who've taken some time to speak about this important motion. I do appreciate the opportunity to quickly close debate on it, and I do hope that it will enjoy the support of the Legislature shortly to send a clear message to the federal Liberal government, particularly Justin Trudeau and some of the extreme environmentalists that are around him, that it is not acceptable to the people of Alberta for them to increase the carbon tax on Friday and to recognize the consequences of that on the people of this province.

Most importantly, though, Madam Speaker, I do think it is an opportunity for the NDP to be able to rise also inside this Chamber and show that they stand with Albertans and not their close ally Justin Trudeau. I understand that for them the carbon tax issue has been a significant ideological issue for their party. It's something, unfortunately, that they hid from Albertans when they ran in the 2015 election campaign but then became a major part of their government and the policy that came from their government in 2015.

It would be hard, of course, as the hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity said, for the NDP to completely walk away from it. But, at the end of the day, the NDP have to take a moment to recognize – and based on some of the questions that they've asked in question period and the letters that they present on behalf of their constituents, we do know that they know that the cost of living, particularly the costs of fuel, electricity, and heating, are having an impact on Albertans, including the NDP's constituents, and that they want to see action from the Alberta Legislature.

Certainly, sending a clear message to the federal government at the very least that they should stop with their consumer carbon tax increase this Friday and try to provide some relief – similar to what the Alberta government has done on the same day, when the Alberta government will remove the Alberta fuel tax to try to help as much as we can. But, unfortunately, I suspect, Madam Speaker – we'll see what happens – that the NDP will continue with their ideological approach when it comes to carbon taxes, which were, frankly, a disaster.

When the NDP was in power, as I said, they hid from Albertans that they intended to do this tax, then came in and rammed it through despite the fact that the vast majority of Albertans were against it. Certainly, the Official Opposition of the day was against it and was sounding the alarm. Some of the consequences that we see right now as far as the cost increase and the impact of the costs of everything going up: as the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity just said, it has a significant impact on heat, on fuel for transportation costs, and on electricity. But it also increases the cost of everything in daily life, from when you go grocery shopping to any product that you may buy to your Christmas presents that you may buy. Everything in our society comes by train or car or airplane, all of which require fuel and all of which are impacted by

the decisions of the NDP and their Liberal alliance inside Ottawa to bring in a carbon tax.

But if, Madam Speaker, there had been any environmental gain as a result of that decision by the NDP in Alberta or the leader of their party in Ottawa, Mr. Singh, or, again, their close ally Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government, from those policies, that would at least be something that could be pointed to. I don't know if some of the members who were not here in the last Legislature will recall this, but the NDP leader, who was then the Premier, the now Leader of the Opposition, had an interview at the end of the year, after bringing forward the carbon tax, the signature policy of her government, and was asked by reporters at year-end interviews how much in GHG emissions, how much in emissions, how much impact there had been on the environment as a result of the decision to bring in the carbon tax, and she could not state a number. She could not state a number on her signature policy. You know why? Because their policy had no impact.

B.C., that brought in a carbon tax in the early 2000s, has not seen any decrease in GHG emissions as a result of that carbon tax. Transportation emissions continue to go up inside the province because people have to drive despite the fact that the NDP leader, the then Premier, told them to take the bus. My constituents don't have buses in rural Alberta. But there was no environmental impact as a result of that, none at all. Their leader couldn't even say it. I mean, can you imagine? Your signature policy, that you put onto the people of Alberta, that has raised their expenses on everything, and in a year-end interview – I mean, a year-end interview. It's not like it's a press conference. You're sitting down there and you're prepared to talk about all your accomplishments of the year, and the Premier, the now NDP leader, could not even point to GHG reductions that had happened as a result of that. It's shockingly disappointing, and it has not worked. It has not worked.

Now, what we see is that this government ran on a platform to get rid of the NDP carbon tax, and unfortunately the federal government is continuing to force a carbon tax on our citizens. Their carbon tax, frankly, is a little better than what the NDP carbon tax was, at least as far as rebates to Albertans. The NDP certainly took more money from Alberta pockets than the federal government is doing. Nevertheless, the federal government is still taking money out of Albertans' pockets at the very moment when Albertans and all Canadians are crying out for relief on areas like fuel and heating costs and electricity. The federal government could at the very least not raise it this year and sit back and see if they could help.

8:00

Now, do you know what the NDP spent it on? Some of you may not know this. The NDP spent a tremendous – in fact, when I became environment minister, I had to clean up a lot of this mess. They focused their time on buying people light bulbs and buying them shower heads. As rural Albertans we were very frustrated. I see the hon. member from Athabasca. He'll know. He lives in a pretty remote community, like myself.

Mr. van Dijken: They even came to install it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Correct. Yeah, they would come and install them. They paid an Ontario company to come and install the light bulbs and shower heads.

But the problem in rural Alberta – by the way, we were comfortable buying our own light bulbs and shower heads – was that the shower heads did not work under well water pressure. The NDP were so disconnected with large portions of this province that they didn't know that we have wells and there would be different

pressure issues on that. So they would install these shower heads, and they wouldn't work at all.

That's what they were doing with Alberta's climate change money. That's what they were doing when they stuck on fixed-income seniors increased heating costs, stuck on single moms increased electricity prices on top of the boondoggle that they already created with the electricity system. It made it so that hockey moms and hockey dads had to pay more money to drive their kids to hockey. All that with no benefit at all to the environment. You can't make this stuff up. It's absolutely shocking.

Nevertheless, I will give the NDP this. It was different circumstances at the time as far as inflation and some of the cost impacts that we're seeing right now as a result of the changing economy, what we're seeing take place in Europe. So at the very least the NDP should have the courage today to stand up and send a message to Ottawa today to say that this is not acceptable to Albertans, and they should join with us in making costs easier for Albertans as we navigate through this tough time that the world is facing, our country is facing, and our province is facing. But they won't do that. I think – we're going to know in a few moments – the reason they won't do that, Madam Speaker, is that, at the end of the day, the NDP Party provincially and the NDP Party federally are the same party. They are the same party. The members across from me: the leader of their party is Mr. Singh.

Mr. McIver: Well, Justin Trudeau, really, now.

Mr. Jason Nixon: And now, ultimately, Justin Trudeau, who has signed a coalition pact to be able to keep a minority Liberal government, held up by the socialists in Ottawa, in power to continue to ram through these job-killing policies and make things more expensive for Albertans.

Now, the NDP don't like it when we raise that. You see it during question period, how animated often you will see the Official Opposition get when this is pointed out. I don't blame them. I don't think I would be part of Mr. Singh's party, but they are. They need to explain to Albertans why they would choose to support their federal leader, the Prime Minister, and not Albertans when it comes to a simple motion like this inside the Chamber.

Sadly, we're going to continue, Madam Speaker, to see some of the unfortunate policies that we get from an NDP-Liberal alliance, that are going to continue to make life expensive for the people that we represent. For the NDP, as the hon. associate minister of natural gas said earlier, to be able to stand inside this Chamber and in any way pretend like they're a champion of the people of Alberta and not stand up to what we see coming from the federal government when it comes to climate policy is hypocritical and unacceptable. I do know that Albertans will eventually call on that.

Their friend, close ally Justin Trudeau, who has been shored up now by the leader of their party – leader of their party – unleashed a new climate plan, emissions projection plan yesterday. It's a shocking plan. In fact, I described it to the media as insane. It is completely unachievable. It would reduce economic activity in our province by up to 40 per cent. It would see things like the electricity grid have to remove 80 per cent of GHG emissions by 2030. Eighty per cent. There's no way technologically to do that. The only way that could end up working would increase the cost drastically for Albertans as they are trying to pay their electricity bills, and all Canadians, frankly, with that.

Mr. van Dijken: They're trying to increase electricity . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Exactly. I appreciate the thoughts from the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The NDP, in question period, was talking about wanting to lower the prices and demanding the government do something to lower the prices beyond some of the stuff we're trying at the moment, which is to bring in rebates and try to help Albertans. The single biggest thing the NDP could do to make sure that we can help Albertans on their electricity bills and other bills is to stand with us and tell Ottawa to drop the ridiculous climate policies and their carbon taxes.

You know, one of the things inside the document that was presented by the minister of environment federally, a well-known former member of Greenpeace, who has illegally blockaded buildings before, climbed buildings illegally, and, frankly, has acted completely against the interests of this country when it comes to environmental policy, one of the things that he presented in this, that's supported by the NDP, was the full phase-out of the combustion engine by 2036. What are we going to be? Like Cuba, where we're trading gas lawn mower parts trying to make sure that our cars can work? Madam Speaker, I want you to think about that. The NDP's partner in Ottawa is bringing forward policies to phase out the combustion engine by 2036. It's not that far away.

In fact, they've said that they are going to go so far as to legislate and dictate to Canadians what cars they can buy and what dealerships could sell, starting in just a couple of years, starting with 20 per cent – all the sales from dealerships will have to be 20 per cent electric cars. First of all, it takes six months to even get an electric car right now; second of all, they're not cheap; and third of all, that's insane.

And it's just one of the policies that we see coming forward. No money for oil and gas. No path forward for the energy industry. Most of the investment announced by the federal government in the last 36 hours on this issue is about, quote, investing in transitioning energy workers out of the energy industry, at the same time that we see some of the largest prices for oil and gas anywhere in the world, that the world cries out for our energy resources. The NDP and the Prime Minister should be standing up and saying: Alberta has the solution not only to the energy problems but to the environmental problems right here. But they won't do that.

Instead, they focus on their ideological beliefs, not on Albertans – not on Albertans – and have supported a federal government who is now trying to dictate a target, which this province will not stand for, Madam Speaker, of reducing our economy by up to 40 per cent. Unacceptable. And the NDP has to decide: are they with Albertans, or are they with their leader Mr. Singh in Ottawa and ultimately their now leader Justin Trudeau of their party? Or can they be pragmatic enough to say, "You know what? We may have gotten this one wrong," and at the very least listen to Albertans. I can tell you that the vast majority of Albertans certainly want to see the carbon tax increase stopped this Friday or not happen at all and, frankly, want to see the carbon tax gone once and for all inside this country because it does not work.

Now, the NDP, often when we talk about this, will – actually, I just want to back up real quick, Madam Speaker. We talk about 3 cents on Friday; that's what it would be, the increase per litre, roughly. The plan that the NDP has supported with their friend Mr. Trudeau will result in a 40 – 40; four zero – cent increase a litre for gas inside this country and in our province. Forty cents, Madam Speaker. I don't know what it was when you started driving. It was a little more than that for me but not much more. Forty cents a litre from that. That's where we're headed. So at the very least the NDP should be able to support a pause for some rational thought about what the impact would be of this on Albertans, but sadly I think we'll continue to see the NDP abandon the people of this province and not stand with them today.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 18 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:09 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Pon	Stephan
Fir	Rehn	Toor
Issik	Reid	Turton
Lovely	Rosin	van Dijken
McIver	Rowswell	Walker
Nally	Schulz	Williams
Neudorf	Singh	Yao
Nixon, Jason	Smith	Yaseen
Panda		

Against the motion:

Carson	Feehan	Sabir
EGgen		

Totals:	For – 25	Against – 4
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[Government Motion 18 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this particular piece of legislation. I know it's not the biggest piece that we have before us, but it's still an interesting piece. I'd like to just share with the House a little bit about some of the Blackfoot history around the gem which we are making the official gemstone of the province of Alberta. In the Blackfoot community it is frequently referred to as the buffalo stone, but of course in Blackfoot it's called iniskim. It is a stone which is really the fossilized remains of an ammonite, which is a creature that lived 71 million years ago, or baculite, as it may be called.

There are very interesting stories about the history of the stone that I think are worth talking about. As I mentioned, the stones themselves are somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 71 million years old, and they typically are really only sourced here in the southwestern corner of Alberta and some area around, but it is actually quite unique to this area of the world and has had a very important role in Blackfoot history and is still used in ceremony on a regular basis. I know I received some ammolite from the Blackfoot community when I was Minister of Indigenous Relations and was given a little, little bit of instruction on it, but I have taken some time to make sure I learned a little bit more so I could talk about that today.

In this particular case people, I'm sure, are quite used to seeing the coiled-type ammolite that comes out of the Rocky Mountains on a regular basis. They're quite beautiful. I mean, I certainly know

many people that have bought pieces of it and had them polished or bought polished pieces and displayed them in their homes or in their offices, because they're actually quite engaging. In this case, while it's the same sort of creature, what typically makes the buffalo stone are the linear ones rather than the coiled ones but the same nature. If you look carefully, you can see that there is a creature with cell divisions in it that result in some things.

But if you were to actually try to go look for ammolite in the mountains, you would not recognize it unless you actually had some skill. That's one of the things that the Blackfoot community quite pride themselves on. When you look at the stones, you know, as they exist in nature today, they typically just look like many other stones, because over 71 million years, of course, the outside of the stone has been kind of bled of colour, so you need to have some skill to be able to recognize it. There's a certain pride in the Blackfoot community to be one of the people who can identify and recognize this stone in its natural state.

8:30

Of course, when you scrape off the outside and cut it deep and then polish it, you get the quite engaging, multicoloured, rainbowlike, iridescent stone that we recognize and that you can buy in many places in the world, you know, as ammolite. The stone itself, because it is linear, can sometimes actually have the look as if there is a buffalo in it because the little cell divisions kind of can look like legs in a large-headed animal, so it is often referred to as the buffalo stone.

More than, of course, the appearance, there is a lot to be said about the actual relevance of the stone in the Blackfoot community. One of the elders in the Piikani First Nation, a man by the name of Troy Nolton, has publicly shared this story, so I'm going to share some of it with you. It's not my story, and I don't claim ownership of it. I really do want to recognize Troy Nolton for this story. I was referred to Troy when I was, you know, asking a little bit about the understanding.

Troy's story is that over 1,000 years ago there was a particular Blackfoot clan in the area that we now refer to as southwestern Alberta that was going through an extremely difficult wintertime. The buffalo just weren't accessible, and of course other animals like deer and rabbits and so on were scarce and hard to find. The snow was very deep, and it was very difficult. Then one night one of the members of what we refer to now as the Piikani First Nations – of course, they were all Blackfoot at the time – a young woman, had a dream, and in the dream a spirit visits her and tells her that the Creator has heard her prayers about the starvation of her people, sees the struggle, and has sent to the community a gift and that this gift would come in the form of a stone called iniskim, or buffalo stone, as I've said.

Then the spirit gave her instructions about where to go, where she could obtain the stone and, of course, also instructions about how to obtain the stone and what to do with the stone when it was obtained so that it would be obtained in ceremony and used in ceremony. The spirit indicated that the young woman would be able to hear the stone singing to her. Often in the Indigenous community, knowledge is shared in song, and this is one of those occasions. She woke up in the morning and told her partner, her husband, that she had this dream, and he told her that she must go and find the stone and bring it back to the people because it was a gift of the Creator and would help them in their plight of starvation at the time.

So she headed out, and indeed she did hear the stone as she headed down the valley and followed it and followed it until it got louder and louder and louder and finally brought her to a small stone just sitting there waiting for her. She picked up the stone, brought it back to the camp, presented it to her husband, and told her

husband: this is the gift. And then they had to make some decisions about what to do now. Of course, immediately they then prepared ceremony to accept the gift of the stone into their community through prayer, as she had been instructed by the spirit who visited her.

She said that there were two particular signs that the gift of the stone was in fact going to resolve their problem. The first was that there was going to be a storm that came in from the north. As a result, the community was told to tether down their teepees and to take all their personal belongings in because there was going to be this horrendous storm coming in from the north. The second sign was that the buffalo was going to come in and wander into the camp at night, but they were not to harm the buffalo that night: wait until the storm had come in.

Obedying all of the strictures given to them by the spirit, they did as they were instructed, brought the stone in through ceremony, waited, and indeed the buffalo did come through camp, and the snowstorm did come. In fact, the next morning a large number of buffalo were trapped in a large drift section of snow, and then it was possible, because the buffalo had been trapped by the snow, for the community to go out and hunt the buffalo and to feed their families and to sustain themselves through that terrible, difficult winter.

So you can see that there is a lot of history to this stone for the Blackfoot community, the Blackfoot First Nations in this province, and even to this day it is very important to the community because it is still used in ceremony and often given as a gift to show some respect to the people it is given to and to share Blackfoot history, tradition, and culture with the guests who receive the stone.

I keep my copy of the stone on my desk at the Federal Building alongside other natural stones from the Rocky Mountains and the North Saskatchewan River because all of these represent to me the fantastic land of the province of Alberta and the great benevolence that we have been given to share with each other. As a result, I am quite happy to be able to stand up tonight and to speak to this bill, in which we will be making the decision, although there's been some history of this already in the province, to officially make ammolite the official gemstone of the province of Alberta.

I encourage everybody in the room to go out, learn a little bit more about ammolite, spend some time at the Blackfoot community and share with them the incredible culture and traditions and ceremony which they have sustained through very difficult times, imposed on them through the colonization of North America, yet they have found themselves in this very positive place of respect and self-respect and pride of their future. I certainly would, you know, hope that all the people in this Legislature would share with the Blackfoot community their culture and their expectations of a good future ahead.

Just as happened with the spirit sending the stone to the Blackfoot community in order to sustain the community through rough times, I think that we as members of this province need to reflect on how we help to sustain the Blackfoot community and indeed, of course, all First Nations communities through the difficult times, particularly the difficult times that we have imposed on them as a colonialist society, and seek to pursue some reconciliation with the Blackfoot community so that we can come to a better place, a place of mutual respect, a place based on ceremony, and a place based on achieving a fair, equal, and respectful relationship into the future.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there any other members that wish to join the debate on Bill 6? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for sharing that story. It's

interesting to see how the Blackfoot culture has integrated the ammolite into stories. You know, stories often, of course, are instructive, right? Part of what I gathered from that story you just shared with us is that by listening to the world as it unfolds around you and being present and able to take the time to know those things, then you should be rewarded and could be rewarded with, in that case, sustenance and so forth. It's interesting to not see the story as looking at the stone itself as something to covet – right? – but, rather, to listen to what the story that goes through the stone entails instead.

8:40

I mean, we have a slightly different version of ammolite here in 2022, which is still quite, I think, fair and reasonable. It's been recognized as quite a beautiful gemstone, right? If it's properly cut and polished, it looks very much like an opal, or maybe opals look like ammolite, I guess we could say. The value of it intrinsically and as a commodity, as a jewel, is growing quite a lot. I found it interesting just talking to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview yesterday, and he told me that when he was the economic development minister, they'd had a trade mission to China, and one of the members that came on the trade mission was an ammolite broker from Calgary. I found that quite interesting.

I remember as well, just reflecting right now, while door-knocking that one of my former constituents in the Wellington neighbourhood – so I guess that would be yours . . .

Mr. Carson: West Henday.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. West Henday now.

. . . was also an ammolite broker – I'll tell you where he lives later, okay? – and was very interested in sharing that as a way to develop some commercial operation around Stand Off, Alberta, I believe, if I'm remembering correctly.

In fact, that's where a lot of the ammolite comes from, around the St. Mary River. It takes care of the excavation into the layers between, like, 30 to 60 or even 80 metres down in the strata to them. That's where these ammolite fossils are, right? In fact, that's what they are, from an ancient seabed or a series of seabeds that would have existed tens of millions of years ago, I guess. I don't really know.

Anyway, you know, it's nice for us to look for ways to expand people's knowledge about the natural world when we do choose these emblems. I think that it's instructive in the widest possible way. I think that the importance of including a very strong First Nations element in our curriculum in the province of Alberta must include not just facts and memorizing lists of all the emblems of Alberta but some of the cultural stories and significance, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, looking for that wider meaning for young people to look at our world and see and help us to animate that world around us. I think that is part of what emblems should do. Yeah.

I mean, we certainly are supportive of this initiative, and I hope that we will be able to create an education component to this, a cultural element to it, and indeed an economic element, too. There is, I think, potential for careful, sustainable harvesting and development of ammolite here in the province, and I know there's certainly a good market for it not just in North America but around the world as well, as I had mentioned last night. You know, I saw it being bought and traded in Thailand – right? – and people were very interested in it because of its inherent beauty and rarity and novelty as well. Lots of ways by which we can approach this emblem. I'm certainly happy to support the bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this important piece of legislation, and let me thank both my learned colleagues, the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford and the MLA for Edmonton-North West, for their remarks. I haven't heard the government side participating in this debate, or I would have recognized those colleagues as well. It's my first opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation.

When we designate something as official, we can talk about that in many different ways. I think, one, it highlights that particular thing, that it is important to the cultural, economic, social life of the province. It can highlight the significance of that particular thing to the life of the province, to the heritage of the province, to the culture of the province. In this case this bill designates ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta. When we look into the history and background and its cultural significance, I think it's quite appropriate that we are doing this, and my colleagues highlighted the sacred nature of ammolite in the lands of Blackfoot territory, especially along the St. Mary River of southern Alberta.

I've seen the stone in many places. I may have seen it in my colleague's office. I think that before hearing this debate, before thinking about this bill, I didn't know and think about the 700-million-year-old history of the stone, its official status as a gemstone, that history, where it's found in Alberta, why it's referred to as the buffalo stone, and how Indigenous communities were able to even recognize these stones without this modern technology so many years back. So this provides us with an opportunity to highlight the rich Indigenous heritage. This is one way of doing it.

There are so many other ways that we can do that, and in the spirit of this bill we can inform the work that we need to do in order to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We know that Indigenous people were here from time immemorial. They have a rich history, they have rich traditions, they have wisdom, they have knowledge, and they have skills that we can all learn and benefit from. At the same time, we do know that we have a long history of colonization, that we have a long history of injustices that were imposed upon the Indigenous people. As we move towards a common and prosperous future, we need to think about how we can reconcile with the past, what we can do to make good on the wrongs that were committed during that colonization, what we can do to highlight and revitalize those rich Indigenous cultures and traditions, how we can help them gather that historical evidence, gather that history that we can all learn and benefit from.

8:50

For instance, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned, Indigenous communities were able to recognize this stone's formation without modern technology. Now, I understand that in mining, I guess in the gemstone area, there is commercial development. There is so much development in terms of how we mine them, how we recognize them, how we grade them. There are so many technological developments which were not present, for instance, 100, 200, or 300 years ago. Certainly, there was some wisdom, there were some skill sets within Indigenous communities, within Indigenous people that they used, that they relied on to recognize these things, to collect these things.

Not only that, but I think there is a spiritual significance attached to it. The name "buffalo stone," I guess, represents that in Indigenous communities they have long been hunting, they have long been using buffalo as a source of food, as a source of prosperity, as a source of survival. So these symbolic gestures, these

symbolic designations, in fact, do mean a lot, do create and open opportunities for all of us to learn about Indigenous cultures and traditions. There are so many things that we can do as a government, that we can do as a Legislature to highlight those traditions, to highlight that forgotten history, that often ignored history. We can start essentially from implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

But I guess the attitude that this government had from the very beginning, when they became government, towards Indigenous cultures and communities was – the first thing that they stated their position on was that it's not really important to recognize treaty land. That was recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Those recommendations, I think, were made in the same spirit that this bill is put forward, that we recognize Indigenous communities, we recognize their presence, we recognize our relationship with those communities, their treaties, their rights.

In the four years when we were in government, I think the then Premier, now the Leader of the Official Opposition, made sure that at all public events where government representatives, where ministers of the Crown were speaking, they started their speech, started their remarks by recognizing the treaty lands. Again, it was symbolic, but it has deep meaning for why we do that and why we need to do that, and this government completely abandoned that.

Today, while we are talking about an important gemstone that has significance to Indigenous communities, I hope all members of this House will take this opportunity to recommit themselves to work for, to use their position to further reconciliation, to use their voice at every opportunity to highlight Indigenous culture, Indigenous traditions, and those injustices that were imposed on them, and stand up to voice their support for the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations.

I think this bill is a good piece of legislation. It's a good gesture that we are recognizing ammolite as Alberta's official gemstone, because Alberta's history is Indigenous history. Alberta's culture is Indigenous culture. These communities, these tribes, these First Nations were here long before any of us immigrants were here.

Then a couple of other things that it would have been helpful had the minister made some comments around that. I understand that designating this as the official gemstone highlights the significance of this gemstone. It will also impact how it's viewed by Albertans. It will create relevance in their minds, and it may increase demand for this gemstone in Alberta. Has the government considered how demand will be impacted, and have they consulted with Indigenous communities, Albertans at large about that, how that will be managed?

I think another thing that I want to mention as well is that its designation will certainly highlight its significance, so whatever the decisions we make respecting this, we include Indigenous communities and their voices and we try to educate all Albertans about this and Indigenous history, Indigenous culture, Indigenous traditions, in particular those First Nations who are part of our province.

Again, thank you for listening to me, and thank you to the minister for bringing forward this piece of legislation. On this side of the House we will be supporting this legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

9:00

Ms Issik: Madam Chair, I rise to move that the committee report Bill 6.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Lovely: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 29: Mr. Nally]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 2. I think that we need to take this as an opportunity to talk a little bit about the government's record in terms of finances in this province. I am very concerned that they seem to take delight in having lucked into an international event of rising oil prices. At the same time, they chastise others for the rising costs of inflation, which doesn't make much sense, that you would celebrate one and chastise the other, because, of course, they're quite closely tied together.

I know that, for example, this government has, you know, complained that some of the decisions being made by governments in Canada and indeed around the world around trying to reduce carbon in our atmosphere are such that they feel that we should not be trying to reduce carbon at this time because of inflation. Yet analysis done by people like Trevor Tombe, a professor at the University of Calgary, demonstrated that while, for example, the price of food has gone up 19 per cent over the last seven years, only .4 per cent of that is actually attributable to carbon levies and that, really, what's happening in our world is that we have a situation where certain individuals are gaining more and more wealth, but that wealth is not being shared widely in the public, and the average person doesn't have that kind of wealth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, I think that we need to carefully look at what this government should be doing and take some time to challenge what it is that they are not doing. They are not actually addressing the issues of inflation. I know they sort of make claims that somehow they're going to try to make life cheaper for Albertans, but the vast majority of their actions have actually been to increase prices on Albertans in this province. For example, we have seen a dramatic

increase in utility bills in this province, and this is directly related to the removal of the electricity cap that was put in place by the previous government. We see people's bills go up in many cases by multiples of what they used to pay, people suddenly having to pay \$300, \$400, \$500 more than they used to.

We know, of course, that the government has suggested that they will, for three months only, give \$50 compensation to people in the province. But, of course, if you are paying \$500 a month, \$1,500, and you get \$150 back, that's a pittance. Or, as one member of the government side actually described it, it is paltry and, of course, does not address the inherent issue at all.

You know, we have a government that has just sort of allowed people in the province of Alberta to be victims to the treacherous winds of change that have been occurring over the last little while. We've seen them take the cap off not only utilities but also, for example, insurance, where we see the vast majority of people experiencing dramatic changes in their car and home insurance.

I know that the Minister of Finance has suggested that this year a few of the many companies have started to reduce their rates, but that is only after last year, when they put the rates up dramatically. If you put something up by 10-fold and then you reduce it down by onefold, you still have a ninefold increase. You can celebrate that temporary or late-to-the-game decrease of a little bit by only a few, only a minority of the insurance companies, by the way, a significant minority. It's not like it's even close to being half. It's not even close to being a tenth of the companies in this province.

And they all benefited from this dramatic increase over the last year, which seems a little bit ironic given the fact that things like motor vehicle accidents actually decreased over the last year because people were staying home a lot more than they were in the past. So while actual costs were going down, the price of insurance was going up. You know, it certainly is the kind of thing this government should be complaining about. They like to complain about a .4 per cent increase on our food, but they are not prepared to complain about a 400 per cent increase on our car insurance. You know, it's very problematic that this government has made the decision just to allow people to be subject to these kinds of dramatic changes when we know that the only people that are benefiting are a very small segment of society, and many of those people provide little or no return.

Many of the companies that have made great fortunes over the last couple of years have been companies that pay little and often zero tax here in the province of Alberta, and this government has done nothing to try to resolve that problem. Companies that are not contributing to the well-being of citizens, that do not help us to build our health care, do not help us to build our education yet take huge amounts of money away from our local businesses: I think that that's a big problem. I've spoken about this in the House before. This government really seems to celebrate large, successful international corporations, constantly gives them money, \$4.7 billion in their first year and subsequent monies ever since, and allows them to increase their prices and, quite simply, gouge the citizens of the province of Alberta on a regular basis.

And, at the same time, often those very same companies are actually taking business away from small businesses here in Alberta. One of the things we want people to remember is that small businesses in Alberta actually employ more people than large corporations do, if you add them all up throughout the province. But they're suffering greatly under this government and this government's total lack of action. I've had many small-business people call me and complain about the difficulties they have with this government. I've had people complain about the fact that when they try to get contracts with this government, the government tells them, "No; we're going to go with a large multinational or large

corporation because we can get some kind of a better deal,” which, of course, means that small businesses never will have a chance to actually move forward.

In one case a small local company – it actually wasn’t even all that small – a local Alberta company, found out that they couldn’t even apply for a contract unless they had been receiving other contracts from the government sometime in the last five years. So they actually made a condition. [interjection] Oh, I’m sorry.

Member Loyola: Do you mind?

Mr. Feehan: No. Please go ahead.

9:10

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. As you know, I’ve done a lot of advocacy for small businesses in the community of Edmonton-Ellerslie as well as throughout Alberta, and, yes, the members on the other side like to pretend as if they’re the ones who are doing all they possibly can to help small business here in the province of Alberta, yet throughout the entire pandemic they did absolutely nothing – absolutely nothing – to curb the costs and the economic crisis that small businesses were going through.

Not only that, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but I do believe that when we were in government, we actually lowered the tax rate for small businesses here in the province of Alberta. Now, I wouldn’t mind knowing how your constituents and the people that you interact with actually feel about this.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for the intervention. Sorry; I didn’t see you behind me there.

No. I think what you’ve said is absolutely true, and it continues. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a similar experience that I do, and that is that small businesses are telling us repeatedly that this government is not helping them at a very difficult time and has done nothing in terms of legislation in order to make their lives better.

As I was just speaking to a little while ago, they’re actually putting in rules that make it impossible for them to actually get contracts so that they can actually be successful. If the rule is that you had to have received a contract from the government within the last five years, inevitably all of the small businesses will lose out because they all will be with big companies that have received contracts in five years, and eventually we’ll get to a place where no small business can ever enter in because that five-year period has passed. You know, that’s the kind of thing that I think is just absolutely terrible for this government to allow to happen, in fact for this government to impose.

I want to give some credit here, by the way. I did make numerous phone calls and had numerous conversations with a member of the civil service around the particular incident I’m talking about. They themselves were extremely helpful and responsive, and I really want to congratulate them for being good public servants and helping me to understand, you know, what the problem was and why this company was not getting the contracts that they should get.

Ultimately, we just came to the point where the poor civil servant just had to say: I am sorry; there is nothing we can do; I must tell you I fundamentally agree with your concern about the problem that you’ve identified, but the rules are the rules, and I can’t change anything. So I would like to thank the civil service for trying and making sure that I fully understood what was going on. But they were not able to actually change the rule, and I think that that’s very problematic.

I have had other businesses come to me, for example, and say that they were supposed to be receiving some monies during the

COVID crisis. They made the appropriate applications and did receive money on the first round, but on the second round, without knowing it, they filled in the form and sent it in using an iPad, and it turns out that the government system would not recognize an iPad. I don’t understand the technical reasons why, but it didn’t recognize it, so officially they had not applied when indeed they had applied. So when it was discovered that this was actually a problem with the government’s program – there were multiple small businesses that did not receive the grants that they were supposed to get – even though it was identified as a government issue in terms of their program, the small businesses were still told: well, sorry; you didn’t apply at the time that you were supposed to, so you miss out on the second stage of the grant application.

Even though they clearly were eligible because they had received the first round of the grant application and they had indeed filled in the form but happened to fill it in on an iPad, which many people would, of course, because that’s a functional tool for many small businesses to be carried around while you’re doing your work at the small business and so on, they were still told they were not eligible because they didn’t apply, when, in fact, they had; it’s just that the government did not acknowledge the application. This is the kind of experience I have small businesses coming to me with constantly in this House. It’s become very evident that small businesses do not see this government as pro business. They see this government as pro corporation, which is very different than pro business. These same companies are now coming to me saying that their utility bills are getting to the point where they may drive many of them right out of business.

Here we have, again, a situation where time after time I have members of the business community, the small-business community coming to me in my constituency office and talking about the fact that this government is making life more difficult for them and, in fact, is surrendering local small businesses to the greater power of the large international corporations. You know, it is very much an anti-Alberta kind of stance that this government has taken.

Of course, average families have seen similar kinds of issues in terms of their own personal budget. Of course, they’re all paying more for school fees now because of the changes this government has made to funding schools. They are paying more on their insurance and on their utilities, as I’ve mentioned before. They’re paying more for even their recreation, like going to parks and using Alberta’s great wilderness. All of these kinds of things are happening, and now that we’re getting very close to tax time in this province, they’re finding out that they are paying more than they would have if the government had not deindexed the tax rolls.

Every time they turn around, they’re being slapped down by this provincial government. The only people that are doing well under this provincial government are the people who were doing well before, the international corporations. It certainly is a government that is in favour of wealth accumulation but is not in favour of, you know, average people trying to make a decent living for themselves. We certainly need to see this change, and we need to see this government change in 2023.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 2, are there others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise this evening and, particularly following the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, is always a privilege to be able to do so and hear those comments. I share many of the concerns brought forward by that member and other members of my caucus on this side of the House, particularly around the idea that we see

in this bill, Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, the continuation of this government's decisions to go forward with the \$1 billion tax grab.

Of course, this is a move to tax inflation at a time when we are seeing rates of inflation that recently Statistics Canada measured at around a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. Of course, that's quite a bit higher than what this UCP government's Budget 2022 actually estimated inflation at; they had said about 3.2 per cent. Again, when we look at this idea of bracket creep, we've heard time and time again that the Premier, when with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, when that Premier was a member of the federal Parliament, railed against this idea of bracket creep and called it a pernicious and insidious tax grab, and unfortunately we find ourselves in a situation here where now what he once railed against so often is potentially one of the largest tax grabs that we've seen in some time.

It's interesting to see how we've gotten here, especially and particularly when we find ourselves in a situation with inflation at a 30-year high, a government continuing down this path of putting more and more costs on working Albertans at a time when the cost of everything is going up for them. Again, as the previous member stated, we see utility bills day in and day out, stories coming in from our constituents to our offices – we've had the opportunity to share just some of them that we've heard – you know, utility bills going up by hundreds and hundreds of dollars. Unfortunately, this government's idea to fix that is not really a solution at all, by any means, and barely a Band-Aid, Mr. Speaker.

9:20

Again, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought forward the idea of insurance costs increasing so much. We saw last year many Albertans seeing increases of upwards of 30 per cent at a time when they are driving far less, often having their vehicle parked for the majority of the time, but still having to pay increasing costs because this government has been so unwilling to take any action.

Again, on one hand, we see this UCP government lowering the corporate tax rate for the largest, most profitable corporations to the tune of \$4.7 billion coming out of the pockets of Albertans, and at that same time they're turning around and telling those Albertans that at a time with such cost increases they're also going to take another billion dollars out of their pockets to use as the government sees fit. That's truly unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. I think that if at all we were to consider this, I couldn't imagine a worse time.

You may recollect, Mr. Speaker, that it wasn't too long ago, I believe in 2020, that we saw this government move forward with new rules that allowed employers to average hours worked by employees over 52 weeks rather than 12 weeks. We saw this change because it took massive amounts of money from employees that quite often were working overtime, very likely working shifts of over 44 hours per week. This was particularly felt by those in the oil and gas industry who may be working these extended weeks and potentially on for a few weeks, off for a few weeks. These kinds of changes that this government has made have been devastating for workers in our province. At the same time as we see overtime dollars being reduced for employees across the province, for those who may be lucky enough to have seen an increase, even a modest one, this UCP government is now going to be taxing them more through the idea of bracket creep.

By no means do I see myself being able to support Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, because this is, in reality, the decision to move forward with the idea of bracket creep, and it's truly disappointing. Again, I truly hope that the government might reconsider. Very doubtful, Mr. Speaker. I think that now is not the time to move forward with this. I question why, again, the

Premier, a member who has been quite outspoken about the idea of bracket creep being an insidious and pernicious tax grab, in his own words, is now going back on that idea and moving forward to tax Albertans so much more.

Again, when we look at some of the other changes that this government has made at a time when inflation is at a 30-year high, particularly around the Alberta child and family benefit, we're seeing families losing upwards of \$450. We brought up the idea of those trying to take care of their families as well as those receiving funds through AISH and Alberta Works, other programs, that this government has moved forward with essentially drawing back the buying power and the purchasing power of Albertans who find themselves on these programs. I just have to question why, Mr. Speaker.

You know, this government has found itself in a situation based on oil prices being over \$100 at this time. That's great. Unfortunately, the Albertans who are depending on this government to support them are not seeing the benefits of that balanced budget. It goes past those that are receiving AISH, that are receiving the seniors' benefit, that are receiving the Alberta child benefit. It goes to every single Albertan across this province when we look at the decisions of this government regarding education property taxes. We've seen those forced to increase, and those have real impacts on not just those, again, that are accessing government programs but every Albertan who is paying property taxes in the province.

Again, it goes past that, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the decisions that this government has made and their inability to form strong relationships with municipalities. We see this government and this minister making decisions that are going to increase the borrowing cost to our municipalities. We recognize that through these hardships municipalities have to find themselves in a balanced budget situation, which is understandable. But, again, the government is making decisions that are going to increase the interest on their borrowing rate, that is only going to be downloaded onto every Albertan, Albertans of all stripes. So when we look through this legislation, while there are sections that are less consequential than others – you know, to some extent, we see this as an omnibus bill that is affecting many acts, but unfortunately, specific to the \$1 billion bracket creep tax increase that we're seeing put forward by this government, it makes it impossible to support this legislation.

Now, just a couple of other things that I specifically had questions around. We do see some changes to the Tourism Levy Act, some changes to the language, which is understandable, but we are also seeing that it will become mandatory for organizations like Airbnb to charge the tourism levy and remit that to the government of Alberta. So I'd be interested to find out if the minister or any members can potentially let us know what kinds of costs are going to be associated with that to those organizations or what kind of revenue the government expects to see from that, or maybe it's not much of a change across the board. I would be interested in hearing more about that.

We do also see some changes to the tobacco act which are going to reduce the tax rate for chewing tobacco. I found that interesting when I first saw it. I have seen that we were taxing this product quite a bit higher than other provinces, so this is going to bring it more in line. I think that there was the idea that Albertans are leaving to other jurisdictions to actually buy this product, so I'd be interested to find out if the government has any numbers on how that might be reflected with the changes, if there is going to be an increase in tax revenue from that, what that increase might be. If it's negligible, if it's substantial, I would be interested to hear more about that.

Again, while we are seeing acts amended in here, sometimes just basic language changes that are needed to modernize that, there is, at the end of the day, this massive increase to the tax burden on everyday Albertans put forward by this government, and it's truly disastrous at any time but specifically as we find ourselves continuing through the COVID pandemic. When Albertans are simply trying to make it day to day, this government is telling them that it is going to cost more to live in this province, essentially, no matter who you are. Unfortunately, for those Albertans who find themselves on programs like I mentioned earlier – the AISH program, Alberta Works – this government is truly leaving those Albertans behind.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think that I will conclude my comments. Again, I do not see myself supporting this legislation. I think that the Premier has done a complete one-eighty on where he once stood on issues of bracket creep, and I think it's deeply unfortunate. I think the idea of it, especially right now, is deeply flawed, and I don't know how we found ourselves in this position. I hope that he will at some point soon, before this legislation passes, reconsider.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 2 at second reading, the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I've been listening to the comments from the other side of the House, and I guess, first of all, I'd like to say that we should probably give some lessons on how to do a Google search, because if one did one, one could find Bill 2. While the folks spent a bunch of time just now talking about stuff, I struggled to find anything that I heard that was true, and I struggled even harder to find anything that was in Bill 2.

9:30

What I heard was a list of NDP talking points, things that they know aren't true. You know, the Finance minister has pointed out that there are several car insurance companies that actually have lowered their rates this year. He gave those details in the House the other day. Yet the folks on the other side just can't bring themselves to acknowledge what is true. Mr. Speaker, again, I suppose there could have been several points of order just for not talking about the bill at all. I could be wrong, but I would be challenged to find anything I heard in the last set of speakers that actually touched on Bill 2. It just wasn't there. The folks on the other side are just not doing their homework, just not paying attention, just not serving their constituents by talking about the legislation that the House is actually considering right now. It's really sad.

A lot of things that they talked about they know aren't true. I mean, nobody took away more jobs than the NDP did when they were in government in this province.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister is making comments such as there was no truth and whatnot that will cause disorder in the House. Members from this side were speaking to Bill 2, which is the budget implementation act, not amendment act, as the minister said. Anything that this bill will implement is in the budget, and whatever colleagues were saying was well within the

purview of this legislation. I think it will be better if the minister keeps his comments to the bill.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clearly a matter of debate, what we have here. I stand by it. I appreciate that the hon. member doesn't like to hear his members corrected, but I stuck with the rules of the House. I didn't point to any particular member. I certainly disagreed with what the folks there said. That's what we do here. We debate. These are all matters of debate, every single matter raised by the other side first. I was just correcting the record, which I think is the definition of debate. It's not a point of order. It's just a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Well, are there others?

I do agree and I am prepared to rule that this is a matter of debate. I'll just provide a little bit of caution that the minister is getting very close to being creative about language around what may or may not be factual inside the Chamber. He's getting very close to implying that members were lying, which, of course, would be a point of order if that was the case, so just a slight caution there for him. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Bill 2 that we're talking about here. The hon. members on the other side – frankly, I will stand by what I just said. You made it clear that I was on the right side, and I will take your caution to make sure I remain on the right side of what the rules are. But the fact is that the folks haven't talked about the bill, and so far I haven't either because I've been busy correcting the misinformation that came from the other side in between just pointing out the fact that virtually nothing that was talked about from the other side is about this bill.

Now that I've spent no time talking about the bill and all my time correcting the misinformation from the other side, I'll just take a minute for those people watching that might actually be interested in what's in this bill. I'm going to spend a few minutes, if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, talking about what's in the bill that's actually before the Legislative Assembly of Alberta right now, which will be the first time in this evening's debate that that has been touched upon, because it hasn't been touched upon from the other side of the House. [interjections] They can't stand talking about the bill. They're just chirping and yelling. I listened quietly to all the stuff that didn't have anything to do with the bill, but they just can't stand now trying to move to talking about what's in the bill. Nonetheless, we shall persevere. We shall move forward.

Budget 2022's implementation measures support responsible fiscal management. It integrates financial responsibility across the government, which will lead to better outcomes for Albertans and a strong financial position for Alberta. The bill introduces policies which support the better use of public funds, improving cost certainty and eliminating financial risks. It enacts several specific tax changes and supports red tape reduction by harmonizing federal and provincial tax legislation. These measures will help ensure efficient use of Alberta tax dollars and protect valuable public services today and well into the future, and that is important, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with our government's goal of having an efficient government, that will allow us to balance the budget, which makes the services that we provide to Albertans sustainable, something that never happened during the four dark years previous to our government being here.

The changes to the government's cash management system in this bill will reduce taxpayer-supported debt for future generations. The amendments to the Financial Administration Act will allow the government to use surplus cash held by provincial entities to help reduce provincial debt. The government replaces an outdated and administratively complex cash-pooling structure with a more efficient and flexible structure that uses surplus cash held in pooled bank accounts to help pay down provincial debt and lower debt-servicing costs. The new cash-pooling structure will reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least a billion dollars – a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker; not chump change, a billion dollars – and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million a year.

These changes also respond, Mr. Speaker – now, this is important, and the other side, rather than interrupting me, should probably listen to this next little bit – to the Auditor General's recommendation. We all ought to listen to the Auditor General, and whoever is in government should because while the Auditor General's job is on one hand, in my opinion, to embarrass whoever is in government by pointing out publicly when they can do things better, a smart and mature government would say, "Wow, we maybe should listen carefully to what the Auditor General said and learn how we can do things better," because that's what a good government does. No government is perfect, and the Auditor General is there to make us less imperfect, and if we are wise, we should all listen to what the Auditor General says. The recommendations were that the government should examine its current cash-pooling structure and make better use of the surplus cash to reduce debt, and this bill responds to that Auditor General recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, what you'll notice is that there's a disconnect here – a big disconnect – between what I have talked about in this bill and what we heard previously from the other side, and what you'll find is almost no similarity between what was heard from the other side and what I've said. Why? Because I've been talking about the bill. I don't know what the word salad was that came from the other side, but it wasn't about the bill that is before this House. My advice, as I prepare to sit down, is that if the other side wants to debate this, they ought to probably do their homework, find out what's before the House, and let's talk about it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie if he still chooses to do so.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity given to me to rise and express my support for Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First of all, I would like to applaud the Premier and all the ministers for coming up with a budget that will fulfill our promises to Albertans. It is aimed to have financial stability as the government maintained all the needed services with an assurance of creating jobs and more businesses in the province.

If passed, Bill 2 will implement many measures introduced by Budget 2022 that will make better use of public funds, improve cost certainty, and eliminate financial risk. Bill 2 will amend the Emissions Management and Climate Resilience Act, Mr. Speaker, by removing the authority for the minister to issue loan guarantees under the TIER loan guarantee program as the program no longer exists, so the function is obsolete. The changes will also uphold overall government direction prohibiting the issuance of loan guarantees as they created undesirable financial risk to government.

9:40

Bill 2 also introduces changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act that will strengthen the local legal framework and

give government flexibility to make decisions in an ever-changing health environment by establishing a new regulation-making authority for health benefits for services provided by allied health professionals. The changes will also increase financial accountability in physician claims, audits, and other compliance activities, and it will clarify wording for the creation of benefit review committees.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also introduces amendments that will change the end date for the government of Alberta's financial commitment to align with a revised business case for the green line LRT project in Calgary. It will extend the period of time for provincial funding by two years, to 2029-2030.

Also, the amendments carried by Bill 2 in the Financial Administration Act will authorize the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to mandate provincial corporations, regulated funds, and other consolidated entities to participate and hold their surplus cash in the new cash-pooling structure. This will enable government to implement a new, flexible cash-pooling structure that will use this surplus cash held in pooled accounts to pay down provincial debt and lower debt-servicing costs. This will reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least \$1 billion and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million per year. It will replace an outdated, administratively complex cash-pooling structure. This change also responds to the Auditor General's recommendation to examine the government's current cash-pooling structure and make better use of surplus cash to reduce debt.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 includes provisions that will implement the Budget 2022 decision to establish a new tax category for smokeless tobacco – for example, chewing tobacco – with the rate set at 27.5 per cent per gram. Most amendments to tax statutes in this bill are annual technical updates intended to ensure that Alberta's tax statutes are clear, consistent with the federal tax system, and, overall, effective in supporting administration of the provincial tax system.

Mr. Speaker, this government had planned to balance the budget from day one. It is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. In fact, during the start of this government into administration, the deficit has decreased even faster than initially planned. Through the well-thought-out strategy of the government our economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery and growth, but there is a lot more to be done to further diversify, strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help for all Albertans.

What is the importance of balancing the budget? The question, Mr. Speaker, never crossed the thoughts of the previous government. Balancing the budget would mean a lot to Albertans as it would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and eventually pay the debt. It would remove the burden to future generations, a debt that they did not incur. When the previous government assumed governance of this province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were ousted from office, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. Balancing the budget will put an end to a spending spree path being asserted continuously by the NDP so that we can go to a path of redirecting this debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

After many challenging years of economic and pandemic hardship Alberta is finally moving forward once again. The government's focus, responsible fiscal management, and relentless pursuit of economic growth have put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity, resulting in additional government revenues. The job-creating corporate tax cut introduced by this government, Mr. Speaker, is

proving to be a more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach we will collect roughly \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since this government took office as multibillion-dollar investments are expected to come to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada, Desjardins, RBC, and TD forecast that Alberta will be leading the country in economic growth in this year. Amazon Web Services announced the plan to establish a second cloud computing hub in Calgary, amounting to \$4.3 billion, while Infosys and Mphasis are to create thousands of tech jobs in the province. RBC is also creating a tech hub in Calgary, with about 300 jobs, while EY will create a new finance hub, with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce.

Northern Petrochemical also announced a \$2.5 billion project in the municipal district of Greenview, and Dow Chemical plans to work on a project that would be the world's first net-zero carbon emissions petrochemical plant, which is predicted to cost about \$10 billion.

Another huge investment that has landed in Alberta is Lynx Air, Mr. Speaker, Canada's newest low-cost airline. It joins Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines. These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy, Mr. Speaker.

We saw the unemployment rate hit prepandemic levels in December 2021 by gaining about 130,000 jobs for the year, including 6,100 to the oil and gas industry. Moreover, in January this year we heard that Canada lost 200,000 jobs, but Alberta's economy gained over 7,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate continues to drop, and unemployment is at its lowest since September 2019. In February 8,200 jobs were created, which means more Albertans are continuing to work and receiving a regular paycheque.

Let me also add that Alberta continues to be a world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development among oil-producing jurisdictions. This shows that while we recognize that Canada's largest export is still the oil and gas industry, we're experiencing broad-based investment and economic diversification in our province.

Nonetheless, this investment climate and composition does not mean that the government's approach of carefully handling the province's finances will twist. Alberta's government continues to discipline spending to maintain balance. Budget 2022, as implemented partly by Bill 2, is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

9:50

As we move forward, Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 provides more than \$22 billion in Health's operating budget, a \$515 million, or 2.4 per cent, increase from the 2021-2022 forecast. Excluding COVID-19 cost, it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-2025 in order to scale up capacity, another year of record-high investment for health care in Alberta. Record investments in health care mean that Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. These record investments also ensure that Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality in most . . . [interjection]

Mr. Sabir: Thank you to the member for giving way. While the member was talking about the impact of this budget on his

constituents, the question I have for the member is that this budget in Bill 2 also continues to implement that bracket creep, which will take \$1 billion out of Albertans' pockets, which the Premier used to refer to as insidious and whatnot. I'm just wondering if the member would like to comment on how bracket creep impacts residents and Albertans in his riding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the excellent question. The 2022 balanced budget propels Alberta ahead. With a balanced budget: more attention and spending on amenities that will benefit all Albertans, and opportunities in health care, employment, and better quality of life will allow every Albertan to grow and expand. By balancing the budget, we will not incur additional debt or borrowing, and we should not incur surpluses. We are able to more progressively pay off the provincial debt and maximize the debt-servicing fee.

New infrastructure projects like affordable housing, community service programs, and employment opportunities will grow this charge. Alberta cities and towns are where many families look for opportunity. In addition, the province's natural beauty, including vast forest and the Rocky Mountains, contributes to our desirable environment. Albertans that live in Calgary's constituency will have more opportunity to find employment, improve their quality of life, and enjoy the benefits that come along with having a balanced budget.

Over the next three years Alberta will invest \$100 million per year to provide additional health care capacity on a permanent basis, including any new intensive care unit beds. The budget also includes a \$750 million COVID-19 contingency this year, which will help address the surgical backlog and ensure the province can cover evolving pandemic-related costs. To expand continuing care programs and services for seniors and vulnerable Albertans, Budget 2022 provides nearly \$3.7 billion . . . [Mr. Singh's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for staying so on message. That was very impressive.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I completely understand that the minister of – of course, through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I completely understand that he likes to dictate to other orders of government and, on that same note, in character, likes to dictate what can be debated in the House perhaps. But on this side of the House we believe in having an opinion and listening to our constituents and what are the issues and concerns that are impacting them, their lives, and their ability to actually put food on the table.

Now, Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, clearly identifies the priorities of the government when it comes to the fiscal plan of the province. They as the government are then identifying which priorities they have when it comes to, you know, presenting their budget and perspective to the people of Alberta. Now, it's commonly known that the members on the other side like to boast that their ideological perspective is what's really necessary to bring more investment to the province. By way of the Financial Statutes Amendment Act that's exactly what they're doing. They're demonstrating what their priorities are, so this is an opportunity for us on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, to actually get up and debate what amendments we believe should actually be inside of this proposed piece of legislation. Through you to the Minister of

Municipal Affairs: thank you very much for your opinion, but no thank you, right? We're going to debate the things that we want to debate in this House as pertain to our constituents, actually.

Now, when it comes to conservative ideology, it's well known that the members on the other side, the conservatives in general, like to believe that less government is actually better for the economy. It is better for the wealthy, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to making sure that corporations get more benefits. When the members on the other side get up and talk about the Alberta advantage, what they're really talking about in terms of the financial statutes amendment is actually giving more privileges to corporations within the province of Alberta. That is coupled – I mean, just to be clear, in case the members on the other side don't know, what I'm referring to is actually reducing the corporate tax rate on corporations.

You know, if it would stop there, at least I could understand that they were trying to do what's best, because they believe that corporations are going to come here, they're going to make more jobs, but as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford clearly stated in debate this evening, it's actually small and medium-sized businesses that employ more Albertans than corporations do. I'm not saying, "Let's not have corporations," Mr. Speaker. I'm just saying that there has to be a good balance and that we have to find ways of creating a more sustainable economy moving forward by having that balance between corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises in the province of Alberta.

Now, I would be remiss to not actually cover the numbers, right? As I did during my opportunity to give a member's statement today, I actually went over some of those numbers, Mr. Speaker, and I wouldn't mind covering those numbers again. When it actually came to capital investment in Alberta year over year, in 2018 there was \$62.3 billion invested in Alberta. That was 2018. In 2019 it was \$59.4 billion. Okay; so now we have a change of government. What do we see? In 2020 it goes down to \$48.6 billion. It does a little bit better in 2021. It goes up to \$54 billion but not \$62.3 billion, like in 2018. So when members on the other side of the House get up and say that they're the ones that, because of their ideological perspective and their ideological approach, are bringing more capital investment to the province of Alberta, it doesn't add up. Numbers don't lie, and Albertans know very well that numbers don't lie. Here we have 2022, and it's projected that we'll have \$56.7 billion, which is still shy of the 2018 amount of \$62.3 billion.

Now, what the members on the other side of the House fail to realize is that in order to have a sustainable economy moving forward, Albertans need to have advantage of that economy. People aren't there to serve your political ideology and the way that you think the economy should function. The economy is there to serve the people of Alberta.

10:00

Now, because of the laissez-faire approach of the members on the other side of the House – and they know very well how supply and demand works – what they fail to realize is that in the equation, in the approach of supply and demand there are going to be people who are priced out of the economy, and those are the Albertans that we care about, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker. What they fail to realize is that the economic externalities of the people who are priced out of the market end up having a real economic cost, and it ends up costing our economy more in the long run. That's what the members on the other side fail to realize. And then, on top of lowering the corporate tax rate, they even take it a step further to create their so-called Alberta advantage, and they actually take benefits away from workers.

Now, I understand that the members on the other side don't like unions, but unions fought hard and long for workers' rights: the eight-hour workday, making sure that they had weekends off. You know, back in the day children actually used to work in factories. They fought to make sure that children wouldn't have to work in factories. Workers organized and worked so that they could have their rights defended, and it was to create a balance. The members on the other side like to create this fantasy world where workers are somehow lazy and they've got to be pushed to do their work. It's almost like – maybe I won't go there. But nothing could be further from the truth. All of the workers want to make sure that our economy functions, but they just want to make sure that they're getting benefits out of it, just like everybody else is.

Now, when you couple all these Conservative ideological economic policies together, what you actually see are Albertans getting a disadvantage by this ideological approach. Corporations actually look at that, too, and then capital investment actually looks at that. Let's look at the numbers of venture capital. In 2021 in Canada overall: \$14.2 billion in venture capital invested; that's a 222 per cent increase year over year. Ontario got \$7.4 billion of that; that's a hike of 270 per cent. British Columbia got \$2.9 billion; that's 224 per cent. Quebec even got \$2.8 billion; that's 180 per cent year over year. What did Alberta have? Mr. Speaker, \$561 million; that's only 23 per cent year over year. At the end of the day, when you look at the numbers, when you look at the amount of venture capital being invested or capital investment overall, you don't see the numbers. The ideological approach that you're presenting isn't working, and we've said it before. I've said it so many times in this House. These are outdated, antiquated beliefs, and people need an economy that's going to be there for them.

I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker, that I can only hope that in 2023 Albertans put us back on that side of the House so that we can get back to the numbers like in 2018, when there was \$26.3 billion of capital investment invested under our government, when we were governing this province for the benefit of all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

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

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and introduce third reading of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

There has been a significant debate on these proposed changes, but I believe this bill is important to achieve consistent COVID-19 public health policy in the province, something that is most certainly within the province's jurisdiction, which is the point. If passed, the bill will ensure municipal bylaws align with the province's approach to public health issues. They would require any municipal bylaws related to COVID-19 vaccines or masking requirements only to prevent the spread of communicable diseases to be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and would require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with the Alberta chief medical officer of health before making a decision on any of those bylaws that should come forward.

This bill does not affect the day-to-day operations of municipal governments, who can continue to implement masking bylaws in municipal facilities such as recreation centres, public transit, municipal buildings. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the subject matter of this bill is extremely narrow. It will ensure there is one clear policy for COVID-19 measures across the province. This is important to provide consistency and clarity for all Albertans and Alberta municipalities as we move forward together toward a path to normal.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hopeful that all members of the House see the wisdom in supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 4, third reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rise and speak to Bill 4. I've been on the record already previously on other areas of debate when it comes to this bill, but I do feel like I need to reinforce the comments that I have made previously in regard to the way that we as legislators, as individuals that are making policies, are working with our counterparts, that this government seriously give their head a shake.

I find this bill extremely disingenuous as to how municipalities should be dealt with and worked with. I think that maybe when this was introduced, there was a reason that the government felt that it was appropriate. However, we have seen, across the whole province at this point, that the very things that the minister is talking about – face masks and proof of vaccinations – are not an issue across the province. There is no municipality that is currently trying to enforce a bylaw such as those two.

This was a direct posturing, I would say, to the municipality of Edmonton even though – and some of your rural MLAs may agree on the government side of the House – there were other things going on in other municipalities that maybe should have been under consideration when it was related to COVID-19 that may not have directly related to masks or proof of vaccinations. Other things were happening in municipalities that were related to how municipalities were choosing to deal with COVID, yet we don't see that reflected in this piece of legislation. So it was very narrow and very select about how it was drafted and how this piece of legislation has been chosen to be used.

The issue that I have with it is that it could have been rescinded once the direction was clear that there were no municipalities across the province that were engaging in creating bylaws around face masks and COVID-19 vaccination, proof of vaccines. It could have been rescinded, and in fact it might have been an opportunity for the minister and the government to start creating and rebuilding bridges with the municipalities that this was directly focused on. We have heard from Alberta municipalities, AM's president about how concerned they are about this precedent of this government choosing to overreach into municipal jurisdiction and to impede, with their authority, when it comes to the creation of bylaws. That is a very, very scary precedent.

It should be something that the government takes quite seriously, but again what we see is that ego overrides common sense in this Chamber when it comes to how the government chooses to interact with different levels of government. We see it federally. We see it when this government chooses to deal with municipalities, where the ego becomes the driving force of the conversation and the common sense and reality of how we interact and how the engagement happens in negotiation, in policy creation, in regulation, and just the ability to sit down and negotiate at a table completely goes out the window.

10:10

It is a very shameful way to govern, I would say, because it is not about collaboration. It is not about setting good policy and regulation and legislation on behalf of the people. It is truly about the power of a government to make choices, and what is clearly becoming clearer and clearer, as we move through the years of this government, is that power is the ultimate priority for everything that they do. It is all about power. It's not about making good decisions. It's not about making sure that the people of this province are protected and are treated fairly and that their health is the utmost priority. It is about, "We have the power, and we are going to wield it and use it when we choose to," and this piece of legislation clearly dictates to that.

I'm going to be very careful with my words. It is a very inappropriate piece of legislation. That will be the word that I will use, Mr. Speaker: it is inappropriate. It is inappropriate because it's not needed, and it needs to be rescinded because there is no need for it. My hope is that there will be no future need for it as we move forward through dealing with whatever the next future COVID concerns may be, but at the same time the municipalities actually get to decide what makes sense for their citizens. What is the next thing going to be? The government is going to decide that they don't like some other bylaw, and the next thing you know, the government is going to come in and decide they're going to make another piece of legislation that says: "Well, I don't know. The city of Calgary lets too many people swim in the river, so that bylaw has got to go. We're going to rewrite that bylaw."

Like, this just doesn't even make any sense. If we all want to recall, 18 months ago or two years ago, when COVID happened, we had the Premier saying that it is up to the municipalities to enforce these very health measures and make the decisions, that they need to decide if they're going to be having masking bylaws, that they need to decide whether or not they're going to have vaccine passports and what all those regulations look like, that it is up to the municipalities because we don't want to be held responsible for those decisions. But now that the government doesn't like the decision, it's no longer the purview and the responsibility of the municipality, because the province doesn't like it, and therefore they're going to wield their power and take away what they clearly told the municipalities to do two years ago.

It's so inconsistent, which is pretty consistent, actually, with the government's inconsistencies, with everything that they do at this point. I guess we should just know that it is constantly going to be inconsistent. I have not seen a clear sign of leadership through this whole process when it comes to COVID, to begin with, or also a clear sign of leadership when it comes to any decision-making processes over the last three years when it comes to any pieces of legislation and how this government chooses to interact with different levels of government.

It is frustrating for me, not only as an opposition member but as an Albertan, to see the direction that this government has chosen to take this province, because they've forgotten the people of the province. They've forgotten – the government has forgotten – why they were elected and why they are supposed to be here, and that is to make sure that Albertans are taken care of and that we have a responsibility to make sure that legislation and policy actually do something for the betterment of our society. Yet when we see inflation and the cost of living and all of these things going through the roof, we have spent most of the session talking about bills that have nothing to do with the economy whatsoever. They actually don't have, really, any forward-looking vision for the economic future of Alberta, for how it's going to help the people of Alberta,

just a lot of pomp and circumstance – that is what I would say – and it's disappointing.

One good step would be, first, to rescind this piece of legislation, and then my hope would be that maybe we will see this government finally decide to stop worrying about their own personal power and whatever is going on within the government's issues of the day, refocus, and start serving the people of this province. I'm getting really frustrated as an Albertan with the direction that this government has decided to take, and I am frustrated as an opposition member on behalf of the people of Alberta that once again this government is so busy with their power politics that they can't focus on the fact that they actually need to govern for the people of this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and have this opportunity to express the importance of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing this bill, which will ensure that the municipal bylaws align with the provincial public health policy.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly thank the Premier, health care professionals, government leaders, and all Albertans for supporting each other during times of uncertainty and challenges. Furthermore, I would like to extend my appreciation to the stakeholders and hundreds of essential workers that have voiced their opinion on the challenging gaps faced in our system as well as to every single Albertan that was affected in the pandemic. Your resiliency and support to the community are commendable.

In the past two years not just Albertans but the entire nation had been faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Citizens of Alberta had experienced a total upheaval in lifestyle and routine, from closed schools, balancing work, challenges for businesses, job uncertainty, and rising rates of death and sickness. In addition to all of these, COVID-19 has created gaps in Alberta's health care system, which continues to deliver health services to millions of Albertans.

Since the beginning of the pandemic the health sector has navigated a difficult situation to deliver health services while protecting Albertans. Even with one of the best universal health care systems, Alberta had been faced with its own unique challenges. Mr. Speaker, now that the conditions of the pandemic have settled after two long, frustrating years, it is time for Alberta to move forward together towards a path to recovery.

All Albertans deserve clear and consistent public health policies throughout the province. Therefore, Bill 4 is appropriate since at a time when Alberta is still improving from the pandemic's consequences, what the province needs today is a consolidation of health procedures that remove the uncertainty and aggravation regarding the masking requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 will introduce changes to the Municipal Government Act that are very narrow and strictly focused on the public health requirements related to COVID-19. Currently section 7(a) of the existing MGA provides municipal councils with the authority to pass bylaws for municipal purposes as well as gives them the authority to pass bylaws regarding the safety, health, and welfare of people and the protection of people and property. This present provision is conflicting with the current public health policies implemented by the provincial government, which is creating confusion in the province of Alberta.

10:20

Bill 4 will propose changes that will require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with Alberta's chief medical officer of health to approve the bylaw. This approach will restrict the ability of local governments to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province. Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing masking bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores, retail businesses, and other operations.

The Alberta government appreciates the significance of local autonomy, which is why the proposed modifications to the MGA will have no effect on the Alberta communities' day-to-day operations. Because most towns currently meet COVID-19 public health regulations, the proposed modifications will have little effect on them. These changes will not apply to municipal facilities such as leisure centres, public transportation, municipal buildings, and municipalities will retain the power to enact masking rules for the operation of municipal facilities as they deem fit. In Alberta, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and Alberta companies should have the option of wearing masks or requiring their customers to wear masks, and the proposed MGA modifications will provide them that option.

The municipalities in Alberta are doing a wonderful job of working with the province to stop the spread of COVID-19, and we commend them for this. However, the task in front of us is for every level of government to continue to work together with a common focus and objective; that is, to ensure that Albertans are protected and supported. Mr. Speaker, once the municipal bylaws align with the provincial public health policy, Albertans will have more freedom and autonomy to make decisions based on the situation of the pandemic.

There is nothing wrong with municipalities imposing their own public health limitations, and the government has completely backed them. This stands. However, it creates challenges once policies start to conflict. Municipalities have every right to make decisions in their jurisdictions, but we must appreciate the genuine concern that has led to the introduction of this bill. The scope of the bill is too narrow to suggest that municipalities are being denied their law-making rights. Mr. Speaker, we must not assume that the bill is trying to eliminate the power of municipalities to pass bylaws related to public health, as guaranteed under section 7(a), but it is to work together with the municipalities when decisions are contradicting.

Mr. Speaker, amendments in Bill 4 will ensure Albertans have clear public health guidelines. As the minister said, the impact of this bill will be very minimal on the operations of Alberta municipalities. When enacted into law, Bill 4 will remove the confusion that often takes place with provincial laws and municipal bylaws and public health requirements related to COVID-19.

In a nutshell, the immediate effect of Bill 4 will impact minimally on municipalities in Alberta because most municipalities are already complying with COVID-19 public health requirements. Local governments are also able to continue to implement mask bylaws within their jurisdictions with due consultation with the ministry. More importantly, let me reiterate, Albertans and Alberta businesses will have the choice of deciding whether or not to wear masks. The bill will also give Albertans a clear public health policy on the COVID-19 public health requirements of Alberta and ensure that masking and vaccine mandates in the province follow the up-to-date data. It is on this basis that I support this bill, because I believe it will take away the frustrations of Albertans and all the constituents in the Calgary-East riding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see that the members on the other side of the House have a . . .

Mr. Williams: A sense of humour.

Member Loyola: No, not necessarily a sense of humour. It's, like, a creative sense of drama. Yeah. But, of course, you know, no, I wouldn't want to offend the member who just spoke. His comments were absolutely riveting. Riveting. Riveting.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill 4 – you know, we were just debating this in the House last night – and to complement the remarks that I was making yesterday and also the remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, I think what's truly concerning about this piece of legislation is the fact that this minister and cabinet have decided to just take more power onto themselves. That's essentially what's happening, right? I mean, don't just take it from me, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Municipalities' President Cathy Heron said to the media, "We are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities – without prior consultation."

Now, I know that the members on the other side, you know, like to claim that they're listening to all Albertans, but I've got to wonder: where was the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he didn't hear the president of Alberta Municipalities and actually take this into consideration when he was bringing this proposed piece of legislation into the House? And many like the president of the Alberta Municipalities share the same perspective. They want to know why they weren't consulted.

As I was saying last night, Mr. Speaker, the concern here really is that this is setting a dangerous precedent, that this is a slippery slope, that if the minister does that in this circumstance, in what other circumstances is the minister going to decide that he can simply open . . . [interjection] By all means. Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: Thank you for taking my intervention, to the hon. member. So if this is a question of a slippery slope, I assume, in my understanding of the slippery slope argument, that you have no problem with the content itself; it's what might happen down the line with the precedent set. So I ask the member: will you please vote for this piece of legislation now and stop any future slipping down the line?

Member Loyola: Well, that would completely contradict and bring this debate to a close. Why would I do that? Like, it just doesn't make sense. I'm here actually saying that this is setting a dangerous precedent. Do you not realize that the logic behind my argument is that if we do it for this piece of legislation, of course, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member, then what other pieces of legislation are going to be expected where we do the exact same thing? I don't understand why that is so difficult to understand for the member. [interjection] But, of course, I'll let him explain. Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: I appreciate this because I think this back and forth is helpful. The purpose of this body is to examine individual pieces of legislation as they come up, with the ability to amend in Committee of the Whole. If there's a problem with a future piece of legislation, raise that then. My understanding of your argument is that you don't have a problem with this legislation. You think it's fine, but "What if down the line?" can be dealt with down the line. I ask you again: please vote for this legislation.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, he is completely mistaken. I'll state it again. I do have a problem with this piece of legislation. The problem with this piece of legislation, again, through you to the member and to all members on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is that it is setting dangerous precedent. There was no consultation taken up with stakeholders and, specifically, Alberta Municipalities. So how can I agree to the piece of legislation? Don't get me wrong. I think that, yeah, absolutely, every piece of legislation that comes through this House: we're supposed to debate it. I get it. But I specifically have a problem with this one, Mr. Speaker, because it didn't go through a thorough process of actually consulting with stakeholders.

10:30

What we really have here, Mr. Speaker – and I would venture out on a limb here, but I don't think I'm going too far – is that this cabinet decided that they were going to listen to their convoy buddies and take their truth as the only perspective in the province of Alberta and that they were listening specifically to the people that were committing the illegal act of blocking a highway in the province of Alberta. That is what's happening here. But, thank goodness for Albertans and thank goodness for the rest of Canada, we here in Alberta are not a homogeneous population that all believe in the same thing. We all have different perspectives.

That is the real problem behind this piece of legislation. When the Minister of Municipal Affairs brings a piece of legislation where he's only listening to one group of Albertans, didn't even take the time to consult with stakeholders as it relates to their specific mandates, their responsibilities, and then goes further than that and even tramples on the liberty of a different order of government, we need to ask questions. Mr. Speaker, through you to the member: I don't agree with this piece of legislation because I firmly believe that, again, this government has decided that they're going to listen to just one group of Albertans.

Understandably, I will protect every Albertan's right to the opinion that they want to have – every Albertan's right – unlike the members opposite, who like to shut us down inside of this House in debate. We just saw it from the Minister of Municipal Affairs saying: oh, well, we're debating this; you can't say that; you can't say the other. Pardon me, but we live in a democracy, and all the opinions matter. All the opinions matter and all are valid because they're perspectives of different people – and I see, Mr. Speaker, you're kind of giving a little bit of a head nod; maybe I'm mistaken – of course, not those that are preaching hate, because that I'm completely against. Those we have to be very careful of.

I would even go a step further because some of the opinions that were being shared at that illegal blockade of a highway by some – not all; some – Albertans were right on the cusp of hatred, discrimination, injustice. There were some pretty extreme opinions being shared on that blockade line by some people. Those ones I am completely against, and they shouldn't be permitted in our democracy.

Here we have an example of the Minister of Municipal Affairs caving to just one group of people, and I don't think that's fair to the rest of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, especially since he didn't go out and actually consult with one of the most important stakeholder groups, Alberta Municipalities. We have it right here, and I'll read it again. Cathy Heron, president, said to the media, "We are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities – without prior consultation." My big question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, of course, through you, Mr. Speaker, is why he didn't consult on a piece of legislation that he's bringing before this House. By what authority?

Mr. Williams: The Queen's, I guess.

Member Loyola: Okay. So by the very remarks coming from the other side being heckled, then we shouldn't care about stakeholders, we shouldn't care about other Albertans; we should only listen to a select few Albertans and base all of our legislation on just those people that happen to agree with the ideological perspective of those in government. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Williams: Well, that's how you govern.

Member Loyola: Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: The authority on which we will pass this law will be the authority granted to us by Her Majesty the Queen with the majority of votes in the Legislature, and if Albertans disagree with that, they're welcome to go to the polls and say: "We disagree with Bill 4. These members tried to pass it, and we disagree." We can be voted out. This is a democracy.

Member Loyola: Well, I'm glad you mentioned that, Mr. Speaker, of course, through you to the member, because I can't wait till 2023. I really can't. You know, I am out there door-knocking. I'm out there talking to so many Albertans. They are so incredibly fed up with this government. Things are getting more and more expensive.

You know, like, the Minister of Municipal Affairs got up and was talking about the fact that, "Oh, yeah, insurance prices have come back down," but that's a half-truth, Mr. Speaker, because when they go up by 30 per cent and then come back down just a little bit, that's still an increase, Minister. Through you to the minister, of course, Mr. Speaker, that's still an increase, and that increase is what Albertans are feeling. It's not just on insurance; it's on utility fees, it's on postsecondary education, additional fees, on you name it. This government has made life more expensive for Albertans, and that's what I'm hearing on the doorsteps when I'm out in the community. That's what I'm hearing time and time and time again.

The members on the other side like to, you know, talk about how they're the best ones for the economy, Mr. Speaker, and this is the biggest fairy tale. When you look at jurisdictions all across this land, you see that the advantage that they give corporations is a real disadvantage for average working people in the province of Alberta and all other provinces across Canada. Through you to the members on the other side, again, I can't wait for 2023 because I'm out there day in, day out talking to Albertans and talking about how a real economy that serves people is one that takes care of those that are marginalized. What we're seeing under this government is that even middle-class – even middle-class – Albertans are getting priced out of the supply-demand equation, and life is getting more expensive for them.

I've talked to so many people, Mr. Speaker, who tell me that they're just one paycheque away from not being able to make the mortgage payment, and then they have to put it on credit. They have a line of credit with their bank, and then they're going to have to use money from their line of credit to actually pay for their mortgage. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was debating earlier tonight, the members on the other side like to make it seem like the carbon tax is the sole reason of this incredible amount of inflation that we've seen, and it's just not true, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You know what? I am having a hard time making the connection to is how the remarks are specifically related to a masking bylaw for municipalities. I'm sure you were just about to make the connection so that I could understand how the remarks were relevant, but at present they certainly weren't.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, what we have before us is the fact that Albertans can just not trust this government. Members of Alberta Municipalities can't trust this Minister of Municipal Affairs because he didn't even take the time to consult them on this piece of legislation that we have here before us. Nothing can be more evident than the fact that this cabinet caved to their COVID buddies that were making this illegal blockade on the Alberta highway at the entrance to Coumts. This is what the real problem is that we have before us, and I can tell you that I, for one, am voting against this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

10:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill in the last possible time that we have available to us. Of course, I oppose this bill, and I certainly wish the government would reconsider this. You know, we have talked about the particulars of this bill on a number of occasions, so the government has heard the reasons why the bill is inappropriate. But since we're on third, certainly, I think that we need to take the time to talk about the overarching concern that is inherent here.

It was only a year or so ago or perhaps a bit more that the Premier himself was suggesting that municipalities actually impose their own masking bylaw. We know that that is a part of the history of this conversation that we're having today. We have to ask ourselves what happened in the last little while that would have the government go from suggesting that, in fact, municipalities impose a masking bylaw, if they chose to do so, of course, to taking away that choice that he was suggesting they had at one time and imposing a requirement that is against their choice today. The only thing that is different, of course, is the leadership race that's happening in the party that is running this government for the next little while, not too much longer. You know, I think it's quite disappointing that a piece of legislation would actually be constructed in order to appease people who the Premier himself has recently referred to as lunatics. I think it's a cynical piece of legislation.

Unfortunately, it's in kind of a long series of pieces of disrespect for municipalities. That's really what we're talking about here. I quote Cathy Heron, who is the mayor of St. Albert and who, of course, is now the president of Alberta Municipalities – it used to be referred to as AUMA for anybody who is following – when she said about this particular legislation, quote, I believe in a collaborative approach to government, and I believe that this was the exact opposite. She also says: it sets a precedent for future legislative changes when all of a sudden a municipality and the government of Alberta disagree, and that's a precedent we don't appreciate.

This is why we're trying to use this last moment that we have to suggest that this really is wrong-headed legislation because it does almost nothing, well, really does nothing to provide any services to the citizens of Alberta. It doesn't improve their lives in any way whatsoever, but what it does do is it undermines dramatically the relationship between the provincial government and the

municipalities, which is what we've seen as a consistent legacy of this government, an attack on municipalities.

We have many other examples: the increased costs that they have caused municipalities across this province by suggesting that they would increase the number of RCMP officers and then not providing any dollars to go with it so that the costs went up in the municipalities; the decision to actually charge municipalities extra money whenever they take out a loan instead of using the provincial government's loan rate, which is going to increase costs across every municipality; the decision to give a tax holiday to companies involved in paying taxation to municipalities, again increasing the expenses for municipalities; the decrease in grants such as MSI that this government has proposed over the next number of years, rightly described by the minister as front loaded to look good and then, of course, being terrible for the municipalities ever after that; attacking them so that all these municipalities now have reached the point where they must increase taxation in order to just pay the bills because of the decisions of the provincial government here.

You know, it was just last year that we had mayors and reeves from across the province out in front of this Legislature protesting the financial decisions that have been imposed on them by this provincial government, attacking them consistently over time. There's just been series after series of insults to the government, as expressed by the mayor of St. Albert here, Cathy Heron, that this is a noncollaborative government, that this is bad for the relationship between the province and the municipalities.

There have been many other times and ways in which the municipalities have felt insulted and hurt and wounded by this government, and, you know, this is just another one that actually doesn't do anything to protect or help people. All it does is help a government in crisis, and we know this government is in crisis. We know they spend all of their time on their internal conflicts, that they really are not paying attention to the province of Alberta, that they constantly are infighting. They can't agree with themselves. They call each other names like "lunatic," apparently, and now here we are in this situation, where they're really disrespecting other elected officials throughout the province.

We know that in the past, for example, this government made a decision to take some of their issues and put them on the ballot during the municipal election, were asked repeatedly, over and over again, by municipalities to please not interfere with the municipal elections, not to distract from the important issues that need to be discussed during the municipal elections, and this government just ignored them and went ahead with it, again for their own purposes, not because it provided any greater service to the province of Alberta but because they wanted to be able to raise some false flags and influence people running, people going to the polls, for their own purposes. Again, it's all about the government wanting to maintain power when they know that they're in crisis and that there is a serious possibility that they will lose that power.

We also know that this government recently has had a very lucky windfall in terms of international oil prices, that they brought in some extra dollars, the same as every other jurisdiction that has oil has also brought in those dollars, not based on anything this government did. It was just lucky that they happen to exist at the time when the international situation has resulted in a dramatic increase in oil prices. So they had this extra money, and they had an opportunity to be able to perhaps do something good for municipalities. Did they do anything for municipalities during that time? No, they did not. They didn't do anything for them.

In fact, the city of Calgary, for example, had made a very specific request because they have had a dramatically difficult time during the last number of years. They are a city that's experiencing some of the highest unemployment rates in the country under this UCP

government. They're a city that has also had a dramatic loss of head offices in their community, has many office towers that are empty, and has really experienced some pretty rough years the last couple of years. The last two, maybe almost three years now have been very rough for the city of Calgary, so they made a very specific request to this government to help them. What happened in return? They got less than 10 per cent of what their request was from this provincial government, who was lucky enough to have a windfall from the international price of oil and wouldn't share that with our largest municipality.

10:50

This is the legacy of this government. This government has at every opportunity undermined and disrespected the municipal governments, made their lives more difficult, caused them to have difficulties with their budgets, difficulties with their revenues, and of course they now will have to impose significant increases on their citizens for municipal taxes as a result directly of the choices made by this UCP government. All across this province people are going to experience a worse life as a result of decisions made by this cabinet, as they have in so many other areas.

Thank you very much for my time. Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 4, and let me say at the beginning that it doesn't matter how many times anyone will ask, I will not be accepting any interventions. I will make my comments to the point and very brief.

While listening to the Minister of Municipal Affairs introduce this third reading, I guess it was rich coming from that side, that they are bringing forward this piece of legislation to have a consistent COVID-19 policy – a consistent COVID-19 policy – coming from a government who was on vacation during Christmas, when they asked Albertans to stay put, coming from a government that was caught dining at the sky palace. Now they come here and bring this piece of legislation, and they want us to believe that somehow it's about a consistent COVID-19 policy.

Earlier in the pandemic, when this government was asked to respond to the threats of COVID-19 by bringing forward a mask mandate province-wide, they said, the Premier said, and I quote, that these decisions are best taken locally. End quote. Now the Minister of Municipal Affairs comes up with this legislation purely for some political reasons and wants us to believe that it has something to do with a consistent COVID-19 policy. I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member already said that he wouldn't be taking interventions.

Mr. Williams: Oh. I apologize. I didn't hear that.

The Speaker: If you're not paying attention, you ought to be.
The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I was saying is that now somehow the government is bringing this piece of legislation and wants us to believe it's about a consistent COVID-19 policy. It is clearly not, as evidenced by this government's position at the beginning of this pandemic, where they thought that these decisions are best taken locally, and now they think that, no, they need consistency in these decisions. I think the government should be ashamed of peddling these double standards in this Legislature and wasting members' time. The minister should be ashamed of that.

They get up and they talk about their platform. They talk about consultation. We didn't see, no municipality was able to see if there was something in their platform that they will be reducing municipal government power. I do understand that municipalities are creatures of statute and that their powers can be increased and reduced, but there was no such commitment made by this government during their election campaign.

They have shown through their actions that they are incapable of working collaboratively with other orders of government. That's what municipal leaders are saying. I'm sure that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and other MLAs and ministers heard that directly from municipal leaders a couple of weeks ago. They told this government that there was no municipality who was bringing forward such laws. At least this is not an issue for now.

They warned this government: don't encroach on municipal jurisdiction unnecessarily and for political needs and reasons. Maybe it may help the Premier survive his leadership review. They told this government that municipalities across this province are against the Alberta provincial police force idea, but still this government is pushing full speed ahead on those things. They do not listen, they do not consult, and they are completely incapable of working collaboratively with other orders of government, and that is deeply concerning.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs mentioned that it's a very narrow bill. It matters less whether a bill is narrow in scope or broad. What's at stake here is that this government is willing to override municipal powers, that this government is willing to walk roughshod over municipal jurisdictions if it suits their political needs. That's the precedent this legislation is setting, that's the trend that we will be voting against, that's the precedent municipalities are against, and we stand with municipalities on this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know we're here late, so I promise not to take my full time. Happy to accept interventions. I really wanted to set the record straight and make it abundantly clear why this legislation, I believe, is appropriate, is consistent.

I think I want to start with some fundamentals here. Municipalities are creatures of this Assembly. They're creatures of the province. They are created by legislation that we pass. That's not trying to be arrogant or dismissive of them; that's just the state of play. That's how things are. Contrarily, the province is not a creature of the federal government. Both the province and the federal government are established in the Constitution, have supremacy over their areas of jurisdiction to pass any law that they see fit, and no past parliament can bind a future parliament when it comes to what we do in this Chamber. That is not true of municipalities.

If the NDP feels otherwise, they're welcome to follow the amending formula of the Constitution, petition the other provinces, get two-thirds of the provinces onside and more than half the population, and change the Constitution to say that municipalities are constitutionally entitled to change the laws that they see fit. I, on the other hand, believe that municipalities are a function and a creature of this Legislature and the province.

Importantly, with that context, it needs to be understood as well that, for example, in my constituency we had a number of disasters and emergencies happen before COVID. Fort Vermilion, for example: we had a state of emergency when the ice jams happened on the Peace River and were wiping out the town. Quite literally, icebergs were wiping out the town. During that time, understandably, they enacted a local state of emergency, and that town was evacuated. We had another crisis before, in High Level,

La Crête, Paddle Prairie, with the Chuckegg Creek fire. During that local state of emergency they also evacuated many of these municipalities. Municipalities made these local decisions. That was right.

11:00

If my municipalities were evacuating town months after the fire and in the middle of summer, when there was no ice on the Peace River, I'd be concerned. I'd be concerned that they were abusing the ability to set up local states of emergency. This Chamber would have an obligation to say: no, no, no, no; you can't go treating our citizens in that way, because ultimately you answer to your electorate, but your municipality as an entity, as an institution, answers to this body. Now, we have an example here of municipalities that are making decisions that are contrary to the public scientific information provided. We have an example of them abusing, in my mind, the good-natured compliance of the people in these communities, and we as one province get to say: no, no, no, no; you're not allowed to do that; you're not allowed to continue to use that authority in a way that is not in concordance with the facts.

So I think it's absolutely consistent. It's our obligation in this Chamber, and if we were to not pass this law, I think we'd effectively be doing the same thing, setting a very dangerous precedent to say that municipalities can abuse these privileges that they have, granted by this body. It's our obligation as this body to make sure they are not abused and not used in inappropriate ways, because if the folks of Peace River were getting evacuated for an ice jam on a plus-30 day in the middle of August, I'd be concerned. That, ladies and gentlemen, is the equivalent of what I see happen here if we do not as a province move forward and ask municipalities to pay attention to exactly what our chief medical officer is saying and the best public data we have.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday is next.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 4, Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I've appreciated the conversation that I've heard so far on this debate, and I will let you know that at this time I won't be accepting any interjections. Thank you.

Just a few points I want to make here. I think the one that has resonated most with me, not only from what we've heard in the debate this evening and before that but also from municipalities and Albertans alike: the fact that as we've gone through this process of trying to deal with COVID, the provincial response has been nothing less than a mess, is probably the best way I could put that, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that, again, we heard last year the Premier abdicating responsibility for making these decisions, leaving them with municipalities, saying, quote: these decisions are best taken locally. Again, as we've heard, the Premier has done a complete one-eighty on this issue, just like many other issues that he and his caucus have had to deal with, and I would say that that is, again, one of the reasons why he is the least trusted politician in the country. Heck, Mr. Speaker, he might even be one of the least trusted politicians in his own caucus.

The fact is that when we look at what we see in this legislation and look at the initial responses, as we've heard, municipalities in the beginning of this process were asking for the province to take action. The Premier said, "Absolutely will not; it's up to you." At

that time the municipalities said, “If you are expecting us to make these important health decisions, then you need to give us the data.” Unfortunately, to this day, Mr. Speaker, those calls for experts to come forward from the province to present to municipalities have by and large gone unheard. They continue to ask for those experts to come forward to them as they try to make these decisions even in the face of this government trying to take those powers away from them through Bill 4.

I would argue that this legislation before us is a mechanism for this government in the future to not have to take any action, just like we saw in the beginning of the pandemic, because today, with the presentation of this legislation, they will say that municipalities don’t have the right to make these decisions as narrow as or as broad as the minister might like to argue. But the fact is that tomorrow, if we find ourselves in another wave and municipalities have to make these considerations, the provincial government is going to say, “Oh, we aren’t taking any action; you have this power now,” but they are now going to have to go through more regulatory red tape to actually make those decisions. Again, it’s an abdication of responsibility from this province, because they will say: “Oh, well, your municipality has to make these decisions. We’re not making them for you.” Yet here we are with Bill 4, and they’re exactly saying that.

Mr. Speaker, really, on both hands it’s quite hypocritical. The fact is that Bill 4 is putting barriers in place for municipalities regarding the decision to make health measures, and it truly is about the Premier trying to hold any semblance of power. It is the only way that this Premier sees a path to holding on to power within his caucus, a group of people who are increasingly believing that he is doing not such a good job, and I would agree with them for different reasons, potentially regarding COVID-19. But the fact remains that we, all Albertans expected much better from this Premier and from this UCP government through the COVID-19 pandemic, and unfortunately we, again through Bill 4, have not had that.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but I appreciate the opportunity to hear this. I also appreciate the many municipal partners who have come forward to raise their concerns regarding Bill 4, to raise their concerns regarding the absolute failure of this UCP government to take action from the beginning to put supports in place when they made decisions around vaccine passports and the enforcement of those, because by and large Alberta municipalities were left without supports in the first place to make those important decisions, and unfortunately that meant consequences for the health and well-being of many Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I will try to correct some of the mass of misinformation that came from the other side. A lot of things have happened. What people need to remember is that COVID started two years and about three weeks ago, so 18 months ago we had about six months of experience. Everybody in the world didn’t know what was going on because the virus was so new. It was changing. No one in the world really knew, and we were all doing our best.

The difference between 18 months ago and now is that we actually have four times as much experience with COVID, and during that 18 months, apparently, the other side hasn’t learned a blessed thing, but on this side of the House we were paying attention, which is why we made a different decision now with four times the experience than the decision that we made 18 months ago. That would make sense to most Albertans, I think. I think Albertans

expect their people that are in this place to learn. On this side of the House we did learn, Mr. Speaker. We gained more evidence, more experience, more knowledge about what would happen, yet at the end of the day we still don’t know a hundred per cent for sure what the virus will do next, but with four times the experience one should not be surprised that a responsible government would have learned something and changed perhaps some of their decisions with new information.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that some of the debate from the other side was hilarious. The first member that spoke talked about how it was about power and it was about: this shouldn’t be changing things for municipalities. But then in the same debate the same member said: why didn’t you make other municipalities do different things differently? So I guess it really wasn’t about whether there were rules about municipalities. It was about whether the other side – the other side apparently wanted to tell municipalities what to do, unlike us.

In fact, what’s clear here is that Edmonton kind of forced us to defend our own legislative territory, our turf, if you will. Again, this is a stay-in-your-lane bill. The fact is that members of Edmonton’s council went public saying that they were going to go against the provincial health rules in an area of provincial, clear jurisdiction. In fact . . . [interjection] I know they don’t want to hear the facts over there, but I’m going to carry on. Mr. Speaker, in fact, even after we introduced this legislation, the city of Edmonton actually brought a motion to their council meeting to override our legislation. Now, it was defeated; nonetheless, five members of that council voted for it.

So the argument that there was no reason to bring this forward just doesn’t hold water, because history does not support that argument. [interjections] The city council in this town brought forward a piece of business to override the proper health jurisdiction of the province, and, Mr. Speaker, we defended our jurisdiction. [interjections]

11:10

The Speaker: Order. It’s after 11 o’clock. I think we can allow the minister to conclude his remarks in closing debate in some sense of order.

The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe some of the folks will notice that I was quiet when they were speaking despite how much I disagreed with what they said.

Mr. Speaker, here it is. The province is doing the right thing defending our proper area of jurisdiction. Really, the city of Edmonton forced us into it. I’m going to give them the benefit of the doubt and say that those members of Edmonton city council that wanted to override the provincial jurisdiction, in their minds, were doing what they thought was best for their citizens, but really a responsible provincial government can’t let the municipalities try to take over municipal responsibility. That’s just not how it’s done.

We’ve discharged our responsibilities. We did it in the most narrow way possible. The municipalities still have all the authority they had before this bill to protect the health and safety of their citizens, as they ought to have, as our legislation gives them. Really, at the end of the day, nothing has changed unless some municipality wants to override provincial health regulations. [interjections] It’s unfortunate that the member from the other side tries to shout down the truth, but shouting down the truth doesn’t change the truth.

The fact is that all the arguments essentially made on the other side: they know they’re wrong; they made them anyways. What’s really funny is that they all voted for this bill at Committee of the Whole. I don’t know what revelation they had in the last day, but somehow they’ve changed. They can vote whatever way they want.

They ought to vote for this, but on this side of the House we will be, because defending provincial legislation in the area of health is this government's responsibility. This government will discharge its duties and its responsibilities, and part of that will be passing Bill 4.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Rehn	Smith
Fir	Reid	Toor
Issik	Rosin	Turton

Lovely	Rowswell	van Dijken
McIver	Savage	Walker
Nally	Schulz	Williams
Neudorf	Singh	Yaseen
Pon		

Against the motion:

Carson	Loyola	Sweet
Eggen	Sabir	

Totals:	For – 22	Against – 5
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[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until Thursday, March 31, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:30 p.m.]

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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