



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, April 19, 2022

Day 20

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Brian Jean Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

The Speaker: Hon. members, I now invite the hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women to proceed to the main doors of the Chamber.

Members, I have received word from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta of the report of the returning officer for the constituency Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche containing the results of the by-election conducted on March 15, 2022, which states that the by-election was conducted in the constituency of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and that Mr. Brian Jean was duly elected as the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Ms Issik escorted Mr. Jean to the Mace]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I introduce to you and to this Chamber Mr. Brian Jean, the new Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, who has taken his oath as a member of the Assembly, has inscribed the roll, and now claims his right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let the hon. member take his seat.
Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 30: Member Loyola]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has five minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate for second reading, Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and welcome everybody back, after our Easter weekend, to speak to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading. As we know, this is a financial bill, and it is speaking specifically to the budget that the government has put forward for the people of Alberta. Now, when the budget was drafted, as we all know, it was drafted previously to what we were seeing with the increase in inflation, the spending within COVID, and the increase in the oil

revenue that the province is now benefiting from. What we have not seen, however, is this government responding to those factors.

Obviously, within this statutes amendment act there are pieces that I think many Albertans are concerned with, and those concerns, I think, are valid. As we look at what is happening across the province and, of course, happening across the country, inflation has significantly increased over the last two years. What we've seen is that on average it's raised about 5.7 per cent, a significant increase, I would say, in regard to the cost of living, not only in Alberta but across Canada. Now, what we haven't seen, obviously, are wages keeping up with that inflation. The wage right now officially would be at about 3.1 per cent over the last year and, of course, again, like I said, inflation being 5.7 per cent.

Now, because of that, what we know is that the people of Alberta's wages are not able to keep up with the cost of living that is happening across the province. We have seen utility rates substantially increase. Yesterday natural gas was on a tear. I think it's up to 8 cents a kilojoule right now. We've seen the price of fuel increase substantially. We've seen the price of looking at our basic needs such as our food costs increasing substantially, yet we've seen nothing within this bill or this budget that is addressing any of those cost pressures.

Now, the major concern around that, as we all know, is that when inflation continues to increase and our wages aren't able to keep up with that, our purchasing power also substantially decreases, so Albertans are at a place right now where they're not able to take their earnings and reinvest that into our economy.

Now, to have a budget introduced into this Legislature that is purely based on the price of oil, for the government to be applauding the fact that they have a balanced budget, again, on the price of oil, which is a resource that all Albertans own and should have some form of benefit from – we have not seen that same respect for that resource and the value of that resource reinvested into the needs of Albertans.

Now, the government could have done a couple of things, and I've spoken about those repeatedly since this budget has been introduced. One of the major ones would be the fact that they should have looked at the inflation. They should have looked at the fact that Albertans' incomes are not keeping up with the cost of inflation, and they should have reversed their decision when it comes to taxing personal income tax because, of course, what we know is that the average family is now going to lose about \$500 alone on their basic personal exemptions when it comes to their income tax. That's pretty substantial at a time where the discrepancy between inflation and wages is significant, and we know inflation is going to continue to go up. We saw the Bank of Canada already, just recently in the last couple of days, increasing the interest rates in relation to mortgage payments, in relation to car payments. That will put more stress on the average Albertan.

Now, that \$500 could have been part of the basic personal exemption, could have been put back into the pockets of Albertans to help them address the increased costs that we're now seeing, but the government chose not to do that, which I believe they should still reconsider, given the fact that we're still in second reading to be able to look at this bill, reconsider the decisions that have been made and support Albertans by giving that \$500 back. That's one simple solution.

Now, of course, the other piece of that is that we saw this government promise a \$150 rebate, which Albertans have not seen yet, at a time where, as I said, not only yesterday we saw the price of natural gas significantly increase pretty much overnight, knowing that those bills now at the end of this month are going to be substantially higher. Again, the promise that this government made

to help bring down those costs has not been presented to the people of Alberta, nor have they received any type of relief in regard to that.

Now, there were other things that this government chose to do, which was basically looking at, again, another tax on inflation for AISH recipients, because they're going to lose about \$3,000 in real purchasing power with the changes that have been made to AISH. Senior couples that are on the Alberta seniors' benefit plan are also going to lose about \$750 given the fact that this government has not kept up with inflation. Of course, there are other hidden fees that were introduced within this budget: tuition increases, park fees, insurance costs, utility bills. All of those things that the government has the ability to create policy that would help bring down those costs this government has chosen to ignore and not introduce anything in regard to this particular bill.

I think it's disingenuous to Albertans to say that we should be celebrating this budget, because, as I've said, a balanced budget is only good if it helps the people of Alberta, and there's a way to do it. I mean, we look at the budget and we look at the projected value of oil, which I think was at a very low number of \$70 a barrel, I believe – it might have been a little bit less – and we're already over \$100 a barrel. There is going to be a significant amount of revenue coming into the province that was never budgeted within this piece of legislation.

10:10

Because it wasn't budgeted, the government will come out next quarter and try to celebrate how they've done even better than what they told Albertans they initially thought they were going to do, yet there will be no policy changes, no legislation that we have seen that will actually speak to the pressures that Albertans are facing.

You can balance a budget and still make sure that you're providing services. The significant cuts to health care, the conflict within the bargaining process between our health care workers and the government right now, the request to take substantial wage decreases at a time where this government is talking about the amount of revenue . . . [interjection] I will accept an interjection.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I think it's particularly worth noting, not just in this House but, you know, for Albertans in general, that this budget, this UCP budget, in fact, was underestimating the revenue from oil and gas quite dramatically, and while we don't have to calculate the exact amount now, because this is an unfolding story as we speak – right? – I think the government tabled in this budget a \$500 million surplus, something like that. It's considerably more than that. It's exponentially more than that. You know, what I fear is that, cynically, this UCP government will try to buy Albertans off in the next election by suddenly appearing with billions of dollars of surplus in a matter of months. In fact, we probably have that right now.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the interjection. He is correct. As of right now with the tax on inflation, in fact, what the government of Alberta will be doing is getting a \$1 billion surplus in just income taxes alone, a billion dollars off of Albertans just by the fact that they did not remove their decision to tax personal income tax.

It's a billion dollars. Now, of course, that is a billion-dollar tax grab. By taxing inflation and failing to index the income tax system, all of our constituents should be very concerned. I know that I have constituents in my own riding whose bills alone on utilities have doubled. That \$500 that they would have received back on their income taxes would have paid at least one month of their utility

bills, yet we haven't seen a shift or a change by this government to move that back and look at making sure that Albertans have their income tax returned to their pockets at a time when they don't need to be doing it.

Now, of course, the other piece of that, as the hon. member did say, is that this is one of those things where this government continues to try to position themselves to go into another election where they can start celebrating surpluses, talk about how great they did fiscally. We see that even with the 13-cent rebate on the provincial tax this government has put on fuel. Now, it's not a balanced 13 cents. I've talked about this already in the House a few times. We know for our agricultural industry specifically that they used to have a tax exemption on their dyed fuel. Part of the reason for that was to make sure that our agricultural industry still had a competitive advantage and a comparative advantage across jurisdictions so that those costs that they were incurring were able to be off-set, and it was one way to look at decreasing some of the input costs that were going to be required to get, you know, crops ready, to do aerial spraying, all of those things. Yet we didn't see the government make an adjustment there. Dyed fuel, regular fuel: they're now the same.

Why the government chose not to do that I don't understand, especially at a time where we continuously hear from our agricultural sector the stressors that they have when it comes to the increase in input costs. Fertilizer is going up. Feed costs are going up. Fuel is going up. Their transportation costs are going to go up. The demand on the supply chain is going to be extreme come harvest. Yet we saw nothing within this piece of legislation that would address that.

Now, again, at a time where we see many of our corporations doing quite well, our oil and gas industry doing very well, we again saw this government hold fast on keeping the corporate taxes low yet increasing every Albertans' taxes. It doesn't make sense. Why does this government feel that Albertans should continuously have to keep paying more out of their pockets at a time when they're cutting the corporate income tax? It's one more tax on Albertans and a complete disregard for the corporations that are benefiting from the natural resources of our province that are owned by the people of this province.

There should be a balance between what this government expects from corporate income tax and what they expect from personal income tax, yet they didn't index corporate taxes; they left it flat. That, I think, is a real concern because, again, we're talking about a resource that is owned by the people of Alberta, a resource that corporations are benefiting from, yet they're not paying the taxes back to the very people that own that resource at a time when this government feels like Albertans should have to pay more, at a time where inflation goes up, at a time where their wages are not matching the cost of inflation.

We know, and this government will continuously talk about the fact that: well, this is about job creation and reinvesting into the job market, but we haven't seen the evidence that these corporations, that haven't had to pay the income tax at the same rate as personal income tax, haven't had to keep up with inflation, are actually creating or reinvesting into the market. If they were, we would have way more jobs. What we are seeing is that the revenue that many of these corporations are benefiting from, the profits that they're making, are actually just being put back into their dividends, they're paying their shareholders, and they're not actually reinvesting it into the employment market.

That is another big concern, because when this government continuously talks about employment and the jobs that are being created in Alberta, one, we're behind the rest of the country still,

but on top of that, the jobs that this government continuously talks about are part-time positions; they're not full-time. They're not positions that are paying mortgages and that are high paying; they're lower earning part-time positions.

The government should have an expectation that when you give a corporate income tax cut, because that's what it is, and when you're trying to give corporations a benefit to be job creators, that they would create full-time, long-term, mortgage-paying positions, yet we haven't seen that. So, then, why are they continuously getting a tax cut? Why are Albertans having to pay more in their personal income taxes when corporations don't have to?

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this piece of legislation has fallen short. I believe that the government could have been far more in tune to the realities of the markets and what was going on with inflation and the cost of living and the fact that we know that our wages aren't keeping up in this province to those demands. They could have created policy, and they could have done that within their legislation to ensure that all Albertans are able to pay their bills, are able to pay their mortgages, and that we are successful as we move forward, and that that purchasing power that we need Albertans to have to keep our economy moving forward is there.

Right now we don't have that, and people are worried about whether or not they're going to be able to pay their next utility bill. They're worried about whether or not they're going to pay their next mortgage payment. So I would encourage this government to go back and reconsider the decisions they've made and help to support Albertans with this increased cost of living.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 2 are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be back here in the House and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and much like . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, I believe that the hon. member has spoken to second reading of Bill 2 previously.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

10:20

Mr. Eggen: Am I good on that one?

The Speaker: Yup, you're okay.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Good.

I have a mask on. See; it really is me.

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Again, I will refer back to some very excellent analysis by the member previous from Edmonton-Manning, you know, just talking about priorities and perception and expectations and responsibilities of a government to the population that does elect it. I think we see a pretty good case of the application of that responsibility and the dashing of expectations and, really, a lack of direction that this budget kind of points to.

We know that it's important to be fiscally prudent, but this has to be balanced with a sense of what you are responsible for, right? When it comes down to the provincial budget here and anywhere, really, the lion's share of that expenditure is to the responsibility to health care and education and the safety of the population in general. What I see, and I think what Albertans see across the province – and I've been travelling around the last couple of weeks quite a lot, Mr. Speaker, to different parts of the province: to Red

Deer; to Camrose; to Canmore; Calgary, several times; Edmonton, of course, I just wake up and I'm in Edmonton, and what I'm seeing as I've been door-knocking, obviously, is that there's a real gap between what people are seeing on the ground and what this government is saying in regard to not just their budget but their style and choices around governance in general.

One of the most striking things that I see, and I hear it on the ground in all of those places and more, is that health care and access to health care is severely curtailed, especially in smaller centres, where you literally have places like Boyle and Edson and southern Alberta – different towns – having to close down their emergencies or the equivalent of their emergencies in a town because they have inadequate staff for those services, you know?

The reason I mentioned health care and then safety and security is that the two, Mr. Speaker, go hand in hand, right? If you live in an area where you have an expectation that, you know, within 30, 40, 50 kilometres even you can access emergency care and suddenly that's not there, it literally undermines the safety and the security of your family even if you don't happen to have an emergency at that moment. You know that it could be there and it might not be there. That devalues the ability for people to live in a place. It devalues the property value as well. People say, you know: "We're going to move here; it looks like a nice place, a nice town. How's the local hospital?" and you say, "Well, actually, it's shut down half the time because we don't have enough doctors or nurses." That literally puts pressure on the economic development and the habitability of a place, right?

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this budget and the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, I'm looking at those things. Another element that I talked about: about the lion's share of any given provincial budget being, of course, in regard to education. What my particular responsibility is as the official opposition critic for postsecondary education, for colleges, universities, polytechnics around the province – again, we've seen generational cuts, probably some of the biggest cuts in the history of this province, to this sector, and here we are in 2022 with a surplus and we don't see that turning around, right? At least approaching \$700 million taken out of the system in the previous three budgets, and those colleges, universities, and polytechnics are suffering. They're reeling with layoffs, with program closures, and just a real lack of direction for the future.

When you take a certain percentage of money from a facility like the University of Alberta in Edmonton or the University of Calgary and so forth, you know, it takes longer for those cuts to be felt, but in some places . . . [interjection] I'd be happy to take the intervention. Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I just want to acknowledge some of the incredible work that you've been doing travelling the province, talking to our postsecondary, whether it's instructors or students or families that are deciding to go into postsecondary. You talk about the incredible impacts, and I've heard you share some powerful stories here in this House about what's happening with those that are wanting to get into postsecondary but aren't able to because of the cuts that have happened. I mean, you see it every day when you're talking to Albertans and advocating on behalf of them. You hear their personal struggles and the impacts of the finances and the devastating cuts that this government has made. I would love it if you could share some of that again in this House because I don't feel that this government is taking into consideration the personal impact that's being had across the province with so many families, students, that are really struggling with the horrible decisions that financially this government is making.

Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, you know, we've been sharing that information and talking about it, but sometimes stories are the most powerful way by which to really understand what's going on. The story that I hear, compelling, over and over again from Fort McMurray down to Lethbridge – right? – and the colleges there is that any time you're increasing the tuition rate by 20 to 23 per cent, for example, across the province and then, on top of that, extraordinary tuition increases between 20 to 40 per cent, even up to 103 per cent for a certain counselling program at the University of Alberta, then you are literally shutting the door for a certain sector of the population that just can't afford it. If you move from here to here, you're literally disenfranchising thousands of people from being able to even consider going to university or college or a polytechnic or upgrading themselves as well.

I mean, I know a certain person in my own family that was accepted to the nurse practitioner program, which is a fantastic program. It really helps with our health care system, Mr. Speaker. It really helps to diversify critical care, and I think that this government at least on paper and in words does support using more nurse practitioners in our health system, right? But the words on paper are quite different from what actions do project, and the action is that they've increased the tuition for nurse practitioners such that many people just are not going to go. They literally will not go because they can't afford it, right?

These are usually registered nurses that are already working. They probably, maybe have a family and so forth, so they're already having to budget their time and their money and consider advancing themselves in postsecondary. That's the target for a nurse practitioner, but that program is going to be in trouble because for a whole lot of the many people that were considering it, including my own daughter, it just isn't possible anymore, right? There's a story right there.

I think that we could lose a lot of people. And the extension of that story, Mr. Speaker, is that for the first time since the early 1980s we have a net migration of people between 18 and 25 years old out of this province, right? Again, that is a loss that is irreparable and has long-standing effects to our population. If you're losing that critical group of people – right? – those young people that we educated through K to 12 and set them up and had an expectation for that generation to be here to work and to prosper, if we're losing that, again, we're in big trouble, don't you think, Mr. MLA?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: I was going to call you minister.

10:30

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. That's twice today.

You know, I appreciate your comments, and I just wanted to talk a little bit about – you're talking about the cuts to our postsecondaries, the impact it's having on driving students out of the province, which is very, very bad for our province, for our economy, for the future. I was hoping you could also touch on the fact that we know technology companies that are looking to relocate across this country or internationally rely on a strong talent pipeline. That's something that we support very much. This budget has fallen short on funding our postsecondaries, so I was hoping the member can comment on the impact not just it'll have on the outflow or outmigration of young people, but what will that do for Alberta companies or for Alberta trying to attract these major players?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you know, strikes on an

important synergy that was just starting to take root between postsecondary and technology here in the province. Yeah, we've seen growth in technology investment across the country. Again, if you are looking at these things as a competition between the 10 provinces and three territories, then everybody is kind of moving up on this pretty much, and Alberta is still lagging behind. At that very particular moment, Mr. Speaker, when we need to diversify our economy and work together to try to keep those young people in the province, then, again, this choice around our budget and supplementary supply and the money we have and resources that we own together – it's not being invested in the right place. Simple as that, right?

If you lose those people, young people, they probably don't come back, right? If a company sees that the universities or colleges or polytechnics are in any way compromised on long-term, stable, predictable funding, then, again, people – they vote with their feet, quite frankly, or they just never even come. You know, it takes a generation or many generations, in some cases, to build the reputation and the integrity of a postsecondary institution, but it only takes a few months to lose it. Lose your reputation: it's gone, very hard to get back. That's what's happening now. Between the lack of investment in postsecondary and a lack of, I guess, let's say, certainty or security and affordability for young people, I think that's a pretty toxic combination, and we certainly could do better.

I know that an investment in postsecondary pays exponential returns. There are no two ways about it. We saw the University of Calgary calculating the literally billions of dollars that the University of Calgary contributes to the city of Calgary's GDP, if we could call it that, right? I mean, it's a bit fluid. I met with the president again during these last couple of weeks down in Calgary, and he calculated, you know, a \$5 billion or \$6 billion contribution to the overall economy of the city of Calgary, and we could expect that there's some equivalency to that in Edmonton with the University of Alberta and Lethbridge with the University of Lethbridge and Olds with Olds College and Vermilion with Lakeland. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. There are 26 colleges, universities, and polytechnics scattered across this province. It's a unique situation that no other province has, really, that geographic mix of small, medium, and large polytechnics and trades and universities.

You know, Mr. Speaker, you don't know what you've got until it's gone sometimes, and when a place like Lakeland College or Concordia takes a cut – I was there as well last week or 10 days ago – they're having to lay off staff, close programs. Concordia is losing its nursing program, for example, which was an important part of servicing not just Camrose but the whole region all the way up the highway, to social workers as well. I mean, if people train in a certain place, they're more likely to stay there, too.

Mr. Speaker, you know that because, of course, you have Olds College, which really helps to backstop the town of Olds' economy. Simple as that, right? Things might see an economic downturn through energy or whatever, but, hey, we've always got the college. You can see people playing off the synergy there, with the hotel and the brewing program – I definitely took a tour and tasted some of the beer; it was really good – and the abattoir that they have there, the synergy of having the high school in the same campus as the college. I mean, these are all things that happened with a long-term, sustainable investment in funding from the province of Alberta to colleges and universities and polytechnics here in Alberta.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you. I have appreciated the member's comments so far in terms of budgeting priorities and how it impacts Albertans when we look at the bill before us. I think it's important

to again note that when we compare the work of the NDP government from 2015 to 2019 and the investments that we did make in postsecondary education to properly freeze postsecondary tuition for Albertans to what we've seen under the UCP, where institutions have now actually had to come to the minister and ask for increases of upwards of a 100 per cent on some programs, I think it clearly shows the difference in values between the NDP and the UCP and clearly shows the difference in an understanding of how we support our economy and diversification of our provincial economy, especially when we made those decisions when the price of oil was so much lower, recognizing that no matter what the price of oil is, Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that we're supporting Albertans. It's rich, for lack of a better term, that while we have the price of oil now where it is, we've seen the UCP making these decisions.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for that. Thank you for bringing me back to, of course, the political realm – right? – which is an important part. People like to denigrate, you know, political elements to policy and so forth, but it's all about that, really. I mean, at least we have, Mr. Speaker, a democratic way by which we can choose and to constructively engage a population and have alternatives, quite frankly. Again, that's a good reminder. I don't know what the price of oil is today, but it's got to be close to a hundred bucks. We were dealing with a \$25 barrel back when we were continuing to invest in postsecondary, as just one example. You've got to do that.

I mean, you see it in other jurisdictions, for sure, right? Ireland: it's always tenuous, their economy. They ebb and flow and manage. But they realized a long time ago that their biggest asset is their young people and trying to keep them there, so they have a very affordable college and university program where many of the basic operations and basic tuition are free. The Germans do the same thing, knowing full well that, you know, it's not the coal mines of Germany that keep the country going, but it's the auto industry and their technology industry and so forth and their medical, biomedical industry. Those are the things that move an economy and are some things you can be sustainably pointing to for now and the future.

I mean, those are the kinds of things we need to do here in the province of Alberta, right? I always get a head nod when I talk about these things. The Calgary Chamber of commerce had put it as their top priority to invest in the city of Calgary, and it's a critical element of a redevelopment policy and program to the downtown especially, to have the universities and colleges being invested much more integrally in downtown Calgary.

It goes on from there, right? You can't find a place that – you know, Keyano College: when I was in Fort McMurray a couple of times in the last few months, again, people just really want that as an anchor to the community so that it's not just a place to work and go but a place where people can buy houses and start families and have their kids go to college and get a trade education and things like that.

The whole point here, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, budgets are the enabling tool for all of these other things, for education and health care, for safety and security, for building the infrastructure that we need to grow, all of those things. Albertans are looking for that, right? Of course, we want to be prudent with our money, and we want to make sure that we're investing and saving for the future as well. People like to equate the provincial budget with a household budget, and right now household budgets in Alberta are suffering. Albertans demand and expect more, and we will be here to help deliver that for them.

Thank you.

10:40

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, an important piece of legislation that helps this government implement some of the terrible decisions they have made through Budget 2022. In the last two weeks I had the pleasure of attending many different events in my constituency and had the opportunity to talk to many people about the issues facing them. While the government is busy patting themselves on the back for the increase in the WTI price, people are hurting. Their budgets are not balanced, and they're struggling to make ends meet.

In my riding in particular northeast Calgary represents some of the neighbourhoods that are among the neighbourhoods with the lowest per capita income in comparison to many other neighbourhoods in the city of Calgary: Taradale, Martindale, Saddle Ridge. All of them have average household incomes around \$29,000, \$30,000 as compared to the average in Calgary of \$42,000 to \$45,000, which means that increases in their insurance costs, increases to their utility bills impact them way harder than some people in other neighbourhoods. I mean, these impacts are difficult to digest for many Albertans across this province, but because I represent some of those neighbourhoods with people who have been impacted already a fair bit by this government's policies, they have been particularly hit hard.

While they have income tax open, what this government could have done to help Albertans was that they could have reversed the changes they have made to income tax exemption brackets, that bracket creep that the Premier used to call while in Ottawa an insidious and pernicious tax grab. That decision alone is taking almost \$500 from those Albertans' pockets at a time when they need that money the most. It's costing Albertans across this province almost a billion dollars, and government is working overtime to do everything that doesn't help people in my riding and people across this province at a time when cost of living is going up, like, from utility bills, insurance costs, tuition fees, and even park fees. This government is bending backwards to find more ways to tax Albertans and especially to tax those Albertans who are in the lowest tax brackets, all the while giving billions of dollars – billions of dollars – to the most profitable corporations.

For instance, when we talk about insurance, the first step that this government took was to remove the 5 per cent increase cap on the premiums. I remember the government trying to convince us that unless they do so, insurance companies will leave the province, the insurance business won't be viable, and whatnot. They were standing with the insurance companies and not with Albertans. They then even tried to hide the annual report detailing the premiums, claims, payouts, all those things so that Albertans won't find out that their decision was not based on facts. Their decision was to please their friends, lobbyists, and insiders.

Last week we found out that insurance companies made over a billion dollars in the last two years even during the pandemic, where every business was hurting, every small business was hurting. Albertans were hurting. They were struggling to make ends meet . . . [interjection] I'll take the intervention.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I think it's important to highlight how some of these decisions are being made. You talked about a government that makes decisions based on what their friends need, not what the average Albertan needs. You talk about businesses struggling. You talk about families struggling. There are so many examples of decisions that this government has made that are based

on supporting their friends, the insurance companies, for example, that you highlighted.

When we talk about how the financial decisions made by this government impact families, what are those implications? What happens to a family in Alberta when they're looking at their budget and they see that this government is making decisions to support their friends and not the average Albertan? What does that family budget look like because of the financial decisions that this government has made, because of the decision that they've made to support their friends, not Albertans? I'd like to hear a little bit more about what that means for a family who's struggling to cover the cost of insurance.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for this important question. Last weekend I was in Banff, and I went out door-knocking with my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, and we stopped at a house where a single mom spoke to us. She was a barber, and she shared her story with us. Her business is not doing well. She was barely making ends meet throughout the pandemic, and now her utilities have gone up almost double, from \$300 to \$650. Her insurance has gone up, and basically she wasn't able to pay the rent because she was worried that her utilities would be cut off. These are real people. These are real Albertans who are impacted by this government's decision not to take action, not to do anything to make life affordable for Albertans. They promised relief of \$50 on utilities, and on the gas that relief hasn't kicked in yet. If Albertans' bills are going up, like, from \$300 to \$600 or \$700, \$50 a month does not make much of a difference.

10:50

These increases are a direct result of this government removing the 6.8 cent per kilowatt hour cap that we had in place. That's the direct result of government removing that cap in favour of the corporations, in favour of their friends, and leaving Albertans on their own to fend for themselves. That's how out of touch this government is from Albertans and issues facing them. [interjection] I'll take another intervention.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. We all have critic areas, and what I'm curious to know is: how is this budget affecting your critic area specifically? I know that we've seen a lot of delays in the execution of justice here in the province of Alberta, and I know just anecdotally from my neighbour I was talking to yesterday – right? – who said that, you know, “I have cases that get deferred so many times that they're lost. They literally are gone.” Whatever transaction or whatever issue it is, after a certain period of time without the timely intervention and a court date or appearance and so forth you lose that case.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you. That's a really important question. Over the last three budgets this UCP government has cut over \$200 million from the justice system – over \$200 million from the justice system – and they have not done anything to address backlogs, to address Jordan delays, and to address the delays that have and will result from the pandemic. People who want to have a day in court are seeing their perpetrators walk scot-free, their cases being dropped in front of them. It's the government that claims they're tough on crimes and whatnot. They have not done anything to address those delays.

They had their opportunity in this budget to make up for those cuts, talk to the stakeholders and the justice system, listen to their needs, and provide for what they need so that Albertans can get justice, so Albertans can access the court system in a timely manner. Instead, what's happening: prosecutors are not happy with them.

They are even thinking of strike action. Some of those stakeholders can't even get a meeting with government ministers so that they can discuss and share their concerns. That's how bad the situation is.

Back to what I was talking about. I was talking about how government had this opportunity to fix many things and fix at least the rising costs that are resulting directly from this government's policies, but they chose not to do that. Instead, this government is piling on the costs for average Albertans. Just one simple policy, bracket creep, is costing Albertans \$500 a month. And when you're working on minimum wage, when you're a single income earner, that \$500 makes a huge difference. Albertans are also losing around \$450 because the Alberta child tax benefit isn't being indexed by this government. Albertans on senior benefits – again, these are Albertans who are on fixed incomes – are losing \$750. Under this government plan and with this Budget 2022 an AISH recipient will lose \$3,000 in real purchasing power.

Mr. Speaker, these are the decisions that this government could have reversed in this budget, in this piece of legislation, but they are choosing not to because they do not care; they do not listen. The only people who have access to government and their ears are big, profitable corporations. Even when they were giving them billions of dollars, they promised that that will create jobs, that that will bring prosperity back to Alberta, that that will help us fill downtown Calgary. None of that happened.

Those corporations got hundreds of millions of dollars. And what they did? They laid off people right here in Alberta, in downtown Calgary. Downtown Calgary is still sitting at a 30 per cent vacancy rate, and the government solution is that they're giving \$500 million to the city of Calgary to fill it up. That's how bad, that's how out of touch they are from the reality.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 2.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Adjourned debate March 30: Mr. Getson]

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure we'll have time for everyone to have a few words in regard to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I see this bill as following quite closely federal legislation from some time ago that criminalized this activity and, in fact, criminalized the aiding and abetting of this practice as well. So, you know, that is the main domain of the abolition and the criminalization of this practice. We should keep that in mind, of course, when we are debating this bill.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

I mean, that being said, I'm always an advocate of, Madam Speaker, ensuring that we are providing some supports for federal legislation that we do agree with and providing an educative component to federal legislation that is the main driver of this particular practice. I guess that's what, you know, we're doing with Bill 10, and I do support that as such.

11:00

I think it's important for us to realize, really, what – my understanding is that we're aiming to send a message to people who otherwise would consider sending a woman or a girl to another place to have these operations, or these cuts, to take place and just

to reinforce the message to anybody considering that that, one, it's against the Canadian law and, two, any aiding and abetting of an individual to engage in this practice is against the law, too, right?

If we can get that message to people from various cultures that might consider this, I think that's a worthwhile thing to do, right? You know, although I don't have a great deal of knowledge about female genital mutilation here in this country, I know that in many countries in Africa this is something that governments, federal governments and state governments of various republics and countries around Africa, are taking a sharp focus on, this problem, again, trying to, yeah, certainly criminalize and recognize the . . .

An Hon. Member: Your colleague . . .

Mr. Eggen: Sorry?

An Hon. Member: . . . wants to intervene.

Mr. Eggen: Oh. Sure. Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms Goehring: That's okay.

Mr. Eggen: Here I am standing right beside you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you for the intervention. I think that you raise a really good point, hon. member, that there is a lack of understanding about this practice, and I think a key part of that could be an education component, especially when it comes to the health care professionals in how they support women in this process and support those to help destigmatize what's happening.

I mean, you come from a postsecondary lens, and I think that by talking about, you know, some of the supports that could be provided at the postsecondary level, when those that are entering the health care practice should be educated on this very, very harmful practice – so when we're looking at the postsecondary lens, what health care professionals do you think should be educated about female genital cutting, and how can that impact the education of those that are serving women going forward?

I think that when we're talking about something that is not well known, it's important to consider education. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I appreciate that, hon. member. You know, I think that that is our purview here, considering it is a federal law that we're dealing with. Part of moving cultural practices away from dangerous situations and so forth is to not just bring down the full hammer of the law and try to put somebody in jail and throw away the key kind of thing – right? – but, rather, for people to understand that not just in Canada but perhaps in their place of origin this process of education, moving away from female genital mutilation, is happening as well. So in a place like Kenya, for example, there are active programs for health.

It's a question of power, too, I think, that if you are imposing this on women and girls, it's an imposition of dominance and of gendered dominance as well, right? So when you're trying to build a modern society in a place like Kenya or in Mozambique or in Tanzania or in Zimbabwe, you must address these things full on. I think that for us as part of different cultural communities in Alberta, let's say, this might have some residual activity still, that you can work with people and educators and with doctors and public health people as well.

Part of the message is that we're trying to move away from this not just, of course, in Canada, by criminalization, but this is also happening perhaps in your country of origin, right? So, you know, it's better to not do this, and it's better for the health of women and girls and the overall equality and sense of justice in this society,

which you can follow from that angle as well. These are things that I think we can do.

You know, I must say, though, Madam Speaker, that we need to address a larger issue here, which is that we have adequate access to health care, especially community health care, that can best provide this combination of medical advice and culturally sensitive intervention. Like, you can't do that at the emergency room at the Alex, right? I mean, there are other things going on. Where you can perhaps effect positive change the best through preventative medicine, of which I think this should fall under – preventative medicine, for sure, to dissuade people from this practice – is where community health comes in and having that reach and that trust, that sensitivity, and perhaps even language capacity to talk to people and to work with them to move away from these kinds of activities, right? I mean, that's where you can actually be effective.

What I see in my own community and right across the province is that those community health programs are being cut, right? They're being cut by this UCP government, and they are losing their effectiveness by lack of staffing and by, you know, a sort of bad relationship with the health care professionals that staff and actually make community health centres work and function. Madam Speaker, again, we can't talk about specific procedures and so forth without discussing the support system that actually makes those things work, right? We can say, again, on paper, like with my last discussion around postsecondary, that we support education and postsecondary. You write it down on a piece of paper and you say it out loud here in this Chamber or outside, but if you were literally cutting with the other hand at the same time that same program, the actual critical infrastructure that supports it, then it doesn't make any sense, right?

You know, Madam Speaker, again, we can certainly help through the criminalization of this cultural practice and to support it through education. I mean, you can have a one-two combination on that, but our job here in Alberta is to educate – education takes resources – to use community health outreach to know that people and women and girls and families that are choosing not to do this are supported and encouraged, in fact. Again, you can't just do that with words and on paper; you have to do it with actual supports. Lo and behold, if you do invest in community health, there are all kinds of ancillary benefits that come from that. People are more conscious about preventative parts of their health care and know that they have the security of a community health unit that is there when they need it for themselves and for their families. All of those things are good.

Yeah. Again, I certainly support Bill 10, and I just wanted to point out that it doesn't exist in isolation; it has to be in concert with community health initiatives that all Albertans want and need for themselves and for their families. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will be supporting this bill, as my colleague has articulated previously. I do have some thoughts in regard to the legislation and just what it will look like once passed in relation to implementation.

11:10

I do want to echo the importance of education in ensuring that women and girls have the understanding and the knowledge when it comes to female genital mutilation and their rights as women. I think that, again, this speaks to a variety of concerns when it comes to women being put into positions where they may be vulnerable or there may be power differentials between the relationships that they're part of.

Again, you know, working as a social worker previously to this and working with youth, I continuously had concerns about the young women and the girls that I was working with and those relationships that they were having within their communities. I think that there is a need to ensure that as women are growing up, they understand their rights, they understand their sexual reproductive health and their options, and they understand what a healthy relationship looks like and that the people that are around them also are respectful of those positions and the autonomy of a woman's body.

When I worked in this profession, one of my major concerns was always around ensuring that the women and girls that I worked with weren't being victimized, weren't being trafficked, weren't being brought into situations and coerced into environments where they were being put into environments like sex trafficking or human trafficking.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think, again, we have a responsibility, when we talk about pieces of legislation like this, that we are ensuring that as much education and support is being provided to women and girls so that they have that understanding and they have those supports in place.

I believe that, you know, because it isn't something that is discussed very often, our health care professionals also need to be aware of those conversations, the requests being made, and then: how do they work with families and how do they work within communities to ensure that the rights of women are being protected and that there isn't pressure being put on young girls to have this procedure done and that their personal health is being protected as much as possible?

I guess some of the questions that I would have when this bill is passed in this Chamber, if that is to happen, are: what is the government doing to ensure that our health professionals have the resources available to them to be able to manage situations such as this? [interjection] Oh, I see an intervention.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member. I know in the work that we've done as social workers, it's often a multidisciplinary approach that we take to working with families. I know that when we look at the cuts, specifically to social work of 11 per cent, from this government, that also has an impact when we're talking about how we best support the women and girls specific to Bill 10. I think that there is an importance to understand that when we're working in community and we're working with the well-being of individuals, we need to look at it from a community best practice. Part of that best practice is using a multidisciplinary approach. I know this member has the same background as I with social work, and we often worked very closely with health care providers. We were often the first point of contact when it came to some of these young, vulnerable women when they were being victimized, so having that importance of that education piece when it comes to not just health care workers but the multidisciplinary team is important.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member. I appreciate the comments. I think, you know, again, looking at that multidisciplinary approach, one of the things that we do know in other jurisdictions in relation to female genital mutilation is that the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada states that it is mandatory for its members to report if they suspect that a female child has been subjected to FGM or is going to be subjected. It is considered a child welfare protection issue. Now, of course, because of that, that speaks to the importance of having a multidisciplinary approach. You want your pediatricians to be able to be educated and understand the signs and the concerns, the

behaviours that you may see within a family in relation to this. You want to make sure that you have social workers available that are able to respond to the child protection matters if there is a flag or an identification of this.

But not only just within the medical profession; I think we also see this in the education system as well as our child care system. Many people who are engaging with children at all different stages of life need to have the education and understanding of what signs and indications there may be in relation to a child that may be at risk of having this procedure happen or has had it happen.

Again, I think because it isn't something that is necessarily discussed often – I mean, I'll be honest; as a child intervention worker this wouldn't have been something that I would have had on my radar as a concern that would have been brought forward to me. In fact, I have never had this issue flagged to me as a risk factor for a young girl or a female child. So even my knowledge and understanding would have been very limited had I had a referral made to me as a child intervention worker. I would have required some understanding and some education to be able to work through the different factors that would relate to the family that we would be working with.

So I do think that, you know, it is definitely something that the government, as they move forward with this piece of legislation, must make sure communities are aware of and that they understand. It's one thing to have a piece of legislation introduced into the Chamber, but the policies and the regulations that will be created because of it need to be ensured to be passed along to the people that will be managing and working within this legislation. I don't particularly see, to be honest, within the legislation how this would transfer to some of those multidisciplinary professions and ensure that people, for one, are even aware that this legislation is happening.

And what does that look like in best practice? Where do health providers go to develop the skills that they'll need to be able to manage this? What kind of cultural awareness practices will be required? What kind of ability to be able to have conversation and dialogue around this issue to ensure the best outcome for the child? I don't see how that is happening. I mean, I trust that our medical professionals are very capable of having conversations when it comes to medical procedures, but we're dealing with other complexities when we speak to this very issue.

So, for me, it's not the legislation that I have questions about; it's just the way that we speak about it. It's the terminology that is used, it's the engagement with communities, it's ensuring that all health care professionals and multidisciplinary professionals have an understanding and an ability to work through this so that, one, they know how to report if there is a concern; two, how, if there is a report of a protection issue, social workers like myself would have an understanding to even be able to engage in the conversation; and then, of course, all the other factors that would surround this practice in the sense of risk factors in relation to vulnerable populations. How do we ensure that there aren't types of human trafficking occurring, all the other matters that relate to the overall health of young women that may be involved in child intervention services?

11:20

I would like to hear from the government at some point around what the next step would be if this bill were to pass. Will there be experts? Will there be funding available for medical professionals to have an understanding or an expertise in this area? What will that look like? It's one thing to have a piece of legislation, but if it's not actually going to have the outcome, then I guess the question would be: what is the intent? I mean, we know that we can create

legislation in this place, but if it doesn't actually transfer to a workable policy or a regulation that Albertans are able to use, it's kind of a moot point.

My hope is that this bill is not going to be something that is potentially approved or passed within this Chamber and then forgotten about. Hopefully, someone on the government side at some point can give a little bit more information, I guess would be the best word, about how this will then be used as best practice. With that, I will take my seat.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank all of my friends here from the Official Opposition for offering some comments on Bill 10. I hope that I can build on some of the issues that my friend from Edmonton-Manning raised in her comments on this bill. This is around her requests for providing education to new Canadian communities and better supports for those communities. I really want to underline this point, Mr. Speaker, because I do support the bill, and I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for her work in bringing forward this piece of legislation, but although I do support the bill, I am not entirely convinced that the requirements for health care professionals to report instances of female genital mutilation to law enforcement bodies will be sufficient to curtail the practice here in the province of Alberta.

In her comments when she introduced the bill, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore admitted that the practice doesn't happen here in Alberta – and I sincerely hope that that's true – but that there are communities of people who send their girls to their home countries or to the countries of origin, rather, to have this practice performed on them. I guess I don't see the link between requiring health care professionals to report these cases to law enforcement and actually preventing this from happening because health care professionals presumably won't know that some little girl has had this done to her until it's too late. Then law enforcement will be informed, and then they can step in and carry out whatever punishments are available to them under the Criminal Code, but it doesn't fully explain to me how that will prevent this from happening in the future other than, you know, perhaps other members of that family will be spared from being sent abroad to have this done.

One of the things that I've seen over and over again as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for the last seven years is the lack of appropriate cultural supports to help new Canadians raise their families here in an entirely new cultural context that they find themselves in. I represent a riding that is the home to a number of organizations dedicated to advancing the interests and well-being of francophone-African communities primarily, and one of the things that I've heard over and over again from organizations that work with these francophone-African communities is the lack of appropriate cultural supports to families in learning how to raise their children in a Canadian context.

My friend from Edmonton-Manning talked about that in her comments. She mentioned that, in her time as a child intervention worker, she was not aware that this was even a practice, didn't have the education, I guess, or the knowledge to potentially even have the conversation with families that she might be working with. I think that if we want to be successful in preventing this practice from being carried out on children who are currently living in Alberta, then we need to provide the appropriate cultural supports, and they're not there.

The communities that are present and that live and work in Gold Bar tell me over and over again how frustrated they are to deal with the Children's Services department when there are very few people of African origin working in the department. There is nobody who speaks French who can talk to them. I think this is a critical piece that needs to be in place if we want to prevent this practice from happening. [interjection] I see that I've generated an intervention from my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs, so I'd entertain that now.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, hon. member. I think it's really important, the discussion that we're having here in the Chamber, especially when it comes to the lack of understanding with the professionals that are working within these communities of newcomers. I know that you were the previous minister of postsecondary, and you had that hands-on approach with talking with students around what their needs are. Do you see a place within the postsecondary system to start that education process? You know, we have a piece of legislation here that really does nothing to actually provide support to those that need it, to provide support to those in their first language, to provide support to those with a cultural context. Is there an opportunity within the postsecondary system to perhaps provide that education piece, to talk to the families of newcomers, to say: "What do you need? What is missing in the services that you're trying to access? Where are the gaps, and how can the postsecondary institutions perhaps provide a liaison to those gaps?"

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs for asking the question. I think that there are a couple of things that I would like postsecondary education or the Ministry of Advanced Education, broadly speaking, to address. Now, I understand that the Ministry of Advanced Education doesn't dictate curriculum to postsecondary education institutions the same way that the Minister of Education is intent on dictating a 50-year-old curriculum to the primary and secondary education systems here in the province, but I would encourage all of the postsecondary education institutions to have a look at their curricula for social work students, for example, or other people who will be entering this field to see if the education contains the appropriate cultural components that those students will be dealing with when they go to work. I certainly think that the ministry has an important role to play in terms of providing adequate financial support for institutions to undertake those reviews and make those changes to the curricula.

I think where the Ministry of Advanced Education could play a much more proactive role is in at least providing adequate English language learning services to new Canadians. This is something that was identified as an issue, that we began working on when I was minister, but there are thousands of new Canadians who just don't have access to appropriate English language learning lessons because their benefits are cut off before they can reach an appropriate level of English language proficiency, and I think that that's something that the government would be well able to address. We have to admit that language barrier is a significant issue when we're dealing with these incredible cultural gaps that we have to cross in order to address this issue, so we literally need to be speaking the same language, I think, in order to be able to address the issue. I think English language learning would help us go a long way.

I want to wrap up my point by just urging the government to take meaningful and immediate action on providing French language services to francophone-African communities in the province of Alberta to prevent these kinds of things from happening.

11:30

Now, I honestly don't know. This isn't something that the francophone-African communities have raised with me. Part of the issue is that I am a man and the people that I'm speaking to in the communities are often men, and this kind of issue, as the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore indicated when she introduced the legislation, is something that is talked about between women and that is passed on from grandmother to grandmother, as she said in her speech.

The point is that we need child intervention workers who come from an African background and can speak French so that they can deal with the families in an appropriate cultural context and work with them to explain to them the Canadian context for raising children, and I think that if we provided that, we would go a long way to preventing this practice from being carried out in the future.

The other piece that touches on the intervention from my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs is that we need to improve the representation in the faculties of the health care professionals who will be working with these communities. You know, I will say that med schools, by and large, have very diverse populations, and they should be a model for other health care professional faculties, but I don't think that we have the same kind of diversity in associated health care professions, and I think that that's something that also needs to be addressed. We need to have more health care workers coming from different cultural backgrounds so that they understand what families are dealing with when they're making these decisions to send their children to their countries of origin to undergo these practices and to help prevent them from engaging in those practices.

There is a lot that needs to be done, in addition to the measures that are in this bill, to take meaningful action to prevent this kind of practice from being carried out in the future, and I really urge all government members to look at what additional supports and practices can be put in place both in the child intervention system and in the health care education system to address this issue meaningfully.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on second reading to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, you know, and to speak to this very serious matter. I'll start off by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for introducing this piece of legislation on this very, very important topic.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I know that female genital mutilation is illegal under the Criminal Code, as it should be. Performance of FGM is also already an offence under the Health Professions Act and, as such, as well with the College of Physicians & Surgeons.

Now, I appreciate the opportunity that this bill is giving all members of the Chamber to talk about women's health, the importance of women's health, and I also want to touch on a number of points that my colleagues have made. I really appreciated hearing from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on his references to a number of points but specifically talking about his experience over the past six-plus years representing the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar and some of the challenges that his diverse group of constituents have raised over the past several years and, you know, a number of ways that the government could enhance this piece of legislation that we are discussing before us today.

First of all, I think it's becoming clear from a number of points that colleagues have made that, yes, this bill does address the legal consequences and ramifications for our health care professionals

when it comes to FGM, but what is missing in the legislation is that really important piece around education. You know, I appreciate the fact – my understanding is that the government has indicated that that will come through regulations, but I think, Mr. Speaker, the educational component is absolutely paramount to changing and preventing future cases or instances of FGM.

You know, for that reason, it should be debated in this Chamber. It should be open to the public. We should be engaging with our health care professionals to ensure that they have a voice in what that education looks like. I appreciate that colleagues of mine have spoken about the role of our postsecondary institutions and how they play a critical role in that education. It should start as young professionals are working their way through earning their credentials, not waiting for them as graduates.

Now, granted, for those that obviously have already graduated, it's important that they also have an opportunity for education in a number of different areas from, again, being trained to recognize the different signs to providing supports for women and girls who have gone through this. Now, you know, I won't pretend to be an expert or even to have a thorough knowledge of this area, but I do think it's important that we provide our health care professionals with all of the tools that they need to be successful and to support the very women and girls that we are trying to protect and support through this piece of legislation.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought up some very good points around language services and ensuring that our new Canadians and folks who have come from other countries have all of the supports that they need to be successful, whether that's through English language learning services – I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that years ago I had an opportunity to attend an ELL class that was being taught in, or the classes occurred in, the Clareview rec centre. It was incredible to participate in just one short class, the impact that that has. I know that those kinds of services require government support, maybe not government to deliver but at least through not-for-profits or community organizations that are on the ground in local communities who know exactly who their clientele are and can tailor those classes to the very folks that are participating in them, but that requires support. [interjection] I see I have a friendly intervention. I will kindly accept it.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, hon. member. I think you made a really good point in your comments in that there is nothing in this legislation that actually addresses the support of women and girls. The title of this bill talks about women and girls, and that is glaringly obvious, that that is missing. To me, not having the voice of those that are impacted is huge. I know that your background is education and that you worked with vulnerable youth. I just think of the importance of your experience working with youth and being able to hear their voice – right? – like, being able to hear what they need and having that perspective of actually those that we're trying to help and support, having them share their voice. As an educator, having hands-on experience with vulnerable youth – you worked with high-risk youth – you were able to see what they needed because they told you. Having that is essential, I think.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for that really important point. It is absolutely critical to ensure that the very people that we are trying to help have a voice and participate in the solution that we're trying to get to.

11:40

You know, I was very privileged to work at Edmonton's Inner City High School for six years, working with very high-risk youth.

I mean, I like to describe them as young people who have been unsuccessful in the traditional system for a number of reasons. They face barriers. In my experience, they face more barriers than the average student does and for a myriad of reasons. This is no fault to our public system, but the services that are provided currently through many of our public schools are insufficient. We often talk about wraparound services, but I can tell you that these young people face incredible odds – I can only imagine – yet show up to school every day because they want to change their circumstances, and they do so voluntarily, which is absolutely incredible. Quite frankly, part of the reason I decided to run more than 15 years ago was because I saw that the system needed to be improved and that we needed to get more supports to young people, ironically, not less, which is where we are today with the current UCP government.

When it comes to this bill, I think the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs raised a really good point, that at the moment, the way the bill is currently written, I don't see how the very women and girls that this bill is meant to help, how their voices are reflected in this piece of legislation. Again, I think, quite frankly, if members of the government were in the opposition benches, they would be asking our government the exact same question of: where is that reflected, and can we get that in the legislation? Let's not wait for the regulations, which, of course, are done by cabinet behind closed doors. You know, let's engage with folks to ensure that all voices are represented. I don't know, honestly, who the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore engaged with and consulted with in drafting this legislation. I would hope that she has engaged with those who have experienced this first-hand.

Again, you know, the two pieces that I think could strengthen this legislation are ensuring that women and girls have a voice through this legislation and, as well, a critical piece, that educational piece, to ensure that we are doing everything we can to provide our health care professionals and educators with the tools and education that they need to be able to identify when these practices have occurred, to support the very victims of these practices.

My hope is that the government is open not just to robust debate but to ideas and, potentially, amendments from the opposition but equally from government members as well in order to ensure that we have the strongest piece of legislation that we can moving forward to do what I believe the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has stated in this Chamber: to prevent these practices from happening. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and listen to the rest of the debate on this bill as we move forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I've appreciated the conversations that we've heard so far, the thoughts and comments, especially from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who obviously finds this issue very important, and it shows through the discussions that they've brought forward in the Legislature regarding this important and very sensitive issue. I thank that member in their responsibility as the previous minister handling this issue as well as as a private member, more recently, for bringing this issue and giving us all the opportunity to speak to it.

I think that we've heard from many members at this point that, you know, in some cases or as far as female genital mutilation goes, it is currently illegal under the Criminal Code, and that makes sense. It should be the case. Again, when we look at the Health Professions Act, performing this type of FGM procedure is a criminal act

through that association as well. There are codes in place that are dealing with this already on a federal level and from a health professions standpoint. But I think, with that being said – excuse me; from a College of Physicians & Surgeons standpoint. The fact that the member wants to bring this into the Health Professions Act, I think, is a reasonable step forward.

You know, I think that we have heard a lot of important conversations around: while this being a valuable step forward, it's important to recognize that this should just be one step in that direction and not necessarily the last step. I think that the member who brought this legislation forward has made it clear that there are more regulations to come from this. I'm very interested to see how the consultation process moving forward will take shape and what we might expect to see after those regulations and further consultations are happening. Again, this is important, that we get this right not only through this step but also through what's to come in regard to: will we see proposals for ensuring that this is taught on an educational level to health care professionals as they are going through postsecondary or even before, Mr. Speaker, ensuring that education is in place to recognize when this might be taking place and for ensuring that those physicians and surgeons understand the steps following that from the law perspective and from ensuring sensitivity on the issue and so on and so forth?

I think, again, as we've heard from many members on this side of the House, the fact is that we can put this type of legislation forward, but if we aren't ensuring that there are health care providers in communities who are prepared to address this and, Mr. Speaker, are there in the first place, this legislation won't do as much as the member might expect it to. We've heard again and again that many communities across the province are currently without primary care networks, potentially without physicians and family GPs, so we need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to provide those wraparound services to ensure that there are supports in place to tackle this issue and many other issues regarding such services.

We continue to be very concerned that, you know, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of millions of dollars have gone unspent when it comes to the health care system, especially as we move through the pandemic, and even more so it is an even bigger concern when we look at rural communities and communities outside of the major centres while it's, of course, an issue inside our urban communities as well.

Mr. Speaker, again, I have appreciated the conversations that we've heard about this. I think that there is more that we can do on this issue, but I appreciate the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing this forward, for beginning those conversations, ones on an issue that is quite clearly very important to that member. I thank all members for taking part in this debate and discussion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to begin by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing forward this piece of legislation. We don't hear about this very often, and I think this piece of legislation will certainly help us raise awareness about an issue that's not very often talked about.

11:50

I went to social work school with a diverse group of students back in 2007-2008, and that's the first time that I heard about it. I think

that, as was said in this House, it's outside the Criminal Code and it's currently not being practised in Canada, so we don't hear a whole lot about it. I was looking up on the World Health Organization website, and I was shocked that there are 200 million women and girls that are subjected to this practice. That's 200 million girls and women. That's a brutal violation of rights of girls and women.

As this bill was moved from a private member's bill to a government bill, I hope that at the later stages the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore or other members of this House will be able to bring forward amendments and government will be willing to attach some money to this bill so that this bill can carry out its intended purpose, it can raise awareness about this important issue, and it can take steps to make sure that, directly or indirectly, this practice is not happening in any way, shape, or manner in our society.

When this bill was last before the House – that was before the constituency break – I did take some notes, and the Member for Lethbridge-East mentioned that it was not within our jurisdiction. Well, the Criminal Code is also not within our jurisdiction, but the Alberta Health Professions Act does prohibit it, and the provisions contained in this legislation will further strengthen those prohibitions and make sure that if health professionals come to know about this, there are proper procedures in place and there is a reporting mechanism.

What I really want to talk about is when the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore was speaking to this bill, she mentioned that it's not happening in Canada but that there are girls, there are women that were sent to their countries to perform this procedure, and then they are brought back to Canada. I think it's deeply concerning if this is happening in Alberta, in Canada in this day and age. We do not have – I tried to research as much as I could, but we do not have any information, any data, to show how often that's happening, where that is happening, which communities it's happening in, and this bill does not address whether we will be doing anything to make sure that it's not happening and that girls are not sent to the countries to be subjected to this inhumane practice.

My hope is that at a later state the government will look into it – now that it's a government bill, the government certainly has resources at their disposal – that they will put in some effort and share with the House any information that they can gather about the extent of this practice happening here in Canada indirectly.

I think we also need to find ways that we can work with the communities where this practice is happening and provide them with the supports that they need, provide them with the information they need so that we can put an end to this practice. As my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned, people who come here as newcomers often face many barriers, from cultural understanding to language barriers. I think one way of supporting those communities will be that we are able to provide language supports so that they can learn about the systems here, learn about the culture here, learn about the laws here, and be able to adjust themselves accordingly. In the absence of those supports that becomes very difficult.

I represent a constituency that has quite a high number of people with English as a second language, and what this government has done in the last couple of months, in this budget in particular – they've even completely cut a program called learners support, that was providing language support to newcomers. They replaced that with a new program that is completely at the discretion of the Minister of Advanced Education, and people will only get supports if there is money and the Minister of Advanced Education decides to provide support for that program. With one hand the government wants to raise awareness about this practice, the government wants to put an end to this practice, but at the same time the government is also cutting those vital supports that will help us raise awareness of this practice and put an end to this.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until this afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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