



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 20, 2022

Day 21

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today are two of my guests that I had the pleasure of having a chat with earlier this afternoon. Naslund Lazenby and his father, Mike Lazenby, are friends of mine, and they are special guests of the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. members, also in the galleries this afternoon are Tim Schindel and Blair Nielsen from Leading Influence. They are guests of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has the call.

Support for Ukraine and Ukrainian Refugees

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching the situation in Ukraine closely. As the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and chair of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I wrote the Prime Minister back in January asking for strong sanctions to deter Vladimir Putin and his evil imperial ambitions.

As the situation escalated, I was proud that Alberta acted quickly to provide aid for Ukraine. Our government gave \$6 million to the Canada-Ukraine foundation for humanitarian aid and \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress's Unite with Ukraine campaign, which will provide essential military equipment to the Ukrainian territorial defence force, and \$350,000 for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for their Alberta Stands with Ukraine campaign. This morning I was exceptionally proud to stand with the Premier and the minister of labour and the Minister of Advanced Education to announce more than \$2 million in new funding that will be used to support Ukrainian refugees coming to Alberta. The money announced today will be used primarily for settlement and language services delivered by newcomer organizations across the province.

This brings Alberta's total assistance to Ukraine to more than \$13 million, and for that I want to say thank you: thank you to the Premier, thank you to our government, and thank you to all the advocates who are working so hard to support Ukraine in its time of need.

Alberta has a long history of Ukrainian immigration and a population of more than 350,000 people of Ukrainian descent. Our history is everywhere, from the wonderful restaurants like Taste of Ukraine, where we were earlier today, to the Vegreville Pysanka Festival, to UFest and the giant pysanka in my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

These refugees have been through a lot, but I'm confident that our people in our newcomer organizations will be able to lessen their burden. I believe I speak for the entire Legislature when I say that my heart is with the people of Ukraine as they fight for their freedom and sovereignty. For those who are coming: welcome to Alberta. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

Health Care System Capacity and Front-line Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, front-line health care workers in Alberta are crying for help. They're exhausted after two years of this UCP government's attacks, two years of being pushed to the limits by a government that repeatedly acted last and least to contain the spread of COVID-19 and put political interests ahead of public health.

Here's what those workers are saying. From a rural ER doctor:

I assessed a patient in their car in the parking lot today. Why? Because all of our isolation rooms were filled. Why? Because EMS is so short staffed it takes 20+ hours to get a sick kid and fractures transferred.

From a pediatric ER doctor:

Our waiting rooms in Alberta children's hospitals are packed to the gills by afternoon. 50 children in the waiting room is the norm, and has been for weeks... Most of my colleagues are so burnt out that they can't even see it... so very sad, and frightening for future healthcare.

From an anesthesiologist in northern Alberta:

ICU and hospital capacity appear steady in this wave of the pandemic... but 1000s of surgeries have still been cancelled, primary care capacity has fallen precipitously and healthcare worker burnout is worse than ever. Healthcare systems are still falling apart.

From a physician at the Royal Alex hospital in my constituency:

We are a collapsed healthcare system with overcapacity meeting us at every corner. Nurses are burnt out and short staffed. Physicians are not at their best. And we simply do not have beds... We are asking our teams to work with less resources... Patients wait hours and hours for an assessment in the ER, only to wait hours (days) to get an inpatient bed... we are now in a 6th wave where our wards are already crumbled... it's a wonder any of us are still standing. The trauma and memories of December 2020 flood back quickly... It's in every pair of eyes I see on the ward... I hope our government will listen to those of us screaming with hoarse voices.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that invests in and supports our public health care system and the workers who make it possible, that builds them up instead of tearing them down. That's our promise, to listen to and work with health care workers, to undo the damage done by the UCP, restore access to care across our province. That's what an Alberta NDP government will do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Nanton Grain Elevators

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Livingstone-Macleod is full of many great historical landmarks. Earlier this year I rose in this very House to highlight the history of the Crowsnest Pass, with train robberies, police shootouts, and the Roxy Theatre being added as a provincial historical resource.

I once again have a chance to speak about another historical landmark in my region being preserved and recognized for its ties to Alberta's rich history. The grain elevators in Nanton, which were recently featured on many news networks, are nearly 100 years old. In the early 2000s the abandonment of the Canadian Pacific Railway threatened these historic elevators, that stand along highway 2, with demolition. The town of Nanton formed a historical society with the original goal to save the largest of these remaining elevators. The Save One society has been working hard for over 10 years, putting in incredible effort, and thanks to the many volunteers and local businesses, they were able to save not one but all three of the remaining elevators.

On April 9 I joined the society and members of the community to celebrate the Nanton grain elevators' provincial historic resource designation. Thanks to the Minister of Culture and his work, these grain elevators continue to stand and tell the story of hard-working farmers in southern Alberta and will do so for years to come. It's because of the work of citizens of Nanton and the work they've done for years rallying together for the protection and preservation of the town's historic resources. As the MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I'm so proud of my constituents and their drive to save these historic landmarks in southern Alberta.

It's also my job to help in any way I can, so I've been speaking with the Minister of Culture and his office to confirm what funding is available to these organizations to help them in this initiative so they can continue to revitalize and maintain these historic landmarks in Nanton. I look forward to seeing the grain elevators stand tall for years to come, and I appreciate the hard work of the residents of Nanton. I thank them for their continued persistence to make sure they remain in the community and they're a towering reminder of Alberta's rich farming history.

Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Ganley: A decent place to live, food, family, a job that pays the bills, a warm place to sleep, a chance to contribute, a doctor when you're sick, education for your kids, a life, a government that enforces the law equally and tells the truth. Most Albertans don't ask for much. They care about their neighbours. They want to build a better world. They want their children to have access to the same opportunities they did or even better.

But this UCP government can't seem to understand that. They're so wrapped up in their ideology and their infighting that they have completely lost sight of the fact that Albertans are struggling, struggling with those basics, struggling to keep the lights and the heat on and food on the table. They have become so far removed from the everyday lives of the people they are supposed to serve that they think it's okay for people to have their heat turned off in a snowstorm. There are thousands of people in Calgary who have their power cut off, but this government: all they'll say is, "That's their problem; just call the company and hope."

Government is supposed to be there for the people. It is the people of this province we were elected to serve, not large, profitable corporations, not insurance companies. People. This government has billions for profitable corporations, but they need to cut a retired firefighter's wife off from her drug plan to save money. Insurance companies charge Albertans even more while they struggle. The UCP claims that it's necessary. Then they try to hide the facts. The people of this province aren't asking for much, just a decent life they can afford, schools for their kids, a curriculum to actually prepare them for the modern world, an ambulance in an emergency. They want a government they can trust. The UCP can't deliver: they can't be trusted, and, worse, they call people names for even daring to ask, the people they are supposed to serve.

Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government they can trust. Fortunately, they'll have the chance soon.

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

Sikh Heritage Month

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the month of April Albertans marked the beginning of Sikh Heritage Month. This is a great time for us to recognize the many past and current contributions of the Sikh community in making Alberta the

province that it is today. Since the arrival of the first Sikh immigrants in the early 19th century, the Sikh community has helped make Canada a stronger country through its accomplishment in many parts of our society. Whether it's politics, sciences, arts, business or sports, the Sikh community has helped shape Canada's cultural fabric. Our country is the proud home of more than half a million members of the Sikh community, making Canada home to one of the largest Sikh diasporas in the world.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, sadly, a policy implemented in 2016 under the previous NDP government restricted many Sikhs from applying to work as a correctional peace officer. A policy that required all applicants to be clean shaven was recently removed, now allowing those of the Sikh religion an equal opportunity to pursue a career in that field. Our UCP government was elected as defenders of religious freedom and rights in Alberta. I'm proud to see our government taking steps as it further creates Alberta as a place of belonging for all individuals no matter what their religious beliefs may be.

The values of equality, selflessness, openness, and compassion are the core principles of Sikhism, and these values will be highlighted during Vaisakhi and Nagar Kirtan in Calgary and Edmonton next month. As a member of the Legislature I invite all people to participate. Have a great Sikh Heritage Month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Southern Alberta Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, during this break, while the government was focused on the internal drama and leadership issues, I had the opportunity to spend some time with the people of southern Alberta. I was able to travel to the communities of Medicine Hat, Claresholm, Fort Macleod, and Lethbridge, meeting with Albertans to hear their thoughts, concerns, and what they wanted to see for the future of this province.

The UCP talks about swagger. They paint a glowing picture of Alberta, but they are ignoring the very real concerns, the fears that Albertans are telling them and telling me. I have heard the fear of the future of health care and heard from the people who are scared about the prospect of nearly 90 job losses in Claresholm because of this government's health care privatization agenda. I heard concerns about education and how this curriculum doesn't support schools and students and the future that we need to get there. I heard deep concerns about affordability, concerns about the cost of fuel, and how this government isn't doing enough to bring down the cost of fuel for Alberta farmers and ranchers. I heard about skyrocketing utility costs that are hammering rural communities and how the UCP has done not nearly enough to provide relief to those struggling families.

This government may boast and brag about a balanced budget, but if they bothered to listen to the Albertans in the communities they claim to represent, they would hear that these people feel left behind, burdened by UCP policies that take more and leave them with less. But more than anything, I have heard that the people of rural Alberta are ready for change, how they are tired of this government that ignores their concerns, takes them for granted, and piles on more and more while delivering less and less.

Mr. Speaker, if this government was not so focused on themselves and on the upending drama of the UCP in its leadership race, they would hear the concerns that I've heard on my tour of southern Alberta and I hear every day. Southern Alberta deserves a voice, and they're not getting it from this UCP government.

Federal Emissions Reduction Plan

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, on March 29, 2022, we heard Trudeau promise that Canada would have net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. And while we all know that Trudeau never keeps his promises, this announcement is very concerning. When we put a magnifying lens on this net-zero carbon emissions plan, we see that Trudeau's ideal target would mean cutting emissions equivalent to Canada's entire oil and gas sector, agriculture sector, and electricity sector combined. This is insane. But what's even more insane is that we've had pipeline after pipeline cancelled in the name of reducing emissions and moving towards renewable energy sources.

Then on April 6 Trudeau announces \$12 billion in funding for a deep-water drilling site offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. I'm in complete support of this energy project and its role in Canada's energy security, but I am completely baffled as to why the approval process for oil projects ends in such different results on the east side of Canada compared to here in Alberta.

This decision is just another example of federal government hypocrisy, and Albertans are starting to figure out that this hypocrisy is targeted. Why would he strike down Alberta pipelines, enforce massive carbon taxes, announce huge emissions reductions, decisions that adversely impact Alberta's oil sector, just to approve an oil project in eastern Canada? I mean, we all know that Trudeau's Greenpeace minister, who has spent most of his life protesting the oil and gas sector, even breaking the law to do so, is going to make terrible decisions, but this plan is just that, pure hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, at least now we all know that Trudeau is full of it when it comes to our pipelines and the emissions arguments. He's just shutting down our pipelines because they're tied to Alberta, so let me be clear. I will stand for Albertans, and I will stand for ethical Alberta oil.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Former Municipal Affairs Minister's Travel

Mr. Schmidt: Yesterday the Ministry of Municipal Affairs came to the Public Accounts Committee, and it was a remarkable meeting. It was a clear demonstration of the dysfunction and double standards of this government.

Let's rewind the tape back to the fall of 2020. The government was slow to act, and the second wave of COVID was hammering the province. Our health care system was at the brink of collapse. Finally, the government started to act. The Provincial Operations Centre was raised to status level 3, a state of emergency was declared, and the government told all Albertans that they were cancelling Christmas. No travel, they ordered. Don't visit your friends. Don't visit your family. It was too risky. And most Albertans listened.

But as we know, one of the key ministers at that time did not listen. The Minister of Municipal Affairs decided that she was special; the rules didn't apply to her. The minister responsible for emergency management and the vice-chair of the Emergency Management Cabinet Committee abandoned her post and left for Hawaii. This Albertans know, and they are still angry.

But what we learned yesterday at Public Accounts was even more remarkable. Apparently, the now fired minister who left the country didn't tell her department or the Emergency Management Agency that she was leaving. Let me say that again. We were in a state of emergency, the Provincial Operations Centre was operating at level 3, and of the 20 senior officials who came to Public Accounts

yesterday, not one knew the minister had bolted for Hawaii. This is a profound failure of leadership and a profound failure in the machinery of government. Either the former minister was so useless that it didn't matter if she was around, or this government is so broken that during an emergency she could abandon her post without telling the 600 people who work for her that she was leaving.

One thing is crystal clear from yesterday's meeting. Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that does its job, ministers that don't abandon their posts during tough times, and after the next election Albertans will get the government that they deserve.

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

Economic Recovery and Unemployment

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment is a scary thought for all Albertans and, of course, a reality for some. Albertans need to be able to work to provide for their families and to make a living. Alberta's unemployment rate has dropped to 6 and a half per cent, which is lower than when this government took office. Despite the challenges we have faced over the last two years, considering a world-wide pandemic as well as the 2020 energy price crash in oil, Alberta's unemployment rate has continued to drop.

Compare this to the NDP record of increasing unemployment and chasing away investment. Not only has our government been able to decrease the unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, but Alberta is now leading the country with an employment rate of 64.7 per cent and a women's employment rate of 60.7 per cent. Alberta is coming back, and we're coming back stronger than ever. Just in the first quarter of this year Alberta has gained 22,000 new jobs and over 150,000 new jobs since January 2021.

As of now labour shortages are one of the things holding us back, and our government is addressing those issues through the Alberta at work program. Through Budget 2022 we are investing \$600 million over three years in this program. Alberta at work is designed to help Albertans build the skills necessary to support themselves as well as their families. In a statement issued by our Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation following the March 2022 labour force survey, he said:

Our economy is turning a corner. After two extremely challenging years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta is returning to a more normal way of life. With the lifting of public health measures in the province in early March, more Albertans are returning to the workplace, getting back to work, and getting back to business.

Alberta's economy is coming back, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta recovery plan is proving its success.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, today's StatsCan report on sky-high inflation should be a wake-up call for this UCP government: 6.7 per cent. We know it's even worse when it comes to groceries. Alberta families will pay an extra thousand dollars this year alone. Why? Well, because breakfast cereal: up 12 per cent. Butter: up 16 per cent. Pasta: up 18 per cent. Now, the Premier could help today by reversing his pernicious, insidious bracket creep tax grab that's worth almost the same amount. Why won't he?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the NDP has finally discovered inflation as the number one issue facing Albertans right now, the rising cost of living made dramatically worse by their carbon tax. They conspired with Justin Trudeau to make the cost of everything more expensive. They supported his 25 per cent increase in that carbon tax on April Fool's Day, and they want to more than triple it from where it is today. That makes energy more expensive, groceries, food, home heating, and everything. When will the NDP finally come on the side of taxpayers and oppose these carbon taxes?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, way back in 2019 it used to be government policy that if inflation went up, Albertans got more back on their taxes, but the UCP broke their election promise and froze the basic personal exemption in what the Premier himself used to call a sneaky tax grab. Fast-forward to today. Inflation is exploding. Almost half of Alberta families are just \$200 away from not being able to make ends meet. Simple question, again, to the Premier: why won't he reverse his sneaky tax grab? It's not about me; it's about the guy in the Premier's chair for the moment.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax. We have by far the most generous basic exemption in the country, the lowest income taxes, no sales tax. We're the only province with no land transfer tax, the only province with no capital tax, no payroll tax, the lowest business taxes. But the biggest tax increase that's driving inflation and the cost of living comes from the Liberal-NDP carbon tax. Why, three weeks ago, did the NDP stand up and vote in favour of Justin Trudeau's 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Not answering the question.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. Economists talk about inflation inequality, where low-income people actually pay a higher inflation rate because inflation rises on necessities faster, but this government has chosen to pile onto these low-income families. They've frozen income support, kicked 40,000 people off their drug coverage, cut rental supplements, cut affordable housing. If the measure of a leader is how they treat the most vulnerable, then what does it say about a government whose policies are designed to hurt the most vulnerable?

Mr. Kenney: That's manifestly untrue. In fact, the budget for Community and Social Services and those various support programs is increasing in the budget that the NDP is opposing. This government is taking more action by far than any government in Canada to help people address the rising cost of living. That's why we have suspended the Alberta fuel tax. It's why we're providing the \$150 rebate on electricity, and we're capping natural gas prices at \$6.50. Altogether on an annual basis that amounts to about \$2 billion of consumer relief from Alberta's government.

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

Education Funding and Curriculum Redesign

Ms Notley: Quote: this is the most difficult budget that we will have faced in my nine years as superintendent. Mr. Speaker, that's the Edmonton public schools district superintendent announcing that, thanks to this UCP budget, 1,700 students will not be funded in Edmonton this year alone. This decision means fewer teachers, fewer extracurriculars, and, worst of all, fewer supports for children with a range of learning challenges. Can the Premier explain why

the UCP's plan for Edmonton includes watching 1,700 kids enter the school system with no new funding?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, in this balanced budget there is a 1.7 per cent increase, a \$700 million increase for Education, but here's the difference. We've been able to increase support for vulnerable people, through Community and Social Services and Children's Services, for education and health care while maintaining Canada's lowest taxes and getting to a balanced budget. Why? Because this government has been focused on economic growth, on job creation, and that's why we're leading Canada in job growth and economic growth.

Ms Notley: Interesting story, Mr. Speaker.

You know, last night I got time to knock on some doors in Edmonton. In two hours I met two speech therapists who've seen the care they offer children cut back, a parent whose child lost the funding that helps her with her extra learning needs, a mom with kids whose classroom is overflowing, and a nurse so deeply concerned about the UCP curriculum, she may take her kids and leave Alberta. Why doesn't the Premier start listening to these Albertans, unlike his minister who is briefing him right now? They know the real consequences of UCP decisions on their kids, and they are not good ones.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board has a billion-dollar budget, and they have a \$38 million reserve. They're receiving a 1.7 per cent increase in their per-pupil fund this year.

She says that it's a very interesting story, Alberta's economic growth. She couldn't be more right about that, to see the best year ever in exports, the best year ever in manufacturing, the best year ever in oil and gas, the best year ever in forestry, the highest revenues ever in agriculture, the best year ever in film and television, and billions more coming in hydrogen and petrochemicals, all of it turning into new jobs.

Ms Notley: And tens of thousands of kids with special learning needs without any of the support they need. That's the story.

This Premier is either uninformed, uninterested, or simply unable to grasp why Alberta families do not trust the UCP when it comes to education. They've cut RCSD. They've cut PUF funding. They refuse to fund enrolment growth. They've lost a thousand teachers, and their curriculum is an embarrassment. Why does this government care so little about our future generations? Why are they so quick to do everything they can to sacrifice our public education system?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is investing \$1.4 billion in support for special-needs kids in our education system. That funding went up last year; it's going up again this year. We can only increase investments in services like that if the economy is growing. We went through four years of economic devastation and a jobs crisis created by the NDP's high-tax, high-debt policies. Because we are now leading the country in growth, we've been able to balance the budget and invest in critical services like this.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs

Ms Phillips: When asked about hundreds of millions more being billed to Albertans for car insurance, the Premier brushed off any suggestion of doing anything differently. Instead, he used scary words like "Soviet-style insurance system." The Albertans I talk to: all they want is cheaper car insurance. They're drowning in bills, and all this Premier has is tales of a bogeyman. Well, lo and behold,

Premiers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have public auto insurance. Is the Premier really declaring that his good friends Scott Moe, Brad Wall, and Brian Pallister are all Soviets in disguise?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP – I can't believe they're pretending to care about this, because they don't want people driving. That's why they have a carbon tax. You know, when it comes to driving, I have a question for the NDP: do they support Justin Trudeau's new tax on pickup trucks? He wants to add a thousand dollars to the cost of buying an F-150 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier is the one with the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, does the NDP support their ally Justin Trudeau's proposed pickup tax on pickups and SUVs? That would be between \$1,000 and \$4,000. That's a heck of a lot more. The reality is that insurance premiums are coming down and partly as a result of this government.

Ms Phillips: The Premier went on yesterday to say that he didn't recall meeting with any insurance lobbyists, but as *Calgary Sun* columnist Rick Bell points out, his own former campaign manager, Nick Koolsbergen, is now a hotshot consultant who lobbied the Premier's office and key advisers about lifting the insurance cap to give companies even bigger profits. The lifting of that cap shot insurance rates up by 30 per cent in a single year for some drivers. Has the Premier or any of his ministers or key advisers ever discussed removing the insurance cap with Nick Koolsbergen or any member of his Wellington Advocacy lobbyist firm?

Mr. Kenney: Well, no, I have not, Mr. Speaker. I've met with the insurance companies to ask them to reduce premiums and to ensure that we are providing financial services to the Alberta oil and gas industry, something the NDP never did.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP more and more insurance companies were leaving the Alberta market, making it increasingly difficult for people to get insurance at all. Many people had to pay 100 per cent of their premiums up front. And now their solution is to replicate the disaster of ICBC and to nationalize the industry to remove any competition. That would be a disaster.

Ms Phillips: So here we have it straight from the Premier. He meets with insurance company lobbyists, and they get whatever profits they want, but the Premier is not listening to ordinary people just trying to drive their car and – I don't know – appropriately put gas in it.

The Premier and the Finance minister have claimed that insurance companies weren't making money and that that's why they had to jack people's rates, but the facts tell a different story. Even before the government lifted the cap, these companies were netting a billion dollars in profit. So when the Premier said that insurance companies weren't making any money, did he actually mean they needed more than a billion dollars in profit? Just how much more did Nick Koolsbergen tell the government to scoop from Albertans' pockets?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP hates all of the good news in this province. They hate the fact that we're leading Canada in economic growth and in job growth, and apparently they also don't like to hear the fact that insurance premiums are coming down. Right now seven insurers have filed for rate reductions since the fall of 2020 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay. It's important for the Speaker to be able to hear the Premier. You might not like the answer, but he's entitled to give it.

Mr. Kenney: . . . including a 7 per cent proposed rate reduction from AMA. This government took action to limit certain soft injury personal issue awards that were driving up costs. What we need is a competitive marketplace, and that is resulting now, finally, in lower premiums.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, while the UCP has been doing basically nothing about skyrocketing utility costs, Alberta families have been drowning in debt. But all the current government has for them are weak attempts to deflect responsibility. They point to everyone but themselves. They even try to blame others for a transmission overbuild created by Conservative legislation. But a new study from the University of Calgary has found that it is actually corporate profits that are driving up costs on Alberta families. This is a major issue for Albertans. Why is this government trying to hide the real reason for skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, when the NDP cries crocodile tears about utility prices, it's like the arsonist being concerned about the fire that he set. They put 7 and a half billion dollars of additional costs on electricity consumers . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: . . . by building more infrastructure for transmission. They costed \$1.3 billion in their power purchasing agreement fiasco. They cost billions for ratepayers through their ideological rush to shut down our coal plants, the most reliable, low-cost form of energy production, and then they imposed their carbon tax on Albertans. Mr. Speaker, this government is providing nearly \$2 billion of relief to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and a point of order is noted at 2:03.

Ms Ganley: That overbuild was Conservative legislation we opposed. Check the *Hansard*, Premier.

The Premier gloats about forthcoming rebates, but they should have been in place months ago. The UCP has been promising, waffling, planning, and failing to deliver for months now while Albertans struggle. It snowed last night a lot. It was cold. Does the Premier really think that families should go without heat and be left to sit in the dark while he sorts out how to deliver his underwhelming rebates?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, 7 and a half billion dollars of additional transmission costs, \$1.3 billion in penalties to the power corporations, billions of dollars to shut down the coal plants, and then billions of dollars out of consumers' pockets through their carbon taxes: that is why electricity prices have gone up. Thankfully, we have a government that is acting with our electricity rebate, our pause on the fuel tax, and our cap on gas prices, providing greater relief for consumers, the greatest relief of any provincial government in Canada by a country mile.

Ms Ganley: I think most Albertans will trust the U of C over this UCP government.

Mr. Speaker, the rebates are tiny; some would call them paltry. They don't even put a dent in the thousands owed by some Alberta

families. Even the UCP MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland admitted it in this House. All the UCP government has are excuses and attempts to shift blame. I'm going to ask one more time. Does the Premier think it's fair that power companies quintupled their profits while Alberta families owe thousands in outstanding utility bills and are being threatened with shut-offs?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that utilities are heavily regulated in terms of what they can charge. But the NDP approved 7 and a half billion dollars of costs that have to be repaid by consumers. Their carbon tax: they want to quintuple the carbon tax. That will be the single biggest inflationary driver in electricity bills.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have some good news for the House. We promised an independent audit of the NDP's power purchasing agreement fiasco. Fasten your seat belts because that gets released tomorrow. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta at Work Program

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been through tough times with the pandemic and the crash in oil prices, but Alberta is also looking up, with great economic news that we've heard lately. Yesterday I was able to learn more about the good news for Alberta workers as part of the Alberta at work program. This is welcome news for my constituents and Albertans. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: in what ways will these critical investments help Albertans share in the province's successful economic recovery, especially underrepresented groups, including women, Indigenous people, and newcomers to Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for that very important question. Budget 2022 made a record investment of more than \$600 million to help make sure that we have all kinds of programs that will help fellow citizens who are out of work, looking for employment, or help them to upgrade their skills. I am confident that the record investment that we are going to make with the Alberta jobs now program, the Alberta at work program, the Canada-Alberta job grant program will help Albertans who are looking for employment, especially youth, immigrants, and Indigenous people.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that knowledge and skills of workers are a key factor for economic growth and given that education increases the efficiency of each individual worker and helps them get the skills they need to participate in Alberta's recovery plan and given that businesses are looking for new skilled workers, to the Minister of Advanced Education: could you explain how our government is connecting students to fulfilling career paths that are key to Alberta's economic growth? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education is the only one with the call.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the member. You know, there are a number of initiatives that we're undertaking right now to do just that. In fact, we're investing \$235 million over three years to help connect more Albertans and more students to meaningful job opportunities. As part of that, we're investing \$171 million over

three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions in in-demand programs like tech, aviation, health care, and many more.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that vulnerable Albertans can and should be a part of Alberta's economic recovery plan and given that we also consider them to be involved in the workforce and support them in doing that and given that Alberta's government has always been the social safety net for Albertans and will continue to do so, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what additional programs and services will be developed to support the most vulnerable and help them with employment? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for a great question. Yes, my ministry will invest an additional \$20 million to support vulnerable Albertans so that we can get innovative, customized support to help them remove barriers from employment. Not only do we provide the social safety net for vulnerable Albertans; we want to empower them to reach their full potential.

Private Health Services Delivery

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are rightly worried about the UCP's plans to dismantle and privatize health care. Just this week we've seen how the privatization of labs has been a dismal failure, but the UCP see delays, inefficiency, and public dollars going to private profits instead of care as a success. I've heard concerns and worries from eye patients in Calgary that ophthalmology surgeries in the Rockyview hospital will be moved and contracted out at the Holy Cross Centre, bringing into question future access and quality of eye care. My question for the minister is simple. Are ophthalmology surgeries being moved from the Rockyview to be contracted out privately? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. You know, the hon. member raises the issue of privatization. Quite frankly, that is not the case. We need to get past the public-private delivery debate and focus on our need to make the system work better for all Alberta patients. That includes saving money so we can keep investing in services without going to the taxpayer for every dollar. It includes contracting more services using public dollars, publicly administered, like we're doing, like we have done for decades. While in power, members opposite used chartered surgical facilities. We'll be using those as well. There will be an announcement in the near future.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that the Ontario Conservative government's privatization of ophthalmology surgeries resulted in a 25 per cent increase in cost per surgery and loss of capacity in public hospitals for crucial and emergency eye care and given that previous Alberta Conservative government actions to contract and privatize eye surgeries resulted in longer wait times when they made those moves and given that Saskatchewan's surgical initiative, which the UCP have based their plan on, has not led to reductions in the surgery wait-list at all, how can the Minister of Health justify plowing forward with privatization when it's failed across this country for decades?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that simply isn't the case. If we actually take a look at cataracts, wait times for cataract surgeries have dropped to the lowest levels in the last seven years. Why? Because during the pandemic we leveraged chartered surgical facilities to be able to get caught up. Our wait-lists are far too long. We're concerned about the Alberta patient. We're going to leverage not only the chartered surgical facilities but the public systems to be able to get more surgeries done so that we can actually provide the services that Albertans need and want. They're in pain, and we need to help them get healthy, and we're going to deliver that.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that reports and data that the UCP have built their plan to privatize on were released before the UCP threw our system into chaos by fighting with doctors and nurses, firing Dr. Yiu, and charging forward with a privatization agenda, all during a global pandemic, and given that the UCP should recognize, if they care about patients, that, following what they've put Albertans through with their chaos in health care, Albertans value stable and publicly funded care more than ever, will the Minister of Health commit today, here and now, in this House to pause all plans to privatize care till after the next election? Let Albertans decide the future of public health care.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear: leveraging chartered surgical facilities is publicly funded health care. It is publicly funded. It is publicly delivered. What our approach is is actually addressing the issues that we had with tremendously huge wait-lists. We made a commitment in our platform that we would get that done. Unfortunately, we're not going to be able to get it done by next year, but we will get it done. We ran on a platform that we'd use chartered surgical facilities. We are going to deliver on that, and we're also increasing our capacity within our public hospitals. This is public health care.

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: While the Premier was busy prepping a speech to his members to save his job, our caucus was focused on developing plans to revitalize and bring new energy to downtown Calgary. Our plan focuses on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district, and direct funding to support the Calgary plan. We also propose small-business support, events and festivals, transit, more child care spaces, affordable housing units downtown, and support for mental health and addictions. Since the government has been too busy with infighting, we've done the work for them. Will they support our plan so we can restore vibrancy to downtown Calgary?

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, Mr. Speaker, it's time for a little bit of NDP legacy here. When the NDP literally told people to go to the province of British Columbia for employment – but let me tell this right now. Do you know that two cities in the province of Alberta, Edmonton and Calgary, are in the top 10 for the most affordable cities in the entire world? That's big news, and people were starting to move back to the province of Alberta in the middle of last year. When will the NDP start cheerleading for Alberta?

Member Ceci: Given that they're affordable if you have a job and that we have the highest unemployment in Calgary at this time of all major Canadian cities and given that over a year ago our leader promised a plan to revitalize downtown and that we delivered and that over a year ago the Finance minister said that there'd be no help for downtown Calgary despite struggling . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. This may be a first, but I am having a hard time hearing the question, and he does have a right to ask it. You might not like his question, but he has the right to ask it.

Member Ceci: . . . with vacancy rates not seen since the Great Depression, the highest unemployment rate among all Canadian cities – and, thankfully, we reversed that course when we were in government – to the minister: where's the plan? Why haven't you made it ready? Where is it? Would you like to read ours?

Mr. McIver: Well, here's the answer, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to talk fast: \$59 million, University of Calgary; \$41 million for SAIT; \$38 million for the office of the chief medical officer; \$22 million for a new interchange; \$20 million for the Repsol centre; \$5 million for the Calgary Stampede Foundation; \$5 million for downtown revitalization; \$474 million, Springbank off-stream reservoir; \$466 million for three years as part of the \$1.5 billion Calgary green line project; \$387 million for the Calgary ring road project; \$332 million for the Calgary cancer centre; \$195 million for Calgary Deerfoot Trail upgrades; \$99 million for Peter Lougheed Centre; \$91 million for Bridgeland Riverside continuing care; \$80 million for Glenbow revitalization; \$73 million for Rockyview . . . [some applause]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Ceci: Given that he said \$5 million for downtown revitalization and given that in the last election the Premier promised that his corporate handout would fill the office towers of downtown Calgary – he even accelerated the giveaway and said that companies would be irresponsible if they didn't relocate there; since then the number of head offices has dropped, Mr. Speaker – and given that in the UCP's budget all they could muster for downtown Calgary was a paltry \$5 million, that only amounts to 2 per cent of what was requested by the city, and the Calgary Chamber president said that that's absolutely inadequate.

Mr. McIver: I've got more, Mr. Speaker: \$80 million for Glenbow revitalization downtown; \$73 million for Rockyview general hospital; \$65 million for Foothills medical centre; \$64 million for the Court of Appeal downtown; \$45 million for Mount Royal University, repurposing existing facilities; \$42 million for the cyclotron facility in Calgary. We are committed to every part of our province, but the question was about Calgary. We just ran out of time. We're doing more than they ever thought of. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Alberta 2030 Postsecondary Education Strategy

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 will get Albertans back to work. This is ambitious given COVID-19, labour shortages in oil and gas, and digital disruption changing the nature of work. I've heard from constituents, especially those in trades, about how tough it is to gain new skills and explore other fields to earn a living. To the Advanced Education minister: how are the budget and the Alberta 2030 skills for jobs strategy going to support lifelong learning, and how can they help diversify skill sets that align better with the needs of the job market?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question from my colleague. I appreciate that. As I was mentioning a moment ago, Budget 2022 contains \$235 million in investment over three years to do precisely what the member is asking, to help

ensure that our graduates are aligned with the skills and labour needs of our future economy. Specifically, we're providing \$171 million to create 7,000 additional spaces in high-demand programs, in everything from veterinary medicine to aviation to tech to health care. As well, we're providing additional investment to support and bolster apprenticeship and trades training to help more Albertans find successful and rewarding careers in those areas, and there's more as well.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economic prosperity is dependent on retaining talent both local and international and given that Budget 2022 seeks to improve talent retention by enhancing student skills via work-integrated learning opportunities, to the same minister: how will our government ensure accessibility to work-integrated learning and especially for international students who may be limited by work permits and perhaps some other legal requirements?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The topic of work-integrated learning is a very important one. The data is very clear. Students that have an opportunity to participate in an internship or a co-op opportunity are employed faster and earn higher incomes immediately after graduation than their counterparts. That's why Budget 2022 includes \$6 million in new funding over three years to create additional work-integrated learning opportunities in the province. These opportunities help students get a foot in the door with an employer, help them to learn real-world work experience and be better prepared for the job market.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2022 will boost trades in Alberta by investing over \$30 million to expand apprenticeship education and given that at the tabling of Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, one major sentiment was that the trades have been somehow treated historically as less worthy than other postsecondary options, to the same minister: how will this \$30 million investment enhance the parity of esteem in the trades?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, firstly, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that our government firmly believes that a trade certificate has the same value, merit, and worth as a university degree. That's precisely why we're investing \$30 million over three years to support and bolster trades and apprenticeship education in the province. More specifically, we're providing \$15 million over three years to work with our incredible trades partners, organizations like Women Building Futures and Careers: the Next Generation. We'll have more to say about that in the coming months. As well, Budget 2022 includes \$15 million to help create new apprenticeships of the future.

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

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is dealing with another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, I'm hearing again and again from Albertans and constituents who are saying it's getting harder and harder to find a family doctor or access emergency treatment without lengthy wait times, all while the

policies and actions of this government are leading to record numbers of health care professionals leaving this province. To the Minister of Health: why does it seem that it's government policy to do everything it can to drive away public health care workers and doctors from this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I'd like that member to check his facts. Actually, we have more health care professionals working in the province, not less. The most recent report from CPS has indicated that over Q1 last year we have 99 additional doctors, who actually came to work in Alberta. In addition, nurses: over the past two years we have hired 1,800 more nurses; paramedics: 230 additional paramedics; AHS staff in our budget: 2,300 additional AHS staff. We are focused on delivering health care.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the College of Physicians & Surgeons is reporting that nearly triple the number of physicians are leaving our province in 2022 compared to previous years and given that the Alberta Medical Association has suggested that the most important step in stopping physicians from leaving Alberta is negotiating agreements with doctors, after this government scrapped the previous agreement in 2019, and given that the former CEO of Alberta Health Services was fired by the UCP for standing up for public health care, to the same minister: what is the government doing to assure Albertans that this trajectory towards health care crisis cannot continue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted in my previous answer, we are actually expanding our health care capacity. We're focused on hiring more health care professionals in the province. In fact, the hon. member is right: there are doctors who actually do leave. However, there are more doctors coming in. That is normal. We are increasing, as I indicated before, Q1 versus Q1, an additional 99 doctors. We are doing more because we know that we need more health care professionals to deliver the services that Albertans need. We are investing an additional \$600 million in operating expenses this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that. In addition, we are investing in capital and infrastructure. We will build the system and . . .

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that what the minister said only drives home the point that what they are doing is furthering American-style, chartered private medical facilities, that they're pushing forward these increased risks to our public health care system and given that Alberta's health care workers have worked so bravely in stepping up during this pandemic, putting their own health and safety at risk to ensure Albertans can remain safe and receive quality public health care, to the same minister: how can the government justify its push for wage rollbacks, laying off health care workers, firing the head of Alberta Health Services for standing up for public health care and still say they're upholding the public health guarantee?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be crystal clear: we are not laying off health care workers. I was very pleased that an agreement was reached between AHS and United Nurses of Alberta, which increased the wages and also provided incentives

for nurses to be able to work in rural Alberta. We recognize that there are challenges in certain areas with certain professions for health care workers, particularly in rural Alberta. We have dedicated \$90 million last year and another \$90 million this year to be able to address this issue. We are focused on building our health care capacity. We are focused on ensuring that Albertans receive the health care we need. Our budget is delivering it, and we're going to continue to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is next.

Extreme Heat Mitigation

Mr. Schmidt: A report from the Intact centre on climate change at the University of Waterloo says that alarm bells should be ringing about the risk that intense heat poses. The report, entitled Irreversible Extreme Heat, calls on governments to consider extreme heat to be a natural disaster. We've already seen the consequences that intense heat can impose with news that the June 2021 heat wave resulted in the deaths of 66 Calgarians. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks state categorically what this government is doing to protect Albertans from extreme heat so that we don't see the same sort of tragedy again this year?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to lead the way when it comes to investment in reduction of GHG technology inside this province, but I can tell you that what we will not do is join that member and his friends in Extinction Rebellion and the federal government and continue forward with an insane climate change plan that we've seen come from the federal government this last couple of weeks that would result in 150,000-plus jobs in this province going away. Shame on that member for supporting that type of argument going forward. When will he stand in this place and condemn the federal government's carbon tax?

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the report states that the prairies will feel the effects of extreme heat and urges governments to engage in better planning to incorporate heat concerns into city planning codes, address options like public shade, trees, artificial canopies, and incorporate water-based cooling systems like ponds and sprinklers, but given that this budget plans to cut and ultimately eliminate climate resilience projects, going from \$50 million to zero, meaning that municipalities and Albertans are on their own in the event of future extreme heat events, will the minister rethink this senseless cut and make the investments needed to avoid future tragedies like we saw last year?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government just announced \$10 billion in project investments on GHG reduction technology that creates 16,000 jobs inside our province in partnership with our industry, a sharp contrast to that hon. member and his colleagues inside the federal government and the NDP-Liberal coalition, who announced a plan just the other day, supported by the NDP in Ottawa, that would result in production cuts inside this province and hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost inside this province. Shame on him for supporting that.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this report is just the latest evidence that as a province we face more extreme weather events that put Albertans at risk and should be planning and investing to mitigate these as best we can but given that this government's priority, based on their own budget documents, is to invest less, if anything at all, and given that this government has already told municipalities that

they won't see a cent of provincial support when it comes to future disasters, these extreme weather events pose a serious threat to Alberta's economy and our people. Will the minister reverse his truly senseless cuts and invest to protect Albertans from the threat of climate change?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question. This government just the other day announced the process for the Springbank dry dam, a major piece of flood mitigation, very important for the city of Calgary, that his government failed on; continues to work on the new Bow River dam and historical investments in irrigation all across this province that also help to mitigate flood events. That's the way forward, continuing to invest in real projects that also create economic wealth, unlike his new boss, Justin Trudeau, who continues to force his NDP allies to support insane climate plans that continue to devastate economies across the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to the position of the NDP, it is time for a curriculum update. Seeing as it's not been updated in many years and considering that students' grades were declining in literacy, math, and reading, the current curriculum just isn't up to par anymore, but unfortunately due to social media misinformation a few of my constituents have expressed concerns about how our government consulted with experts, principals, and teachers. To the Minister of Education: can you set the record straight about the review process you went through on the K to 6 curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is the most transparent and open curriculum review process Alberta has ever seen. During the drafting process the K to 6 Curriculum Working Group included approximately a hundred teachers from right across the province. We opened a public survey, gave every Albertan an opportunity to share their feedback on this curriculum. We also hosted virtual engagement sessions, had ongoing conversations with education partners and piloting teachers, provided a million dollars in curriculum engagement grants to support partner groups conducting engagements with their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a common complaint we often hear is how little our students know about financial literacy and how, because of that, our students are not properly prepared for the future and given that in your announcement last week you mentioned that fundamental financial literacy is one priority of this new K to 6 curriculum and given that the NDP failed to update the curriculum to set our children up for the future, to the Minister of Education: how are you incorporating this financial literacy into the K to 6 curriculum? [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students will begin learning financial literacy skills starting in kindergarten and each year through to grade 6 and the physical education and wellness

curriculum being implemented this September. We heard loud and clear from parents that they wanted their children to have the skills and the knowledge about finances, and the curriculum delivers on this. Students will learn about money and how to responsibly manage it so that they are financially secure and successful in their lives. We owe it to our kids to do this.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we all want Alberta's education to be considered as a gold standard in Canada and given that there has been a review process with experts, teachers, and parents but given that some parents in my constituency have expressed previous concerns about the age appropriateness of certain parts of the curriculum, to the Minister of Education: can you please explain to Albertan parents how the revised curriculum is age appropriate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've stated many times, we have been listening to the feedback from all Albertans and education stakeholders on the draft K to 6 curriculum. We heard concerns about age appropriateness and content level in some of the subjects, and we listened by revising the drafts more than once to address these concerns. We've also scaled back the number of subjects that will be implemented this fall and made sure that the three subjects we are implementing are age appropriate and that the concerns with scope and sequence have been addressed.

Government Policies and Cost of Living (continued)

Member Irwin: Phoebe lives in my neighbourhood, Parkdale. She's got a baby. She's recently back to work but is absolutely struggling to make ends meet. Her power bill last month: over \$900. Phoebe is just one of my many constituents being hammered by a cost-of-living crisis created by this UCP government. While our government acted to protect Albertans from outrageous price spikes and the kind of crisis we're seeing today, the UCP lifted the caps on electricity and then sat back watching as life became more and more unaffordable. Minister, a \$50 cheque won't keep Phoebe and her family afloat. Will you act?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP caucus, that tried to unionize the family farm, is now asking about the high cost of electricity, which is high because of their short-sighted energy policies. I've said it before: everything they did on the electricity grid caused prices to go up. The best way to keep prices down is to keep the NDP away from our electricity grid.

Member Irwin: Given that it's not just that minister who doesn't think that supporting struggling Albertans like Phoebe is in his job description – the Minister of Finance is sitting back and doing nothing to help my constituents either. He hiked their auto insurance rates by up to 30 per cent by lifting the cap with no warning and then called this price hike courageous. Wow. Can the Finance minister explain how my constituents are supposed to make ends meet when he keeps pulling the rug out from under them? And can he just admit that Albertans can't trust the UCP when it comes to helping them make ends meet? Do better, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP, when they were governing, brought in a rate cap, simply put a Band-Aid on a

problem in auto insurance that was resulting in insurance companies pulling back products, ultimately reducing capacity in the province, with the end goal to nationalize the insurance industry in the province. We're dealing with the systemic issues that are driving up costs. We brought in Bill 41. It's making a difference. Premiums are coming down.

Member Irwin: Let's try another minister. The Education minister ignored the needs for a new Delwood school in my constituency, and she refused my offer to join me and our Education critic to tour the building, and this minister refuses to listen to my constituents' concerns about her terrible Dumpster-fire curriculum, and at the same time our government is benefiting from high oil prices . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Irwin: . . . the Edmonton public school board is facing a dramatic funding shortfall. Can the Education minister answer just for once, please, the people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and explain why my constituents are paying more, getting less, and being ignored by her government.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to share with the member opposite that I just have received an invitation for grand openings of seven new schools for Edmonton public school division in the next couple of months. Seven new schools: two in the southwest and the rest in the northwest. Edmonton public school division in 2020 had 4,700 fewer students than they predicted and last year 1,000 fewer students than they predicted, yet we were funding to the higher levels. If they're having problems with their budget, I can certainly help them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. [interjections] A point of order is noted at 2:34 by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of introducing Bill 203, that would have established a venture fund for Albertans to invest in Alberta's future. The fund was designed to directly invest in the growth of Alberta's tech and AI sectors and exclusively support early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Initially members from the other side seemed to support the bill. In fact, a UCP MLA even called it, quote, the most Albertan concept ever. End quote. Two weeks later they did a complete one-eighty and killed the bill in committee. Did the Premier or minister instruct private members to kill this legislation, and why?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, to the sole member of the capitalist caucus on the other side, we on this side look at the best practices around when it comes to making sure that we use taxpayer dollars wisely. Now it's time to tell them why that was such a failed idea. All they have to do is take a look at the NDP in Manitoba and the crocus fund. Just google it: crocus, Manitoba. They will find the millions and millions of dollars that were lost with that exact scheme. We will not do that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bilous: It would cost the government zero dollars.

Given that this government has cut several programs designed to support our tech sector, causing us to lose ground to other provinces, and given that investing in the fund would have restored competitiveness and supported economic growth, diversification, creation of jobs, and long-term economic well-being in the province and given that we had two very accomplished stakeholders present

at committee in support of this bill but the UCP couldn't provide a single person from industry to speak against it – the bill actually came from industry. Why is this government ignoring entrepreneurs and job creators in the tech sector?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, again, to all the folks, the millions of people watching online: crocus, Manitoba. Just google it. That's why this is one of the worst ideas that we've seen.

But let's talk about diversification in Alberta's economy. Let's start with the film and television industry. The NDP failed – failed – the film and television industry while we've doubled that in one year. The tech sector in Alberta: thousands of positions. It's growing so fast, we had to increase enrolment at our postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the concept of a venture fund and an advisory panel on technology and innovation were proposed in the Innovation Capital Working Group, your group, Minister, in a report written by industry experts on ways to attract investment and grow the tech sector and given that I've been consistently hearing from these leaders and the need for both of these – the minister has previously said that this shouldn't be a partisan issue. Is this government so blinded by their own partisanship that they won't even take good ideas from industry if they're brought forward by us?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud of the tech and innovation space in this province. Under the previous government venture capital funding was \$37 million; last year, \$561 million. Thousands of jobs are being created in this province. We're attracting major investment. RBC's innovation hub is here; Mphasis; Infosys; the largest investment, with Amazon Web Services, in our province's history in the tech space. We have to create programs to fill these jobs. That's a winning record.

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

Teacher Disciplinary Process and Bill 15

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ATA union is in conflict of interest running teacher discipline. Bill 15 takes teacher discipline away from the union. The ATA union does not like Bill 15. It reduces their power. The NDP also does not like Bill 15. Maybe this shows that the bill is a good idea. To the minister: why is Bill 15 a good idea?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 15 will reform the teaching profession discipline process to make the education system safer for students, their families, and teachers. It will further protect students and give parents peace of mind by enhancing the accountability and transparency of the teaching profession, removing any perception of bias that comes from having a union oversee the discipline of its dues-paying members and bringing Alberta in line with comparable provinces and other regulated professions. It is absolutely a great idea.

2:40

Mr. Stephan: Given that there are over 45,000 teachers yet over the past 10 years, with the ATA union in charge, there was not a single hearing for teacher incompetence and given that nobody believes that in the past 10 years there was not a single incompetent teacher in Alberta, to the minister: does this show that the ATA union may be incompetent in identifying incompetence?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. No competency hearings have taken place since the ATA assumed responsibility for the matters of professional competence, in 2009. Under Bill 15 any individual would be able to file a competency complaint with the registrar, who would then confirm if the teacher holds a certificate and then send the complaint to the commissioner to be addressed. The commissioner would review the matter and may initially either dismiss the case, recommend a penalty under expedited process, or use consent resolution agreements, dispute resolutions, or mediation to resolve the issue. We need this process.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the majority of teachers are competent, seeking to be excellent to teach and serve children, and given that children are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union, and given that Bill 15 seeks to put the best interests of children first in the teacher discipline process, to the minister: how will Bill 15 both increase student safety and strengthen the teaching profession?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker – and thank you to the member for the question – the vast majority of teachers in the province are absolutely wonderful professionals, amazing, caring individuals that have the best interests of students at heart. But when cases of teacher misconduct do occur, it is important that the students and their families know that their cases will be taken seriously and reviewed by an unbiased party. Bill 15 will elevate the status of the entire teaching profession with the appointment of an arm's-length commissioner who would oversee professional conduct and competency complaints against teachers and teacher leaders across this province. This is so necessary.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 203, Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This bill was referred to the committee on March 17, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 203 not proceed, and I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence is a debatable motion. I see that there are members in the Assembly who have already risen to provide notice that they, in fact, would like to provide comments on concurrence, which will take place on the next available Monday.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and move first reading of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

More than ever Alberta families, farmers, and entrepreneurs are struggling with high energy prices. These high energy prices are caused by the NDP's short-sighted policies when they were in government, that made everything more expensive in the utilities world. While we are embracing long-term solutions, Mr. Speaker, we're coming up with short-term supports, and I'm happy to say that this government is taking action. If passed, this legislation will protect Albertans during times of high energy prices with targeted rebates.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:03 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I do not have access to the Blues, around 2:03, in response to a question, the Premier used language something like: it's like the arsonist pretending to care about a fire he just set. Arson is a Criminal Code offence. It's a criminal offence. I rose under 23(j), which prohibits members from using insulting language, using that kind of language. I may refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623.

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden.

Although the Premier was referring to the opposition as a group, I believe, still I think that referring to the opposition or any member of the opposition as criminal, that kind of analogy, should be out of order. It's against the traditions of this Assembly, it's against the rules of this Assembly, and as such it should be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to suggest that this is not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate. I don't have the benefit of the Blues either, but if I recall correctly, the Premier at the time had said, "It's like the arsonist is worried about the fire," something to that effect. I know for a fact the Premier was not calling the members opposite arsonists though I would suggest that that caucus is a Dumpster fire. I would suggest that this is a matter of debate. If the Premier had actually said that a member of that caucus was an arsonist, that would certainly be out of order, and I acknowledge that. But he did not say that. Rather, he made an association of suggesting that they're actually worried about insurance rates when the reality is that they are the ones who jacked them up. Not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Premier at 2:03 said the following: "Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, when the NDP cries crocodile tears about utility prices, it's like the arsonist being concerned about the fire that he set." Then he went on to provide the answer to the rest of the question, and a point of order was called. I would agree that the hon. Premier was not referring to members of the opposition or individuals or even as a group but, more so, speaking to what an arsonist would do. This is not a point of order. It's a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:34 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order with regard to the use of supplementary questions. It is a tradition of this House that the first and second supplementals of a question are in some way related to the initial question. In the case of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that was not the case. That member also didn't even use the traditional use of the word "given." The first question was about utility prices; that went to the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. The second question went to the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, and the third, of course, was about curriculum. These matters are not related: curriculum, insurance rates, and utility prices. I would ask that member to try to abide by conventions of this Chamber by using supplementals in an appropriate manner.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

2:50

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the set of questions before me that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked. Certainly, she asked about utilities, she asked about insurance, and she went on to talk about education. She concluded her question with: why are my constituents "paying more, getting less, and being ignored by the UCP"? I think it was in the same context that in terms of education they are getting less. Education has become more expensive for them. The theme of the question in general was the cost of living, that is impacting Albertans. Whether that's utilities, insurance, education, under this government everything has been made more expensive. The question was following that theme.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues.

Are there other submissions?

Seeing none, I agree with the Deputy Opposition House Leader with respect to that the three questions were about the utility costs, the insurance costs, and the education costs. The hon. member also made the submission that they were questions of constituents, and I think that there has been a significant amount of latitude for such questions. But in this case in particular, because of the theme of the costs, this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, yesterday a point of privilege was raised by the Member for Central Peace-Notley. At that time I provided comments with respect to Standing Order 15(4) about a member who is subject to a point of privilege being raised being present in the Assembly. Earlier today I received correspondence from the Government House Leader indicating that their schedule may or may not allow for them to be present during debate and, as such, suggesting that the debate could proceed in their absence should the Speaker deem that appropriate. I have deemed that appropriate given the notice that the Government House Leader has provided to me. I'm happy to table that correspondence in the Assembly tomorrow at the appropriate time.

We will now hear the point of privilege that was raised by the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley. The hon. member.

Privilege Threatening a Member

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today out of a necessity to fully conclude the unfortunate and disgraceful matter that occurred in this House during the most recent Thursday

afternoon sitting. As my fellow members are aware, we bore witness to a new low for this Assembly during the final afternoon sitting before the break. The exchange I'm referring to includes words I cannot repeat here and, perhaps most shockingly, was conducted by the Government House Leader, as the title states, a leader in this Assembly, at a time when Albertans find themselves deeply concerned about the attitude of the upper echelons of the UCP government and how that trickles down into the general attitude of one of the most divisive governments in the history of our province.

I will do my best to describe the exchange and kindly ask for your latitude, Mr. Speaker, in my attempt to do so. For those looking for the exact exchange, please see *Hansard* for Thursday afternoon, March 31, 2022, day 19, page 593. While a retraction has occurred on two matters, two matters from the exchange remain unaddressed. The use of a proper name was withdrawn. The use of inappropriate parliamentary language – I'm referring to the swear word – was withdrawn.

But two issues remain unaddressed. Number one, the threat against all members of the Assembly, which was an act of intimidation. I quote the Government House Leader: "I'll bring a standing order package back here right after the break to make sure you can't use tablings like that no more." The second, the way the Government House Leader challenged the authority of the Speaker during the exchange, was never apologized for. But I respect the Speaker to deal with that issue the way he sees fit and will withdraw that concern from my point of privilege.

I believe that the threat is a prima facie breach of privilege to the Assembly. Upon review of the standing orders, you will find Standing Order 15, which covers privilege. The relevant section of that standing order reads:

15(1) A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any Member constitutes a question of privilege.

(2) A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have given the written notice as required.

Under (6) it says:

The Speaker may allow such debate as he or she thinks appropriate in order to determine whether a prima facie case of breach of privilege has taken place and whether the matter is being raised at the earliest opportunity.

To prove this is a prima facie case of breach of privilege, first, I will address the earliest opportunity requirement. Mr. Speaker, without the benefit of the Blues it was impossible in that moment to account for all of the many infractions of our rules that were made by the Government House Leader. Yesterday was the first sitting since the incident, and we have the full *Hansard* exchange now, something that was not available to us at that moment.

To understand what a breach of privilege would consist of, Mr. Speaker, I refer the members of this House to the Legislative Assembly Act. I will highlight the sections I believe to be key to the understanding of why this is a breach that falls between sections 8 and 13 of the act.

First, section 8, Jurisdiction of the Assembly:

The Assembly has exclusive jurisdiction in respect of

- (a) the determination of the lawfulness of its proceedings, and
- (b) the regulation of its proceedings and the conduct of its business and affairs.

To have the Government House Leader threaten – unilaterally threaten – to bring changes to the standing orders in order to protect himself, not the Assembly, when it is clearly the Assembly that makes these decisions.

Next, in section 9, Privileges, Immunities and Powers Generally:

9(1) In addition to the privileges, immunities and powers respectively conferred on them by this Act, the Assembly and its Members, and the committees of the Assembly and their members, have the same privileges, immunities and powers as those held respectively by the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the members of that House, the committees of that House and the members of committees of that House at the time of the passing of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Clearly, we are extended the same understandings of procedure as other jurisdictions in regard to privileges and breach of privileges.

Now, in section 10 we find the pertinent language on breaches of privilege and contempts.

10(1) The Assembly may inquire into, adjudicate and punish breaches of the privileges of the Assembly and contempts of the Assembly.

(2) Without restricting the generality of subsection (1), the following acts constitute breaches of privilege or contempts to which that subsection applies:

- (a) an assault, insult or libel on a Member;
- (b) obstructing, threatening or attempting to force or intimidate a Member in any matter relating to the Member's office;

Clearly, this incident was a threat and an attempt to intimidate members from using the rights they have to table documents.

Section 12 also makes it clear that the Assembly is a court in this matter.

12(1) The Assembly is a court for the purpose of exercising its powers and jurisdiction under sections 10 and 11 and its decisions and orders under those sections are final.

Section 10(2)(b) is, of course, of particular note as it makes it very clear that an act of intimidation like that which occurred when the Government House Leader threatened to alter the standing orders is a violation that represents a breach of privilege.

In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* there are numerous references to the rights of the House as a collectivity not to be intimidated and interfered with and the rights and immunities of individual members, freedom from obstruction, interference, or intimidation.

Members of Parliament, by the nature of their office and the variety of work they are called upon to perform, come into contact with a wide range of individuals and groups. Members can, therefore, be subject to all manner of interference, obstruction and influences. *Maingot* states:

Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation... of a person for or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

That was 218.

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to services of its Members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference. Speaker Lamoureux stated in a 1973 ruling that he had "no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation." As Speaker Bosley noted in 1986:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

3:00

Let's be clear. The Government House Leader's interruption did in fact stop the tablings for that day, and the threat and intimidation clearly makes a case for the point of privilege.

In ruling on another question of privilege, Speaker Bosley stated further that the threat or attempt at intimidation cannot be hypothetical, but must be real or have occurred.

I think we can clearly say that this threat and intimidation was not hypothetical. It was real, and it did occur.

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.

This has affected myself and all members who now worry about tabling documents in case the House leader finds further personal offence and does in fact bring forward changes stopping this important part of members' business. In less than two weeks the House is expected to vote on a government member's private member's motion to review the standing orders. It is alarming to think that the House leader could at any time bring forward changes to the standing orders or use this review to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is directly related to a proceeding in this Assembly. The *Hansard* shows clear as day the threat to all members to alter the standing orders if tablings are used in a manner that this House has ruled already that they may be used as. This is a clear attempt to prevent myself and others from carrying out their parliamentary duties. We need to be clear that the tabling of documents is often requested when members quote from documents, so it's not only an opportunity but a requirement.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is not a one-man show, and no, it doesn't revolve around a small group of people that feel it is their personal playground that they can manipulate. This Legislature belongs to Albertans, who have chosen people to represent them here. We have rules and processes, and members' rights are protected. The Assembly decides the standing orders, not the Government House Leader, and to suggest otherwise is an insult to this Assembly and the people that have sent us here, that rely on fair processes to be applied.

All members of this Assembly should be alarmed by these threats and should stand together against them. There is no place for threats, intimidation, or bullying, and yes, there are consequences for actions that fall outside these rules. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that you find this incident of threat and intimidation a point of privilege so that the appropriate consequences can take place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of privilege, of course, is a very serious matter that members of the Assembly are all welcome to provide commentary to. I see the Deputy Government House Leader rising. I think it's appropriate to find out if there are other members of the Assembly that would like to speak to the issue prior to the response from yourself. Are you comfortable with that?

I see the Opposition House Leader. I also see the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen. We'll hear from the Opposition House Leader prior to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to engage in the debate on this point of privilege. I will just begin by acknowledging, as has been acknowledged in this House many times, that rising on a point of privilege, the raising of such matters, is incredibly serious and, as mentioned in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 141, should not be "reckoned with lightly and accordingly ought to be rare, and thus rarely raised in the House of Commons" or here in the Alberta Legislature.

I rise because I agree with the Member for Central Peace-Notley that this is a serious point of privilege and to enter into the debate. As was argued by the Member for Central Peace-Notley while arguing the point of order on the day, which was March 31, when this occurred, the Government House Leader on that day, in my opinion, did threaten and intimidate not only the Member for Central Peace-Notley but the Assembly as a whole, threatening to change the standing orders to limit the actions of members of the Assembly once the House had resumed.

Now, as the Member for Central Peace-Notley just noted in his closing, the Government House Leader – when it comes to the changing of the standing orders, the standing orders are changed by the Assembly itself and by all members, but I must enter into debate that the Government House Leader has very real sway and power within this Chamber, within his own caucus, and is seen as a leader and someone who has influence in this place, so threats made by the Government House Leader come with very special weight in this place, and how that Government House Leader governs himself, I believe, has true impact in the business of this Assembly.

Now, as the member has recapped, this occurred while the member was making a number of tablings. The statements made by the Government House Leader captured on page 593 of *Hansard*, in my view, constitute a very real threat and a violation of both the statutes and precedents that govern the Assembly. Now, while the threat was directed at the Member for Central Peace-Notley, I will say that the threat to alter the standing orders, which are the rules with which the House regulates its proceedings, was considered by members of the Official Opposition caucus as a real and present threat, particularly in light of the tone and in light of previous changes to standing orders made by this government.

Tablings being a vital function for every member of this Assembly, all members of the Official Opposition took note of the threats that were being made because it is through tablings that we put the concerns of constituents on the record, back up statements made, and provide evidence.

Now, I would want to enter into this debate the Speaker's own words from November 3, 2020, found on page 2960 of that year's *Hansard*, that rulings "be guided by the precedent that is before us, the standing orders we have all agreed to, and the reference books that we all turn to." It's very clear to me that if the standing orders of the Assembly are to be used as a tool by the government to control and limit available actions of the opposition members and of independent members, how can this Assembly continue to function if the members exist in an environment of fear brought on by a Government House Leader whose actions exhibit not leadership but fear and intimidation? How can the Speaker continue to do his duty if these rules are subject to ire and the whims of the government and their House leader?

There are sources that are relevant to this matter, and while listening to the Member for Central Peace-Notley, I noted one or two sources that we found that were similar, so I will not repeat where I can avoid doing so. Certainly, chapter 1 of *Beauchesne's* states that “the principles of Canadian parliamentary law are: to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority.”

The Legislative Assembly Act lists and constitutes the breaches of privilege, which I will not read in, but I will say that we agree with 10(2)(b), obstructing, threatening, or attempting. We would agree with the Member for Central Peace-Notley that the act of threatening here is the one of major concern for us.

In *Erskine May* paragraph 15.14: “To attempt to intimidate a Member in their parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt.”

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, items that are considered contempt, page 82:

assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties . . . assaulting, threatening or disadvantaging a Member, or a former Member, on account of the Member's conduct in Parliament.

The last one being particularly relevant. The threat came as a direct result of the actions of the Member for Central Peace-Notley due to his actions here in the Assembly. The description and relevance of the items he is tabling, which is, again, as you turn to *Hansard* page 593, amount to one sentence per tabling. It's important to note that there is no limit on the number of tablings that may be done at any given time per the standing orders.

We did also note Speaker Bosley's ruling on page 108 in 1986, but I will not reread it into the record.

I believe it is clear that on March 31 the Government House Leader did make an actual threat to obstruct the Member for Central Peace-Notley from the future performance of his duties, the tabling of documents, which is a breach of his privilege, as well as extended that threat in something that would impact all members of this Assembly. This is further proven when considering the reference on page 91 of *House of Commons*, that lists “the presentation or submission of a document to a House or Committee” as a proceeding in Parliament. Specifically, page 91 of *House of Commons* shows that he was performing his duties through a procedure in the House.

3:10

Finally, on this point I turn to page 60 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. “Any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House . . . is referred to as a contempt . . . It does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a Member; it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results.”

I will suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in conversations I've had with my Official Opposition colleagues, there has been a very chilling effect by the Government House Leader's words in this place. Through his action he has not only breached the privilege of the member but has committed a contempt against the entire Assembly and every member of this Assembly.

Certainly, we know this is not the first time we've addressed the threatening of another member as a breach of privilege in the Assembly, nor is it the first time a member of the Assembly has used threats against a member in an attempt to limit the actions of a member. For this, I'll just draw your attention to a point of privilege raised on September 22, 1993, ruled on by Speaker Schumacher. In this case a member of Executive Council threatened to withhold government programs from a member's constituency. There are similarities in these cases, and I would point to the ruling in that case. In a clarifying statement the Speaker ruled that a prima facie case of contempt did exist, and in that case the

member in question withdrew and apologized prior to the point of privilege being finally raised.

In the case before us today, in this case, the Government House Leader potentially could try to use that argument. I would suggest that the Government House Leader did withdraw and apologize for the use of unparliamentary language as well as the use of proper names but did not for threatening the Member for Central Peace-Notley in the ongoing discharging of his duties. In my mind, this matter is very much still alive.

I urge the Speaker to look at Speaker Schumacher's rulings. I believe that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, and I urge the Speaker to provide the Assembly the opportunity to consider what actions would be appropriate.

I will leave this up to the Speaker and his ruling, but I do want to offer that in this instance we saw a pattern of behaviour that I believe will require more than an offer to apologize and withdraw. The members of this Assembly need assurances that these types of threats cannot and will not be tolerated in the Assembly or anywhere in this precinct.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to engage in this debate.

The Speaker: Thank you to the Opposition House Leader.

I might just mention to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that I appreciated the way that the Opposition House Leader attempted to not just repeat similar arguments, so I will encourage you to do the same. We don't want to set a precedent of violent agreement or matters of debate around points of privilege, but if you do have additional comments or content that may be beneficial for the Assembly as well as for the Deputy Government House Leader for them to conclude their arguments, it is reasonable for other members to provide additional submissions. I will call on you now, but if it is largely similar, I will likely intervene.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance, and I so appreciate what the two hon. members before me said. I feel it's so accurate for the level of intimidation, the level of threats. I'll do everything I can to have three new relevant points.

Absolutely, this is a question of privilege. It is directly related to the rights and privileges of this Assembly and every single member in here. The words “I'll bring,” the words “make sure that you can't [do that]” are very strong words. Mr. Speaker, it's maybe no coincidence that I didn't see any tablings today or yesterday. Is this threat hanging over our democracy?

I'll jump to, as both the hon. members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Central Peace-Notley said, that we have a process for changing the standing orders. We have a process where all of us can go to those committees and argue, to make points, go to the media, do a dissenting opinion. The words “I'll bring” and “[I'll] make sure you can't” fly in the face of that.

Just quickly, it's so important, you know, for the 4.4 million Albertans that we're fortunate to represent. I think one of the phrases I've heard the most often in my 10 years here is: when you're first elected, it's like drinking from a firehose. So many Albertans rely on us to get their ideas, their tablings, their points to the floor, to the decision-makers. The fact that a key decision-maker, the Government House Leader, used the words “I'll bring” and “[I'll] make sure you can't” is egregious. It's horrifying.

I just want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the process. We have a Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that meets to change the standing orders, that meets to discuss them, where any one of the 87 of us can go and put in our good ideas on behalf of the thousands of Albertans we represent. I wonder how the hon. members for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-Meadows, Chestermere-Strathmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, and Red Deer-South

feel. They're on that committee. Are they going to be swayed by the words of intimidation that so many of us felt? There are others on that committee, and again any one of us could go, and the fact is that we haven't seen tablings in two days.

The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley alluded to that two Mondays from now we're probably talking about Motion 506 from the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis and – my goodness – the two things that she knew that the hon. Government House Leader's words fly right in the face of: "Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing." She doesn't say: I will; I will make sure. She's sending it to the committee, and the words she uses both in her point 1 and her point 2: increase collaboration and co-operation, "facilitate collaboration and cooperation among their members."

Mr. Speaker, absolutely, this is a question of privilege from a high-ranking government member in a position to control the process and the legalities. I'm sorry it happened because I think the perception of this and an obscenity that in 10 years I've never heard in here sets us all back, and that's why this is incredibly important.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others with new submissions or additional information that would be beneficial for the Assembly and the Speaker to make a decision?

Seeing none, as is common practice in the Assembly with respect to points of privilege, the member in question or the Government House Leader or their designate has the opportunity to respond to the arguments that have been made today or to delay that response to tomorrow or a future date. I'll provide the Deputy Government House Leader that opportunity now if he would like to respond. I'm welcome to hear the response, or we can delay till tomorrow. How would you see fit to proceed?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, you know what? I will probably go ahead and respond today.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start off by saying in response to this point of privilege from the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley that I do not find that this is a clear point of privilege. I believe it is not.

Let's review some of the facts that occurred on Thursday, March 31. This can all be found on page 593 of *Alberta Hansard*. The Member for Central Peace-Notley rose to do a lengthy series of tablings. I would argue that in doing this, he also monopolized a large portion of the Assembly's time. Some might even say that he was wasting the time of the Assembly by abusing the standing orders, which allow tabling returns to operate. While doing these never-ending tablings, he made multiple drive-by smears of the Premier and the Minister of Environment and Parks, going as far as to directly accuse the Government House Leader of misinforming the House, and he also said that the minister of parks tried again "to dupe the House." This is clearly unparliamentary language although the Member for Central Peace-Notley only apologized for the first instance.

But the Member for Central Peace-Notley has a bit of history, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber of trying to find new and clever ways to call people liars in the Assembly. He has been called to order and made to apologize multiple times for these infractions. For example, on April 6, 2017 – this can be found on page 547 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day – the Member for Central Peace-Notley said: "Given that the government lied." A point of order was called, and his first instinct was to then pivot to the following phrase: "Given that the government misled the people." This

resulted in another point of order being called, and the Member for Central Peace-Notley had to apologize.

3:20

There are other examples of this as well. The Member for Central Peace-Notley is no stranger to the rules of the Assembly and has frequently sought to push the envelope. This isn't his first week. He knows the rules full well and what he is doing. Therefore, given that this member has a history of trying to abuse his position to call MLAs liars, then it should be no surprise that he was extremely frustrated to see him abuse the Assembly's time with nonstop tablings and using the tablings to call members of the Assembly liars.

Now, his letter yesterday raised two issues, Mr. Speaker. The first was that he alleges that the Government House Leader refused to come to order when called by the Speaker. There is nothing in *Hansard* that indicates that the Government House Leader did not come to order when called on by the Speaker. When reviewing *Hansard*, it is clear that the Government House Leader, when called on by the Speaker to raise a point of order, did so. When asked by the Speaker to apologize and withdraw the use of his unparliamentary language, the Government House Leader did so immediately and without reservation.

That is certainly not something that we've seen from the Leader of the Opposition, for example, who I've never seen apologize and withdraw for remarks made in this Chamber but, rather, makes the Opposition House Leader do that on her behalf.

I also know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud struggles with direction from the chair, when on March 14, when asked to withdraw and apologize, she only withdrew and then when pressed, apologized in offering this poor apology: "I apologize and withdraw for the sentiments of the members across the way." That was, of course, when the member accused members of this side of the House of condoning and engaging in rape culture.

Yet in all these instances the Speaker frequently states that the matter is either concluded or dealt with, so I don't think a point of privilege can be found with regard to the interaction between the Speaker and the Government House Leader, which leaves us the allegation that the Government House Leader intimidated the Assembly by indicating he was prepared to bring forward a change to the standing orders to prevent Tabling Returns and Reports from being misused by MLAs.

The Government House Leader said:

That is completely inappropriate and certainly should not be how tablings are used. Frankly, if that's how . . . member[s] [are] going to continue to use it, I'll bring a standing order package back here right after the break to make [it so] you can't use tablings like that [anymore].

First, let's establish that Tabling Returns and Reports has faced many iterations over the course of the Assembly's history. In the past an MLA was able to table a hamburger from the cafeteria. That's not permitted now under Standing Order 37(4). This meant that tablings are not some inviolate item of business that can't be altered by the majority of the Assembly.

Then, let's review how standing orders are changed in the Assembly. Any member may utilize the tools available to them to put forward substantive motions in the Assembly. These could be government motions, motions other than government motions, and motions under Standing Order 42. Any of these motions, if passed by a majority of the Assembly, can make changes to the standing orders. This occurred last session, when the private member Motion 518, sponsored by the hon. MLA for Peace River, saw the change from the previous question-and-comment period to the interventions we all know and dearly love.

The Government House Leader is frequently responsible for bringing forward government motions which propose changes to the standing orders. This government caucus is always looking to find ways to improve how the business of the Assembly is managed and how to prevent abusive behaviour. There is no threat or intimidation from any member of this Assembly putting forward motions or a member indicating that they are not.

So, very clearly, the Government House Leader did not threaten any member of the Assembly by suggesting that he was prepared, if necessary, to put forward a motion to change the standing orders if any member, and in particular the Member for Central Peace-Notley, were to persist in making nonstop tablings in order to make drive-by smears of members of this Assembly and, in doing so, delay the business of the Assembly.

Therefore, I respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a prima facie breach of privilege and encourage the Member for Central Peace-Notley to quit playing games and to follow the rules and practices and procedures of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, much has been said about the situation that did occur on the previous Thursday, prior to the break. I think it's reasonable that the Speaker take some time to consider what has been said today by both members of the opposition and by the Deputy Government House Leader, and I will report back to the Assembly at my convenience, possibly tomorrow but maybe Monday as well depending on the dialogue between the table and I and the considerations that will take place. I do take this matter seriously, and I do take the events of Thursday, March 31, seriously as well, and I'll consider all of those things when executing the decision that will take place.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: There are no amendments on the floor. We are on the main bill. Are there members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. We know that this is omnibus legislation, which is typical of a fiscal statutes amendment act. Nine separate acts are being looked at, and most of it is pretty straightforward and isn't, certainly, anything to be concerned about largely except for one significant piece, and that, of course, is the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

You know, even today in question period this question was asked by our leader to the Premier about the government's decision to really tax inflation, and that's that bracket creep. We know that the Premier, when he was in government in Ottawa – he was an MP in cabinet. At that time, when the personal income tax system wasn't indexed to inflation, he slammed – I guess he wasn't in cabinet at the time; he was in opposition – the Liberal government and said that that was insidious and a pernicious tax grab.

It's about a billion dollars of Albertans' hard-earned money that now, because the UCP is deciding not to index this to inflation, which is the norm – it is just the regular process for governments across Alberta and federal governments. They generally do this. It's just seen as the normal protocol because they want to support, you know, their constituents, their citizens to have the same amount of money or to be kept up with inflation. But the UCP government, even though they're flush with money from oil and gas revenues, decided that, no, that money needs to be in government coffers and out of the pockets of Albertans.

That's happening at a time when Albertans are struggling with affordability. Everything is so expensive, and people are really, really struggling. This is something that is, you know, a hill to die on, as they say, so I cannot support this bill because this regular process of the indexation of the tax brackets is not happening. I will be voting against Bill 2 because of this issue, and I think everyone in this Chamber should because it's taking away from Albertans, and Albertans need to be supported now. You know, we know that inflation is, I think, about 5.7 per cent. I think it might even be higher now. I haven't seen the latest stats on that, but that's the highest it's been in years and years. If this is not the time to do it, I don't know when it is in terms of indexation of the tax brackets.

3:30

I mean, it's really a significant mistake by this government to go ahead with this legislation because it's putting significant hardship on regular Albertans. I think that just once again shows how we cannot trust the UCP. They're not thinking about the best interests of Albertans; they are thinking of, you know, their elite friends and cutting corporate taxes, throwing money away to nonexistent pipelines based on huge risks of who becomes President in the U.S. Of course, they guessed wrong, and – guess what – Albertans have lost billions of dollars because of that. We just cannot trust the UCP government, and this is just another example of how clear that is.

You know, if we just reflect a little bit on even what happened today in question period, the trustworthiness of the UCP is just clearer and clearer every day. It's honestly, sincerely quite disturbing for me to sit in this Chamber and hear the ridiculous – ridiculous – things that are said. Today in question period – I just made some notes – the minister says: okay; the NDP is going to unionize farms. That's ridiculous. You can't trust what they're saying. It's not even anywhere close to truth.

All they're doing is having cheap shots, sort of base comments, that aren't based in reality at all. And this is the government? I mean, isn't the government supposed to be leading the people? Have vision? Instead, it seems like they're just backed into a corner and they're squirming and they're saying ridiculous things. Yet they're in charge now, or for the time being, and they're, you know, demonstrating that they're not thinking clearly. They're saying things that are ridiculous.

Oh, yeah. The Minister of Health said that we have to get over this difference between private and public health care. What? We have to get over that? No, no, no, no. There's a clear distinction between that – and of course we believe in public health care. The UCP's focus on giving public dollars to private clinics doesn't make that public health care; it erodes the public health care system. You know, that was another thing that was said today.

Another thing is calling – you know, there's a professional regulatory college that does manage teachers. They have a regulatory process, and it's distinct from the union activities, but this group of folks can't seem to get that, so they just pile it all into one and say that it's all unions that are addressing this. That's not true at all. That's not how the Alberta Teachers' Association works. But they like to say these things that aren't true. It's not based in

reality, and it's ridiculous. You know, we just cannot trust at all what the UCP are doing.

And then they make – like, this is a cheap shot – that, you know, our Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview here is the sole member of the capitalist caucus in the New Democrats. They like to say that we don't know anything about business, that we don't know anything about financial management or anything like that, but I mean, again, it's just the furthest thing from the truth.

I mean, certainly, we supported small businesses when we were in government. We cut their taxes by a third. We asked profitable corporations, absolutely, to pay their fair share, and we did have their tax rate at a level that is commensurate with the rest of Canada, largely. It was nothing ridiculous. We didn't put undue hardship on them; it was just what's fair across Canada.

They also like to say that everybody ran away when we were government, but that's also not true. You know, I have some information here about capital investment in Alberta. In 2018 \$62.3 billion was invested, and that was under our government. That's the highest it's been up until this year even. Like, \$56.7 billion is what's projected by the UCP, but in 2018: \$62.3 billion.

To listen to the other side, like, they don't bother to understand what actually happened. They just say stuff. I don't know. The integrity is nonexistent. It boggles my mind to think that this is the way governing is being done in our province. I certainly know, from talking to many constituents, talking to stakeholders, talking to people across our province, that nobody is trusting them. They know that they just say stuff and that they like to spin things, but it's not based in reality.

Also, in 2019 it was \$59.4 billion, and then when the UCP came in, it was \$48.6 billion in 2020, and then in 2021 it's \$54 billion. So it's not what they say. They say: oh, nobody invested in Alberta when the NDP was government. Well, I'm reading you the facts here, and \$62.3 billion in 2018 is far greater than any other year since the UCP have been elected. But they don't bother to actually base what they say in reality.

You know, everybody who paid corporate taxes just sort of took off or was run out of town by us if you listen to the UCP, which also isn't true. We know that the corporate income tax was \$4.8 billion. That was the actual amount in 2018-19, and in 2022-23 – that's under the UCP, of course – it's projected to be \$4 billion. So it's less – it's less – than what it was when we were government. Again, I just kind of shake my head. I don't know what gives them the authority to just sort of talk out of their hats as if they can just make things up.

It's disturbing to me. I feel like – I don't even want to use that. I know that many Albertans are suffering because of the policies, and the UCP are picking a few elite sections of our population to benefit like wildfire. They're doing great. But guess what. Many Albertans aren't. Certainly, we know that, for example, seniors, which is an area that I care very much about – I had the honour to be Minister of Seniors and Housing when we were government. This bracket creep is causing seniors who get the Alberta seniors' benefit to have \$750 less – so this is, like, a couple – annually. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money for many people. Maybe the UCP thinks: "Oh, it's a drop in the bucket. It doesn't matter. Whatever." It does matter, and it's creating some really significant hardship for people. You know, they have trouble paying their rent, with high utility costs now and groceries. I mean, we all know that things are getting much less affordable, and the UCP is making it worse.

Besides that, the UCP seems to like to say: "Oh, yes, we are supporting vulnerable seniors. We're supporting vulnerable people in Alberta. This is what we're doing here. This is what we're doing there." But you know what the reality is? They've cut significantly from seniors. For example, special needs assistance: this is, like,

helping seniors pay for medical supports. Maybe they need a wheelchair. Maybe they need a walker. Maybe they get a little bit of money for laundry. Those programs are being cut. Actually, back in 2020 \$8.6 million was cut from that budget. Just right off the – you know, easily, happily. The UCP seems to think that people didn't benefit, weren't supported by that. There are so many things. That's only one annual year, \$8.6 million since 2020. So that continues.

3:40

Also, nonprofits. You know, the UCP talks about wanting seniors to age in their communities. For seniors to age in their communities, there need to be supports – there's just no question about that – many kinds of supports. Certainly, there need to be oftentimes home care, medical supports, those kind of things. But there also need to be nonmedical supports. Guess who does those kind of supports. That's the nonprofit agencies in communities. It can be, like, snow removal. It can be just supporting socialization. We know that that's a huge issue. Many seniors may become isolated, and that negatively impacts their mental health. Of course, we know that with COVID that was even more profound. There are so many challenges in that area for many people, not just seniors, right across this province.

Nonprofit grants. When we were government, we gave \$2 million annually in nonprofit grants to agencies that support seniors to age in their communities; support them to be healthy; connect socially; some practical, nonmedical supports, as I said, like shovelling or maybe meal delivery. Meals on Wheels is an example of that. Quite quickly after the UCP became government, they cut those grants to less than \$1 million. It's \$900,000 now. It was during COVID that they cut that. That means that those supports aren't in place, especially at such a significant time. But, you know, seniors have to live within their means. That's what the Minister of Seniors and Housing said.

But – you know what? – it costs more in the long run. If people aren't supported, they can get more isolated, which can have more dire effects on their mental health. You know, our mental health affects our physical health. So that can cost our system more. I mean, there are the human rights and sort of supporting people to live in dignity. There are those kinds of compassionate arguments that, of course, are very important. But there's even an economic argument that the UCP is ignoring about why it's important to invest in these kind of public programs or public grants to nonprofit agencies.

I guess I'm appealing to more the economic aspects, which seem to be what the minister would always defend. We have to make sure that the, you know, finances are in order. That's the premier position. I'm just suggesting to her that she needs to look a little bit deeper to understand that indeed the government will save money if people aren't, you know, ending up in hospital or having some kind of an injury at home and then requiring much, much more supports.

It is challenging and, I think, very disturbing just how this UCP government operates and how sort of they're continuing to really put the burden on individuals, put the burden on Alberta families, and not support them. I mean, I think this bracket creep piece is very significant. This bill could shift that. It could be just in line with everything that other jurisdictions do. It's just a natural thing that's seen as sort of normal protocol, that the brackets be indexed.

I urge the government to not pass this legislation, because it does make it much harder for Albertans. They're taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets.

I also, you know, just will say again that what they say matters, and it's important that they base what they say in reality. But in some of the examples that I gave today just in question period, it's really quite ridiculous. I don't feel very proud of this government,

that they are actually respecting the offices they hold. They are government, and that, I believe, is what they should be doing, but sadly it is not what they're doing. Despite their words that they are supporting vulnerable people, that they are supporting seniors, they indeed are not. Actually, they're making it much harder for them. Certainly, I know that through many conversations that I've had with seniors across this province.

So I urge all members of the House to vote against this bill. I mean, it's not something that's worthy of support. It just makes life harder for Albertans. It makes it less affordable for Albertans, and it really is kind of a sneaky way to take money out of Albertans' pockets. I think the government should not pass this legislation. With that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise at this stage of debate for Bill 2. Of course, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, allows the government to implement a number of aspects of the provincial budget that was introduced at the end of February. Now, it is no secret that we take great exception to this sneaky tax on inflation that is contained within this bill and that is projected within the government's budget papers to remain in effect until 2025. This pernicious and insidious tax on inflation – not my words; the words of the Premier when he used to oppose this sort of thing – will cost Albertans more than a billion dollars in additional income taxes, a fact that was not contained within the budget documents but was confirmed with us by the minister within budget estimates.

I will note that that figure was provided to the opposition in the first year that this change was made, but as is quite typical with this government over time, a government that was not particularly given to being on the level in the first place has become increasingly less so. So we had to push and push and push for that number, and they finally did give it to us, so at least there was that, I guess. Small silver linings. That is probably the most egregious part of this legislation.

The Financial Statutes Amendment Act and the other pieces of legislation that should have come alongside this budget should have given practical effect to the utility consumer rebate, but this House only received that piece of very vague and inadequate legislation this afternoon. Now, it was pretty clear that this government had no intention of really paying attention to what was happening to people's bills in November, December, January, when it was actually happening, because the paragraph where they actually make a sort of vague throw to this natural gas rebate business was stuck into the budget strategic plan, and you could tell. It was practically in a different font. It misspelled Ralph Klein's name; the sentence was quite clunky. Clearly, the editors hadn't had a chance to look at it because they just threw some spaghetti at the wall and said, "Okay; that's good; people are complaining about their bills; our work here is done," showing, I think, the level of bandwidth and actual serious public policy response to the tremendous suffering that people were undergoing at that time. Just absolutely no regard for that.

I think one of the bigger pieces in this legislation, first of all, is around trust. I've talked about the bracket creep piece and how, you know, this is a Premier that called this pernicious and insidious and maybe, I don't know, busted out a thesaurus – they used to have them in hard copy back in the '90s, when he made those comments. There's just a greatest hits reel. There's, like, a seven minutes' compilation on YouTube of him discussing this. But at the first available opportunity, in the fall budget of 2019, he went back on

every single one of those words, and they were lengthy. It reminds me, quite frankly, of the time that this Premier was a minister in 2007 that brought in an excise tax on pickup trucks. It reminds me of the time this Premier was a minister in a government that phased out 12 of Alberta's 16 coal plants without associate regulations on coal-to-gas conversion back in 2012; said he'd reverse it during the leadership race and did not. It reminds me of the time this Premier was part of a government in which Harper gave a speech at the G-8 at the time, in 2007, in Berlin committing Canada to carbon pricing or the time that this Premier was part of a government that committed in 2010, by the time it was the G-7, to a net-zero policy or the many times that this Premier has railed about carbon pricing, yet in March here we have a ministerial order from his Minister of Environment and Parks raising the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne for industrial emitters.

3:50

You know, there is apparently what is said, and then there is what is done, and I've just provided not just the tax increase, that certainly annoys people, but members of the Premier's own caucus, other ways that perhaps what is said and then what is done: there is a tremendous gulf between those two things.

But the other piece of this bill that is really – it could be pernicious and insidious if I wanted to, you know, sort of strut around using big words to cover for other things, but that is this business of cash management and pooling cash management. Now, this is, on the face of it, probably a decent piece of public policy. GOA will now have access to all the funds from agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under government control. More importantly, the minister will be able to set the interest rate that those ABCs receive. Now, the government has given themselves the power to charge lower than market rates to these ABCs, like AIMCo or postsecondary institutions or others. The government argues that by centrally pooling cash, they improve their overall liquidity and need less cash overall across all public entities, and that will save on debt-servicing costs. That's probably true, but the problem here is trust.

You know, the minister assured us in no uncertain terms that the changes he was making to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority would have no material effect on municipalities and their cost of borrowing. He said: "Oh, no, no. That's not going to happen." It absolutely did happen. They turned around and went back on their word and charged municipalities more. When we asked in estimates how much this would actually affect the GOA bottom line, they said: oh, it's really quite immaterial. But municipalities have said to us that it is quite material for them.

So this is just for kicks. It's just for fun to cause significant hardship to municipal borrowing costs, when it doesn't even really, you know, make us or save us that much money. And more to the point, the minister and the government cannot be trusted when they provide these assurances to folks, because they just go back on anything they say. "Oh, we'll keep indexing AISH. Oh, no. Sorry." "We'll keep indexing tax brackets. No, no, no. We're not going to do that." At some point people notice. People notice.

You know, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act also gives practical effect to a number of other budget pieces, and one of them I asked the minister about during estimates. He was gracious enough to go back and forth with me, unlike many of the ministers, who apparently do not have the courage of their convictions. It's very clear to me that this one does, and that's a good thing. He knows his files. But when I asked the minister about the management pay freeze in agencies, boards, and commissions, I asked him point blank: "This is being considered? We're going to lift the management pay freeze on ABCs?" The minister said, "Yes, it's under consideration." And we all nodded, and I said, "But it's actually happening, isn't it?" And he

said, “Yes, it’s under consideration.” He didn’t say that it had already happened and he signed the ministerial order in February to make it happen at AIMCo.

Now, this is the kind of thing – like, why wouldn’t you just level? Why wouldn’t you just be on the level and just say: yeah, we did it. It’s not a big deal. I do not know why this government will not level with people. Just say what you’re going to do, and then go defend it and do it. This is just another reason why people just feel like they’re getting the runaround, and there’s no doubt in my mind that this has shredded public trust. So that’s why the government isn’t getting the political credit that perhaps they expected off of a balanced budget, because people do not trust the government. It’s contained within this legislation, one of the biggest reasons why they don’t, and that is that they have not restored the indexation of our tax brackets to inflation; that is to say, that we are paying more. We are paying a tax on inflation.

You know, at some point it goes to competence. It goes to intent. And, quite frankly, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act or one of the associated acts that came in should have given effect to this utility commodity rebate, this piece of whatever it is that just dropped on us this afternoon.

For a budget that brings in a commitment to a natural gas rebate, we’ve now gone back and forth and back and forth on when it’ll actually come in and at what price level. This bill doesn’t provide that. The budget should have. It was obvious to anyone last summer what was happening with both electricity and natural gas futures. It’s why I went on a contract. I went, “Whoa,” and I hectored all of my colleagues to do same, because we also teach financial literacy on the Official Opposition side.

But the fact of the matter is that anyone noticing what was happening in the power markets in response to the heat waves that we were having last year – there were already geopolitical instabilities. We already knew that this was happening, and if anyone was paying attention, I would assume that the government is paying attention because they pay an army of forecasters in the banks, in the private sector, and so on, to be that warning system. They knew what was happening with electricity and natural gas prices because we all knew, yet it is very clear that when they brought in this budget, they slapdashed a paragraph in there because, oh, sometime in early January before the thing went to print, somebody went: oh, I talked to one Albertan, and they seemed slightly concerned about their bills. That’s why there is not a substantive reckoning with affordability within this legislation, because folks were just not listening. It’s very clear that through the month of January people were really worried about their own palace intrigue and the ongoing tick-tock of the *Days of Our Lives* subplots rather than focusing on making life more affordable for Albertans.

With that, I think I have provided my comments. I am concerned about this business of that cash-on-hand pool and those central resources, very concerned about it, because the fact of the matter is that the province can provide whatever assurances to ABCs that they want. Those promises are empty at this point. Perhaps in 2019 those promises would’ve been taken at face value, but we are in 2022 now, and so many promises have been shredded, so much public confidence has been abused that there’s no way that we can take, short of a written guarantee – even still, you know, folks voted for the indexation of AISH, and that was promptly pulled. There is very little that the government can now do to restore that confidence, but they could do one thing, which is amend – at this stage could still do it . . .

Mr. Eggen: Right now.

Ms Phillips: . . . right now. Stand up and amend the personal income tax section of this act to reindex the brackets. Could have a

nice, you know, response to folks who are worried about affordability. This is within the government’s purview. I fully appreciate that, you know, the price of bacon or tomatoes or pasta is not within their control. When people go to the grocery store, these are the things they notice. But their income tax: folks just filed. Could get a retroactive rebate. Would be pretty nice. Could actually do something to help people right now instead of misspelling Ralph Klein’s name when you bring in a natural gas rebate on the back of a napkin, this legislation, four weeks later, that may or may not apply and potentially charge below-market interest rates to postsecondaries as their reserves get raided, because that’s a real possibility out of this.

With that, I will conclude my comments.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise and respond to some of the assertions that the two prior speakers have made. I enjoyed the previous speaker, the Member for Lethbridge-West. Some of those comments: I found them entertaining. Always appreciate the vigour and passion that that member brings, but I have to correct a whole number of inaccuracies here this afternoon.

Firstly, the member noted that the question was raised around the pay freeze related to agencies, boards, and commissions in estimates, and I responded truthfully and honestly during that time that we were considering – and, legitimately, we were considering – our approach around lifting that pay freeze. What we did do is provided some exemptions to the pay freeze where the agency, board, or commission could clearly identify that due to market reasons they were having trouble retaining or attracting staff. But we did not lift the pay freeze. My answer at estimates was, in fact, genuine and accurate.

4:00

Madam Chair, I also just need to say again for the record that within Budget 2022 we have not raised personal income taxes. Personal income taxes are at the same rates that they were in 2021 and in 2020 and, in fact, in 2019. I will say this because I have said it publicly, and I’ll state it again. When we have more clarity, fiscal clarity, in this province – and let me say this, that we are gaining more fiscal clarity as the weeks go by – as we start to see the assumptions that we made in Budget 2022 actually come to pass in terms of economic assumptions, we will reconsider reindexing the personal tax exemption. I stand by that commitment today.

I want to also respond to the concern around moving to the consolidated liquidity solution, the CLS, mechanism to manage our cash. This is a mechanism that I believe will serve Albertans and agencies, boards, and commissions very well. It’s a mechanism that was spawned in part by a recommendation from the Auditor General in his 2016 report, where he recommended that we review our cash management methodology and mechanism and consider changing it if the results of that review would warrant it. Well, Madam Chair, that’s what we’re doing today. The consolidated liquidity solution mechanism will in fact reduce government’s borrowing. That is material. That matters. That reduces the exposure of the government’s balance sheet, the balance sheet of the people of Alberta. It will reduce debt-service costs, it will leave more money for program spending, and maybe most importantly, it will update a mechanism that’s in dire need of modernization. Yes, that’s included in Bill 2.

Madam Chair, I want to make a few high-level comments about the budget because Bill 2 is really the budget implementation bill. I want to make a few comments about this budget. This is a budget that turns the corner on fiscal responsibility. This is a budget that

reports on our great fiscal progress over the last three years, and this is a budget that continues to position the province's economy for disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth, which result in expanded fiscal capacity.

That is reflected in our projections around the corporate income tax rate. The members opposite stated that, in fact, we were disingenuous with our assertion that corporate income tax revenues are projected to increase over where they were when the NDP was governing. Madam Chair, that is a true assertion because when the NDP was governing, over those four years, on average they collected approximately \$4 billion in corporate income tax revenue. Over the next three years we're projecting to collect approximately \$4.4 billion. That's on average \$400 million more per year than the previous government collected. Again, I just want to correct the record. We have been transparent. We have been accurate in our communication around this budget.

Madam Chair, I want to get back to this budget because, again, this budget ultimately reports on expanded fiscal capacity, which is reflected in every revenue line in this budget, and this did not come about by accident. This was a result of intentional economic and tax policy implementation. We reduced the corporate income tax rate by one-third to ensure that Alberta had by far and away the most competitive business tax rate in the country, one of the most competitive rates in all of North America. Why? Because we know we don't compete for capital only in Canada. We compete for capital globally and certainly within the North American context. We've put a real focus on regulatory modernization. Again, that's reflected in this budget. It's reflected in the revenue lines in this budget. It's reflected in cost savings in this budget.

There were a number of initiatives that we've implemented, including the innovation employment grant recapitalizing the Alberta economic corporation, the AEC. This is reflected, Madam Chair, in the fact that we are enabling captive insurance in this province. It's reflected in a very recent announcement, in fact, in some legislation that we have before this House around enabling a regulatory sandbox for financial services, and there's more. This economic growth resulting in expanded fiscal capacity did not happen by accident. It was intentional. It's a result of implementing intentional policy.

Madam Chair, I need to also just make reference to the fiscal discipline and the fiscal progress that Budget 2022 reports on. We inherited – again, we inherited – a government spend that was increasing by 4 per cent per year, and on a per capita basis the government was spending \$10 billion more than comparator provinces. This budget reports on our success at flattening that curve and, in fact, aligning our per capita spend by '22-23 with that of other provinces. We've done that thoughtfully and carefully and surgically in a way where we can still deliver high-quality services to Albertans but in a way that puts this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory, which is critical to the well-being of Albertans today and in the future.

Madam Chair, one of the benefits of fiscal discipline is that it gives government an opportunity for reinvestment, and this budget reflects additional investment in health care: \$1.8 billion over the next three years. To do what? To expand capacity, capacity that has been demonstrated over the last three years to be in deficit, to be deficient. Included in this budget is, in fact, additional investment in skills, talent, and jobs, \$600 million over the next three years, investing in Albertans to ensure they have the skills they need, they require to participate in the new economy of tomorrow.

Madam Chair, Bill 2 assists us in implementing this budget, a budget that really positions this province for disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth, and expanded fiscal capacity, a budget that brings fiscal responsibility back to the

province, a budget that ends an era of downloading debt onto future generations, a debt they did not incur, a budget that positions this province for opportunity and prosperity and a future.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 in committee. I found it interesting to hear the Finance minister, with his budget speech, essentially coming back here to defend different elements of Bill 2. I mean, don't get me wrong. Certainly, Bill 2 has some very ordinary and regular elements to it that you need to help to implement a budget. But in doing so, it also highlights some of the very worst aspects of this budget and, as we have said time and again, the insidious and pernicious tax grab that lies within both this budget and Bill 2, which helps to enable the implementation of this budget. I mean, that's a good starting point for our criticism of both this bill and this budget.

4:10

Madam Chair, I would suggest that, you know, we take a step back and just think for a time. How is it possible that a government continues to lose the confidence of the population here in the province of Alberta when you have \$100 oil and a balanced budget, even with a modest surplus? I would suggest that it's quite a more significant surplus, really. It's just kind of tucked away for a rainy day when this government decides to call an election. But there are elements in this bill that provide clues as to why this UCP government is failing to gain the confidence of the people of Alberta at the same time when they've had this good fortune drop from the sky, right? Let's not forget that, really, this budget is balanced on the incredibly good fortune of a dramatic increase in the price of energy, an historic increase to the price of energy due to international events and demand around the world for both oil and gas.

You know, this whole nonsense about fiscal discipline and clever choices that this government made around this budget has absolutely nothing to do with the position that this budget is in now, which is a balanced or surplus position. In fact, where you can clearly see deficit: you don't have to look any further than this choice not to index tax brackets and to essentially tax inflation with this budget. The minister did mention that he would, upon reflection, think about changing the situation. I mean, obviously, it's there in the front window – or it wasn't in the front window. He was trying to hide it. Now everybody can see it, and it's having a serious effect of lack of confidence of our population towards this government and their ability to manage financial matters or any other things that they are responsible for in regard to health care, education, and the safety and the security of our population.

I was listening to the radio this morning, Madam Chair, on the way over here for the morning session. I confess that I sometimes do listen to radio stations that are firmly planted in the world of Def Leppard and April Wine, you know, long ago and far away. But it makes you feel good. It makes you feel young – right? – in a nostalgic sort of way. Lord knows that radio station I listen to from time to time, if it has a political bent to it, is decidedly conservative. You listen to Def Leppard and April Wine and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, and there's sort of a direct line you can follow to at least personally conservative thoughts. Again, it's a radio station that just plays music usually.

But, oh, no; from the time it took me to drive here, which only takes about 10 minutes because I live close by, they had a long rant about the UCP government. I couldn't believe it. They're saying:

you just can't trust what they have to say. I think his starting point – and I think it's a starting point of a lot of these kinds of conversations in between Def Leppard and April Wine – was talking about their car insurance, which has gone up upwards of 30 per cent for individuals across the province.

It's not like it's an option to have car insurance. It's the law. It's a law that's created here in this very Chamber to ensure that people have insurance. Thus, being a law that is required through this government, through this level of government, it should and must be made affordable, because it's not like you have a choice, right? You look at the design of Edmonton or Calgary or vast rural areas of this province. I mean, it's the size of western Europe. We need vehicles. You need to have an affordable way by which to keep that vehicle on the road. This government whipped that carpet right out from underneath everybody who has to have insurance, which is everybody who's driving legally in this province, and, for many people, simply made it unaffordable. I mean, that's something that people are talking about around the table.

You know, to suggest that it was a courageous thing to do – I heard the minister say that more than once. I was like: oh, my goodness; don't use that. I'm not going to give you free tips. But, Madam Chair, I think I'll give the minister: stop saying that it was a courageous thing to do, to increase people's car insurance by 30 per cent, because it has exactly the opposite effect of what people would think if the minister was being courageous. I would say otherwise. Just opening the barn door and letting everything run out – right? – that's kind of what it really amounts to. That adds up to a fiscal deficit for the vast majority of people who have to buy some form of car insurance here in the province of Alberta.

Again, other fiscal deficits on a personal level: they just keep adding up, Madam Chair. The increases to postsecondary tuition, say, for example, were absolutely unprecedented here in the province of Alberta, 21 to 23 per cent across the board, including extraordinary tuition increases that were approved by this government, by the Advanced Education minister, ranging from 20, 40, even up to 103 per cent increases for certain programs, right? That adds up not just as a deficit to families paying for tuition for their family members to go to school; it adds up to a hundred-foot brick wall around those institutions for people who simply can't raise that kind of money. Lots and lots of people just can't go because this UCP government chose to raise postsecondary education to unprecedented levels here in the province of Alberta.

I know what the argument is. It's the same argument that this Minister of Finance and the Premier uses, "Oh, we're just bringing it up to the national average; we had more or less, and now we're more like the rest of Canada," or something like that. You know, there are just so many ways, Madam Chair, by which you can play games with those kinds of numbers, right? I know for a fact that we have the very lowest student grant allowance for postsecondary, for example. That totally negates any idea that we pay less money for tuition here in the province of Alberta, which we don't.

I mean, this government has been, you know, dragging the same statistic around now for more than three years, right? We've got to remind this UCP government that you did not take power yesterday; it's been three years. Don't you feel a little older? I do. The numbers that you're using from 2018 or whatever are not accurate for today, so stop doing that. It's really not good fiscal management. That's a free tip. That's my second free tip of the afternoon.

Another issue is that when you're talking about, like, the public service – you know, there was some issue about lack of clarity of unfreezing the wages of the public service and so forth. I mean, be careful which rabbit hole you go down. While you may have done that or kept it frozen or whatever you did, you sure as heck did not do that, Madam Chair, with AIMCo's salary raises. They were very

healthy indeed. Sitting on the heritage savings committee, I can see that they managed to slip through extraordinary wage increases for members of AIMCo, right? That was done quite happily by this government while other sectors had to just fight tooth and nail for pennies on the dollar, to try to fight for a fair wage. You've got to be careful where you go with these things. Quite frankly, people can see through it. It's as simple as that.

In regard to energy, again, you know, we would expect that the province of Alberta and a Conservative government in the province of Alberta would at least have the energy file somewhat sorted out. But, oh, no, right? What we learned today, for example, from the news is that, number one, we have a 6.7 per cent inflation rate here in the province of Alberta this month. It's the highest rate in 31 years. A lot of what is contributing to that is a wild increase in energy prices, of energy costs for families, from electricity to gasoline prices and natural gas prices to heat your home, because we still have our furnaces on because it's flipping snowing here in April on the 20th.

We learned today from a very credible study from the University of Calgary that the electricity profits went up by a factor of five here in the province of Alberta, a five-times increase in profits since this UCP government took power and removed rate caps. I know that you need to have, you know, some measure of profit to ensure the integrity of our electricity system.

4:20

I know that the last time we had a Conservative government here it lasted 40-some years. Good grief. They invested an awful lot of money in the electricity grid system. I mean, we fought tooth and nail when we were a mighty caucus of four, suggesting that making those wild investments in super high tension wires and DC lines – a lot of it, we suspected, was for them to export electricity to the United States, which I'm pretty sure was true, right? It caused a social rebellion in central Alberta. That was the birthplace of lots and lots of Wildrose activity, because they were trying to run these big DC lines through places like Sundre and Rocky Mountain House and so forth. You know, we made a big stink about it, too, so this whole notion – I don't know why the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, or gassy behaviour of some kind, seems to love to pretend that it was the NDP that did that; of course, it was the Conservatives. They built these high-tension lines. You see them. Look up when you're driving on highway 2. Those are the ones they built. The Conservatives built them, probably to excess, but that's where we're at now.

Where we are still at now as well is having a responsibility to provide affordable electricity for domestic consumption and for industrial consumption, too. This UCP government, Madam Chair – you know it as well as I do – is not fulfilling that responsibility at all, right? A five-times profit increase for electricity companies: they're making out like bandits, for sure. We know they are. The numbers are clear. I read the report from the University of Calgary this morning, and lots of other people are reading that same report, too.

The price of gasoline: again, we saw the provincial government pull back on the provincial tax on a litre of gasoline. But, Madam Chair, I need a reminder, if someone can tell me, just randomly: how long is that good for? Is that forever? Are they just going to not put the provincial tax back on? They have to at some point. I mean, that's a pretty big revenue stream for running the province. You can't just pull back on tax revenues forever. It's like you're living on borrowed time, right? You can do it for a little while, but you can't do it forever because you have to pay for health care and education and health and security and roads and all of the things that the government and the province are responsible for.

This whole notion of, you know, pulling back on those revenues: we saw the same thing with the corporate tax giveaway, the \$4.7 billion tax giveaway to profitable corporations. They said that this was going to be a trickle-down way by which we will build our economy. I mean, yeah, they laughed all the way to the bank, and – guess what, Madam Chair – those banks were located in the United States and in Europe and in small islands in the Caribbean. People took it as a chance to pay a dividend to their shareholders, and they said, “Thanks very much,” and away they went, right? I heard the Energy minister say some version of that very well: yes, of course, they had to pay a dividend because they weren’t making money for quite a long time when the price was only \$27 a barrel for the energy companies, say, for example. We gave them a \$4.7 billion shot in the arm, and yeah, they paid dividends. You bet they did. That money, by and large, just left town, left the province, and probably left the country, too. I mean, that’s the way these things work.

Yeah. I mean, you know, Bill 2 is just what it is. It has little different nooks and crannies, different elements that you need to do to implement the budget. Some of those things are fairly innocuous and so forth, but it shines a spotlight, once again, Madam Chair, on just: is this budget the best for what we need for right now for Albertans? Does it help Albertans to get ahead? Does it help to diversify our economy? Does it provide for a healthier Alberta, a better educated Alberta, and so forth? I would suggest that “no” is the answer to each of those challenges. What is the most important document that a government produces? An annual budget.

Again, it begs the question: how is it that through the miracle of energy prices going up so dramatically, \$100 a barrel oil, a balanced budget, a modest surplus, that with all of those things this UCP government still has not won the trust of the people of Alberta? I think that the government needs to reflect on that and reflect on it hard and start working on not just helping Albertans but building the trust that Albertans want and need for their government, right? I would suggest, of course, that the best way to do that is to change the government, but we’ll wait and work hard to earn that trust from the people of this province.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I’ve appreciated the conversation that we’ve had so far this afternoon. You know, for members on this side of the House as well, I appreciate the Finance minister rising to share his thoughts on what he called the budget implementation bill, kind of the act that will ensure that their budget is passed and everything that they’ve put forward in terms of ideas will be included in that.

Again, I appreciate that, and I took some notes on some of the Finance minister’s comments. As the previous member highlighted as well, it was interesting to hear some of those thoughts specifically around this idea that we’ve heard quite often at this point around the billion dollars that this UCP government is proposing get taken away from Alberta families in regard to the deindexing of personal income taxes. I find this issue incredibly frustrating in terms of the negative impacts that it’s going to have on Alberta families, particularly because of the history of this Premier around this specific issue. We’ve heard in the House before regarding that member’s work during his time with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and as an MP and time and time again railing about this idea of bracket creep, but the tables have turned now that this member is the Premier of Alberta.

Again, when the Finance minister makes comments like, you know, depending on the fiscal situation into the future, if we have, quote, unquote, additional fiscal clarity, the Finance minister might consider reindexing personal income taxes – and before that, the minister made a comment along the lines of, “Well, it’s not affecting people this year.” Okay. Well, looking into the future, we’re going to see a billion dollars, one way or another, taken away from Alberta families. Again, it was interesting the way that the Finance minister worded that because it almost made it sound like on one hand, “Oh, this isn’t happening,” and then in the next sentence more along the lines of, “Well, it is happening, but maybe based on the price of oil into the future we’ll be able to reconsider this.”

First of all, I think it’s important that there’s clarity in the discussions that are being put forward by the Finance minister. I think it’s very clear from the budget and from those comments that there is indeed a billion dollars’ worth of deindexing that’s going to affect the bottom line for Alberta families. It will possibly get worse as inflation potentially continues to grow. I think that’s important for Alberta families to understand.

There have been some decisions that this government has made based on their budgeting and their policies, and we heard from the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-North West, regarding the \$4.7 billion giveaway to the most profitable corporations in terms of the corporate tax cuts that this government not only put forward in the beginning but decided to fast-forward compared, I believe, to even what was in their platform. What we see again and again from this government is a decision to lower taxes for the most profitable corporations, which we continue to see are using those dollars from Alberta families to purchase stock buybacks, to use those funds to move their operations to other jurisdictions.

4:30

There are a variety of reasons for that, obviously, Madam Chair. Some of those reasons, as we’ve also heard, are reflected in the priorities of this government, specifically when we look at the idea that this government has continued to pull hundreds of millions of dollars out of the postsecondary institutions and at the same time increasing tuition for Alberta families. We heard it from the previous member regarding some of those increases in tuition, 21 to 23 per cent across the board regarding increases in tuition.

In some instances we see programs doubling, which is astounding, Madam Chair. I think that no matter what the original cost was or what the program of study was, to actually see a minister willing to fully support postsecondary institutions coming forward with doubling of tuition costs – of course, these institutions are having to do this because so much money has been scaled back from this minister and from this UCP government. It’s putting these institutions in a really hard place and, by extension, putting Albertans who are trying to access postsecondary studies in a tough place as well.

Further to that, Madam Chair, it’s putting corporations that are actually very interested and very invested in seeing the success of students and the success of our postsecondary institutions in a tough situation as well. Again, when we talk about retention and a skilled labour force, I think the ability of Albertans to obtain postsecondary studies in these emerging markets and technologies is a big part of that picture. I think that we’ve seen time and time again that it might even be a bigger part of the picture than the idea that this UCP government has put forward in regard to the massive tax giveaways that they’ve moved forward with.

It’s frustrating, in my opinion, that we continue down this path, especially at the same time that we are giving away this \$4.7 billion to these most profitable corporations, that, on the other hand, we

have the Finance minister saying: well, depending on how the books look, you know, next year or several years down the line we might reconsider the personal income tax bracket creep that we've included in this budget, that is going to take a billion dollars away from Alberta families at the same time as we're giving much more away to those profitable corporations.

I'll be interested to follow that conversation as we move forward. You know, as far as I might understand, the price of oil is going to be the differentiating factor on that. If it continues to stay above \$100, then maybe Albertans will be lucky enough to receive their billions if not more dollars back into their pockets that this government is choosing to take away from them. I am concerned that if we see that number regarding the price of oil going down, this government actually might go farther and increase the amount that they are taking away from Albertans regarding that bracket creep and regarding the deindexing of personal income taxes.

We've heard discussions around the decisions of this government in this budget to provide very little substance in regard to utility benefits to Albertans and the increasing price of utilities as well as their gas bills. It's unfortunate because we saw even as recently as this week the NDP opposition raising the issue that, I believe, EPCOR had put forward that there are as many as 1,000 Albertans who are going to have their utilities cut off in the near future, if that hasn't happened already, with the government ending the moratorium on utility cut-offs. Unfortunately, we received no answers regarding that issue, so it seems very likely that within a short period of time thousands of Albertans are going to have their utilities cut off.

Again, this is in the middle of a continued pandemic, where Albertans are increasingly struggling to find work. This is in the midst of record levels of inflation, where this UCP government is not only taking more dollars out of their pockets through bracket creep but also letting insurance companies take more money out of their pockets simply for the fact of increasing those companies' profits.

We saw that from the report from the superintendent of insurance. Unfortunately, this government tried to hide this report as long as they could, a report that had been posted for over 100 years straight, I believe 107 years, Madam Chair, and this UCP government decided to finally release it the day before a long weekend to ensure that as few Albertans as possible would be able to see that, but I can tell you that whether Albertans read that report or not, it has been very clear from the massive increases that many Albertans have seen, in some instances upwards of 30 per cent, that whatever lobbying this UCP government is doing and apparently the Premier has been doing, as the Premier stated in question period – whatever lobbying the Premier is doing to lower those fees is clearly not working.

Even with the decisions of this government to reduce the payout benefits for Albertans who have been injured in collisions, in some cases concussions that are life altering, the decision to change the minor injury regulations around payouts and the ability of Albertans to be fairly represented and compensated, even the allowance of this minister to see such big changes in that, Albertans are paying more but getting less, and this at the same time, again, continuing through the pandemic, where they are, in many cases, driving less. This isn't, for the most part, because payouts are increasing, that Albertans are seeing higher benefits from their insurance coverage. This is simply, as the documents quite clearly lay out, that Alberta insurance companies, or insurance companies that operate in Alberta, are clearly seeing higher and higher profits while so many Albertans are struggling.

That continues to be my concern, looking through not only the budget but the priorities of this government and the willingness for the UCP to allow such massive and drastic increases to the cost of Albertans. Again, we have to look at the big picture, Madam Chair.

You know, these sorts of issues might not be specifically within this budget, but they are decisions that have impacted the bottom lines of Albertans, just like this budget has. We saw it very early, and it was an issue that I campaigned on and heard from many Albertans that they were very concerned about. One of those issues was the reduction of overtime opportunities for Alberta workers. Especially this issue affects those working less traditional hours. It affects those people potentially in the oil sands and in factories. Again, we've seen the clawback of this overtime wage for so many Albertans.

Madam Chair, I can't fail to also mention the decision of this government to reduce the minimum wage for students that are under 18 years old. Now, again, I go back to my own history and the story of my mother, who was 14 years old and raised me from that age as a single mother, and I simply can't take at face value the idea that this government has put forward that it's actually a good idea to lower minimum wage for Alberta students under the age of 18. Again, thinking back to that story, as hard as my mother worked to ensure that she was able to continue working and go to school and support our family, this government is saying, "Well, you're going to make \$2 less unless you actually drop out of school." That is clearly how the legislation has been put forward, and I truly don't understand how we think this as a government and as a society is okay.

I will digress from that because, again, it's not specifically within Bill 2, but I think it continues this idea of piling on the costs and also the scaling back of income for Alberta families who are hurting so much through this pandemic.

4:40

Now, again, there are a number of issues that are affecting Alberta families, and I've had the opportunity to touch on a few of them, ones that are directly impacted by this budget, but I think it's also important to highlight some of the other changes that I've had the opportunity to talk about in previous readings of this legislation, a few of those issues concerning AISH benefits for Albertans with disabilities or who find themselves unable to work, also affecting the Alberta Works program.

I go back to the idea that the Finance minister raised regarding bracket creep and the deindexing of personal income taxes that this government has decided to move forward with. It almost seemed nonchalant, Madam Chair. I won't, you know, put any words or feelings in the member's mouth by any means, as best as I can, but it kind of seemed like maybe he hadn't necessarily had this conversation with his caucus, that as soon as possible we are going to move away from deindexing personal income taxes. But it does also remind me of the decisions that this government has made around deindexing AISH benefits and seniors' benefits even at the same time that this government actually campaigned on ensuring that that stayed in place.

With that, Madam Chair, I have many concerns with this legislation specific to the trust that this government expects Albertans to put in them, but I do not personally believe that they have earned that trust and especially not through this budget. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll keep my comments fairly brief regarding Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, I appreciate that the minister has been engaged in debate this afternoon around this bill. But, for me, the part that I think frustrates Albertans and those of us in the Official Opposition is that the current Premier and leader of the

UCP in the not-so-distant past spoke out vehemently against bracket creep, and there's lots of documentation of him attacking the government of the day federally on when they went to enact bracket creep. Yet here we have a bill that essentially enshrines this, yet we have a government that is dancing around the fact that the Premier, in his former role, attacked this concept and called it insidious. I know that my colleagues have quoted the Premier in his former role.

What this government is doing is taking a billion dollars of additional income out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans, the exact opposite of what they claim to do. I mean, this government has actually made the cost of living in this province more expensive for Albertans under their watch: increasing park fees, insurance rates going up, energy rates going up, reducing the Alberta child and family benefit, because it's not indexed to inflation. You know, in this Budget 2022 AISH recipients are going to lose \$3,000 in real purchasing power. Seniors are losing \$750.

You know, Madam Chair, at a time when inflation, as my colleague pointed out – in fact, when some of these notes were written on March 22, StatsCan measured inflation at a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. I believe it was today or yesterday that that has gone up a full percentage to 6.7 per cent inflation in the month of March. And what we have are these, quite frankly, pathetic offerings from the government to help Albertans mitigate the rising costs. Of course, wages are not rising in tandem with inflation. Costs are going up all around us. Albertans are struggling to make ends meet. We know that many Albertans are a few hundred dollars away from being unable to pay their mortgage or their rents, and we have very little in the way of support from this government. Instead of leaving dollars in the pockets of hard-working Albertans, this government is picking their pockets through this inflation tax.

Madam Chair, it's disappointing that the government has the tools at their disposal to do much more. You know, I do want to highlight the fact that although this government continues to pat itself on the back, it basically hit the lottery. With the price of oil, western Canadian select, today hovering around \$90 a barrel, we know that the government is going to be rolling in a surplus. They already are but will conveniently choose the time of when to announce the surplus instead of providing Albertans with real relief today.

This government has made choices, and some really bad choices, over the past three years. You know, the race to the bottom on the corporate tax giveaway has given hundreds of millions of dollars back to companies who have said: "Thank you very much. We will go invest it in other jurisdictions, either in Canada or we'll take that money and go invest it in other countries." It has not resulted in job creation. We have a government that pats itself on the back for companies that have moved to Alberta because of the previous government's efforts in working with entities like Calgary Economic Development to attract companies. In conversations that I've had with these companies, including Amazon's AWS, when I asked them point blank, "Why did you come to Alberta?" not once ever have the companies that I've spoken with mentioned the corporate tax rate. They talk about access to talent, and they talk about quality of life.

Unfortunately, this government has shown its true colours and is attacking both of those things. We know that under the previous government four years ago we announced 3,000 new tech spaces. This UCP government, upon forming government, eliminated that program. Had they kept that program, we would have grads already being produced from our world-class postsecondaries. Instead, they cancelled that because of pettiness and recently said: okay; now we're going to fund 7,000 spaces. Well, that's great. When are we

going to see the first grads of those investments? Not for a long time, Madam Chair.

Meanwhile, when Amazon did a world bid for their HQ2, their second headquarters, Calgary put in a bid – I mean, a couple of other Canadian cities did, too – and we, our government, supported that bid. Calgary didn't make the final short list, and the reason that Amazon gave – because their headquarters were going to be hiring 50,000 people, scaling up over a 10-year period, they said: "Your talent pipeline simply isn't big enough. You don't have enough grads to be able to support the investment that we're looking at making." That's when our government acted very quickly to look at supporting our postsecondaries, but we've seen time and again actions of this current government gutting hundreds of millions of dollars from our postsecondary institutions and risking future potential investments that rely on a strong postsecondary system.

You know, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this bill. It lacks meaningful action that would have real relief for Alberta families who are struggling to make ends meet right now. As opposed to providing real solutions, we have a hodgepodge of Band-Aid solutions by this government, scrambling, as we've seen today, with the announcement of a natural gas rebate that was written on the back of a napkin because it has zero details and will provide zero relief until maybe the fall – maybe – for some families.

4:50

An Hon. Member: Maybe.

Mr. Bilous: Maybe. That's not what families are looking for.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Again, at a time when the government is bringing in unprecedented energy revenues, what we're calling for is for the government to pass some of those dollars on to Albertans, to put them back into the pockets of Albertans so that we can make their life more affordable. But this government is not, and for that reason I'll be opposing this bill.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Any opposed? This is carried.

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. When this piece of legislation was introduced, it was certainly an opportunity to address many concerns that Albertans are facing when it comes to key issues within the justice system. Unfortunately, this piece of legislation does little to address the actual priorities of Albertans. We have a piece of legislation that does something that I believe the minister already has capacity to do, which is to complete reports on data. Yet that's all this

legislation really does. It gives him permission to do something that already can be done.

There are some significant concerns, when it comes to this bill, about what information will be collected, what information will be reported on. It's quite concerning when we've seen some of the behaviours of the ministers from this government when it comes to confidential, private information. We've seen this minister, when he was under the Ministry of Health, collect personal phone numbers from physicians and then call them. He felt that he was entitled to that information and used it in what I would suggest is a very inappropriate manner. So I question: what type of information is going to be collected, and what information is going to be reported?

It's very, very vague when it comes to talking about who is going to be impacted by this. I know that it talks about individuals on bail or parole, but what crimes are we talking about? Is there potential for any sort of conviction to be part of this report that the minister is providing to Albertans?

I think that when it comes to the safety of Albertans, we, this side of the House, believe that that is absolutely essential. We need to make sure that Albertans feel supported and safe in their communities, in their homes, on their commutes to and from their homes. However, this piece of legislation doesn't actually do that.

There are significant concerns when a government has made cuts to the victims of crime fund. That's a fund that was essential in supporting victims of crime. It was essential in making sure that those who have been proven through the court system to be a victim of crime receive supports and resources that are necessary to address things such as, you know, mental health and stability and counselling, those types of things, but this government chose to cut that.

When we're talking about Albertans' safety, I think the bigger picture is: what do we do to actually prevent crime? What do we do to make sure that people that are experiencing crime, when it is reported, have a police officer attend? Municipalities have had their funding cut for police. We have talk about a provincial police program, which I've heard over and over is something that Albertans do not want. We have concerns that are happening that when the matter does get to court, trials are being delayed. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, some of these trials, because of the extensive delays, are being thrown out. How does that support Albertans? How does that reduce crime? None of this legislation actually addresses what the major concerns are.

We have heard from racialized individuals in the province, and there was a report completed that provided some recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council on ways that data could be collected. Unfortunately, this bill, Bill 9, does not provide any tools that would support the recommendations that were brought forward. I think that if this government was true in their intent to support Albertans, to be transparent, to collect data in a manner that's actually useful, those recommendations would have been an easy win. That work has been done. They provided recommendations. They did consultations. They easily could have implemented that and put this into this legislation. However, it wasn't done.

I think, having come from a background in social work and having worked with both offenders and victims, there is an incredible grey area between the time that someone is accused of a crime and when someone is charged with a crime and when that matter actually goes to court. Then there's a verdict, a decision on that crime, and then the sentencing. What's the outcome of that? There are so many phases in between where it's determined that perhaps that individual wasn't guilty, that perhaps there wasn't enough data, that perhaps the person completed significant rehabilitative courses and requirements such as counselling while serving their time. That could change the need to

report. I wonder: who is making those decisions on who is being reported and at what point?

If someone is out on bail, they haven't been found guilty. They've been charged, but they're not actually guilty of a crime. There is a process in the province, in this country for what happens to an individual and what their rights are while they've been charged, out on bail, and have a trial. There's also something in this province and in this country called an appeal. So there could be a decision that's made, someone is found guilty, and they have the right to an appeal. It's not a new concept that people actually have been charged, found guilty, and are not.

5:00

I'm curious what the process is for gathering information, what information is going to be published. We have a system in the province of reporting violent offenders, high-risk reoffenders. When those individuals are determined by a panel of experts – not a minister; a panel of experts who have extensive knowledge of this individual's history, their crimes, their behaviour while incarcerated, their behaviour while in community – they are deemed a risk. A report is then distributed to the community, alerting them that this individual is a high-risk offender, and that information is made public for the safety of the community. Now, I know that that is an extensive process when it comes to making the decision to put this person's information out there. I don't see anything in this legislation that would indicate that such a robust process is going to occur. That to me is quite scary, Madam Chair. When we're talking about completing reports on individuals who are suspected or charged with a crime, that is a significantly grey area.

I know that when I was looking at buying a house, one of the things that the realtor had pointed my attention to was the city of Edmonton's crime map. I could click any community, and immediately all of the data would come up. It told me how many sexual offences, how many car break-ins, how many break and enters into homes. There were attempted murders. There was arson. Like, there was a complete list of data about that community. It didn't identify who did it, but it provided me as someone who wanted to move into that community a plethora of information about what was going on in real time in that community.

As a homebuyer I didn't need to know the name of the individual that did it. I didn't need to know the address of the individual that did it. I looked at the safety statistics that the city of Edmonton police had determined and put in that data. It was something that I trusted. I didn't need to know if they were out on bail, if they were out on parole. Those were things that weren't important.

I question what kind of information this ministry is going to be gathering and then who gets it. Are they going to be giving it to realtors when a realtor is showing homes in a community? They're doing a new build, so anybody who comes through that community can say, you know: "How many offenders live in this area? How many people are actually out on bail? Where do they live? Are they my neighbour?"

There's an idea and an understanding that there are people in the province that take on a belief and a value of being a vigilante. We have incredible access to information simply by just going on Facebook. There are groups all over the place that talk about, you know, "So-and-so did this, and so-and-so did that, and my neighbour has garbage piled up in their house, and I need to report it to bylaw," things that individuals believe are a crime that should be handled. If it's not being handled in the way that they believe, they want to report it and they want someone in the community to do something about it. There is an attempt to perhaps sway the police to maybe respond in the way that they hope.

Can you imagine what would occur if we're responsible as a minister relaying those reports? What if an individual is out on bail

and we see their bail conditions and that's my neighbour and I don't think that they're complying with their bail conditions? They might have a bail condition that says no cellphones. It's a common condition of bail. That person is out on their phone, I call the police to report it, and nobody responds. What do I do? Do I put it in this chat and say, "Hey, so-and-so at this address has a bail condition"? No mention of what the crime is, just that they're out on bail and that they're a risk.

People overreact. People take this information and feel that, you know, because people aren't doing anything about it, perhaps they should. We've seen in Edmonton people that are accused of being sex offenders, where people will petition and line up. Truckloads of vehicles will go up and down their street with megaphones, with signs saying: a sex offender lives in this house; we don't want them in our community.

Why would they think that the information that is provided in this legislation is going to protect the community? When we look at someone out on bail, when we look at someone who's got significant charges, there absolutely is a right for the community to know about their safety, one hundred per cent. Those systems are already in place. I have a friend who works with the police who is responsible for monitoring high-risk offenders, whose job it is to make their lives difficult. They show up when they're getting gas. They show up when they're getting groceries just to say: hey, I'm watching you. The police are monitoring these people that are deemed to be high risk to the community.

There isn't a report on it. The police are doing their job. I trust that when we have these police officers that are highly trained, highly skilled, and equipped to deal with criminals and criminal behaviour, they can do their job. I don't think that a minister should be deciding from the start of bail that the public needs to know about this. There are absolutely no criteria in here about the type of information that's going to be gathered, how long it's going to be stored, where it's going to be stored, for how long.

If this person is on bail and a report goes out and says that this person is accused of these crimes, these are their conditions – I know of many times that when there are continuous bail hearings and perhaps continuous breaches of those bail hearings, their bail conditions change. They could change monthly. Is a new report going to be issued every time those bail conditions change? And then what if this individual goes to court, has their day in court, and they're found not guilty? Is a new report going to be released identifying to the public that the person that we did a report on two years ago has now been found not guilty, and is it going to explain why that person was found not guilty?

There are just so many areas of concern when it comes to the reporting and the disclosure when it comes to this piece of legislation. There are some significant things that this government could do to actually help reduce crime. I think that when we look at the legislation, at the public's right to know, I'm not sure that there are any stats that show a correlation between crime reduction and information. There's no information in here that talks to – who did they talk to to gather this, to come up with this idea that this is the best way to tackle crime? What's the intention of this piece of legislation, and does the intention actually lead to the results that they're looking for? I don't see that in this legislation.

There's nothing in here that talks about hiring more prosecutors. When you're a Crown prosecutor and you have a stack on your desk, how realistic is it that you're going to have an actual ability to go through in a timely manner all of the charges and all of the individuals that deserve their day in court? Those are some key things that need to happen in order to ensure that crime is reduced in the province and that Albertans are actually safe in their communities, and I don't see

that in this bill. It's glaringly obvious that it's not there. There need to be concrete steps from this government to address crime.

5:10

None of the constituents that I've talked to have said that they sure wish the minister would report who's out on bail and what their charges are. That does nothing to speed up the process, to have an individual have their matter heard in court. That does nothing to support those that have been victims of crime. What we have seen in actions are cuts to those services, a lack of support and resources where it really matters, a threat to create a provincial police system. These are actions that don't match what they say their intended outcome is, Madam Chair. I look at this, and I question: what is the intent, and who are they listening to? It's not Albertans.

Albertans are asking for tangible action to support them in what they need. They need the ability to feel safe. They need the ability to make sure that when there is a crime, they have a police officer respond. They need to make sure that if they're a victim of that crime, they have supports and resources in place to help deal with the trauma of what happened. They need to make sure that once their matter gets to court, there's a prosecutor that has the time and ability to really sit through and make sure that whatever the charges are, they're actually dealt with so that an appeal doesn't happen if this individual is guilty. Those are some of the things that cause people to be found not guilty because of human error. Human error happens when you have way too many files.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before I get started on my own comments, I just want to make it absolutely and abundantly clear, because I heard comments coming from the other side, that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was speaking specifically about error in the justice system and not about defending sex offenders. I want to make that absolutely, one hundred per cent clear. I heard comments coming from the other side, and I just want to make sure that... [interjection] No. It's offensive. It's incredibly offensive, the comments that I heard, okay? I just want to get it on the record, Madam Chair.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs made incredibly good insights into this particular bill. Of course, this is an incredibly vague bill. Really, all of the things that are described in this bill: the actual minister already has the power to actually do them. It's basically like a job description, essentially, because the minister can already do these things. Why do we need a piece of legislation before us that basically gives us the minister's job, something that's within the purview of the minister already, when so many more important things could be addressed by this government when it comes to correcting the justice system?

One of the things that I'm very passionate about and very dedicated to when it comes to the justice system is how colonization has impacted specifically Indigenous people here in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada and how they're overrepresented in the prison system. Now, I've been on record before on this particular matter. What I find incredibly outstanding and quite concerning is that even though Indigenous people make up approximately 7 per cent of the Canadian population, we have 23 per cent of Indigenous men in prisons and then not only that; 27 per cent of Indigenous women in prisons. We have to ask ourselves: okay; why is this the case? What is the root of this in the first place?

I would suggest that what really needs to be looked into is how Indigenous people and their behaviour are sometimes criminalized.

It has to do with racism. It has to do with how they're being treated within the judicial system, how they have a lack of supports when it comes to fair representation within the judicial system, and these are things that this government could be concerned about. They like to talk a big talk about dealing with the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Madam Chair, but we don't see much action from this government. I'm really sorry. Like, to the minister of Indigenous affairs: planting a tree and making a little garden on the grounds of the Legislature, which is something nice, is symbolic, but it doesn't go to the root problems that we are facing in the province of Alberta. It doesn't do enough. Just like this bill doesn't do enough, the minister of Indigenous affairs, when it comes to reconciliation and the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is not doing enough. We see that over and over and over by this government, where they just – it's a lack of action.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Now, I think that so much could be done when it comes to making sure that Indigenous people get fair representation within the judicial system. You know, I have a friend who was commenting to me about this thing called justice circles within the judicial system. It's something relatively new that exists. They came up with it probably – you know, it's been in process for about five years, but a lot of people don't know that these justice circles actually exist. The Edmonton Police Service decided to pilot this particular project. It's been ongoing now for a few years, and I think it's the best invention and a way of reconciling two cultures and two peoples and actually to address the criminalization of Indigenous behaviour, as has been seen historically here in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada. This is, like, a real approach, a real alternative, to making sure that Indigenous people are treated fairly within the judicial system.

Now, within these justice circles you have elders from community, people who know the justice system very well, who are invited to – the individual who has committed a crime is actually invited to sit down with law enforcement, with people from their community, the actual person they actually committed the crime against, with elders, and they discuss what were the ramifications of that person's wrong decision and how it impacted the community, how it impacted the individual specifically. This is a real alternative to getting us moving forward as a province, and it is a real alternative for actually implementing the calls to justice of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for making sure that Indigenous people are treated fairly.

When it comes to pieces of legislation coming out of the Ministry of Justice, I'm going to continue speaking about this because it's something that I think that we should investigate further, something – again, I stated that the Edmonton Police Service actually put these justice circles in, implemented them, pilot projected them. It's a real alternative out there rather than the traditional sentencing form that actually happens now within the Alberta judicial system and is actually providing real, substantive change in the community.

5:20

I can't remember the exact numbers off the top of my head because I don't have the report in front of me, but the actual incidents, the number of people who actually end up recommitting a crime after going through the justice circle alternative sentencing program is very, very, very low. I hope that I can bring this up in debate in future, and I will bring more information about these justice circles into the House and table the information because I honestly think that every member of this House, if they are truly dedicated to wanting to make sure that Indigenous people are fairly treated within our judicial system, will want this to be implemented

on a grander scale throughout the province of Alberta, and I hope that it's something that, over the years to come, will be an alternative that is done throughout the entire country.

When speaking during second reading on this particular bill, I spoke significantly about the fact that the victims of crime fund was actually raided by the UCP, and we thought: okay; well, maybe there will be an alternative type of funding for victims of crime. That's what we were expecting to see from this government when they brought legislation forward on this particular topic, but here we see that this vague bill, which allows the minister to actually already do the things that he's doing, doesn't address committing any more funding to victims of crime and helping them out in any way. I think that that's something that members opposite should be asking themselves. Like, bring a real piece of legislation before us that is actually addressing the issues.

Now, there are a number of nonprofit organizations that actually help victims of crime, and they were at the forefront of actually calling this government on the fact that they were cutting the victims of crime fund. They advocated specifically to this government, and again I'll make the argument that so many times when we see the pieces of legislation brought forward by this particular government, we see that they only listen to the people that actually share their ideological perspective. And then what happens to the rest of Albertans? They like to say that they're listening to Albertans. They like to say that they're listening to Albertans, but in sad fact, Madam Chair, what we see is that they listen to people that share their ideology.

You know, as legislators in this House you would think that we would make decisions based on research, on data, and so often we hear from members on the other side of the House anecdotal information. You've heard the saying before – and it's one that I like to repeat – that the plural of anecdote is not data. I can understand that you may have this one experience or you heard about this one story or this one person brought up this issue to you and it was one experience, but you can't make legislation based on one experience. You have to look at the overall data of what's actually being demonstrated. What are the tendencies? What does research show about these things? Then you make informed decisions, and you propose legislation based on that rather than on anecdote.

Now, that's not to say that that one person doesn't deserve to be listened to, but you cannot let a small group of people drive the agenda of the entire province. You know, unfortunately, we saw that with the anti-COVID convoy. We saw a small group of people actually pressure this government, and this government bent – or the government caved, I should better say, caved to the call of this small group of people and decided to lift restrictions without looking at the data, I'll say, and look at us now. Look at us now. It's a shame, the number of deaths that have actually happened in this province as a result of COVID. And that's what happens when you're not making legislation or governing based on data.

You know, that's a perfect segue into another issue that I care about immensely when it comes to justice, not just justice but in general in terms of governance and democratic participation by individuals in our democracy here in Alberta, and that is the collection of race-based data. This could have been a bill dedicated to exactly that, and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre put a lot of time, dedication, as many members of our caucus did, in consulting with racialized people here in the province of Alberta to actually address the issues that they were most concerned about. But in order to address the issues that they're most concerned about, we need to collect data.

Like, I can't tell you how often individuals in my own constituency: they'd be asking me why racialized people are overrepresented at the

lower levels of the government bureaucracy and how come not more racialized people are directors, executive directors, assistant deputy ministers, and deputy ministers of the government. This is a real concern, and the only way that we can attempt to even address this within government is to, first of all, collect the data so that we can actually see what the real data is when it comes to – and it doesn't have to be mandatory. You can make it voluntary.

Many of the individuals and organizations that we consulted when it came to issues of racial injustice here in the province of Alberta – when we did that as a caucus, I think we held six, if I'm not mistaken, in total, six consultations with racialized individuals here in the province of Alberta and organizations that they represent, people that care deeply about the systemic injustices related around racism here in the province, and there's so much work that needs to be done.

But that first step that we need to take is collecting the data, the race-based data. I want to applaud the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for leading us on that particular endeavour and making sure that people were being reached out to and hearing what the follow-up was. It's quite unfortunate, though, that we're not getting support from the other side of the House on this particular issue.

The member brought in the private member's Bill 204. Of course, I'm biased. In my humble opinion, it was an incredibly good bill, well written, identifying exactly what needed to happen here in the province of Alberta for us to move forward on dealing with issues of systemic racism, yet we see the members on the other side of the House wanting to squash this particular private member's bill.

5:30

I look out at members on the other side of the House, you know, and this is what I can't understand, Madam Chair. I'm just so curious to understand what's going through the heads of the members on the other side of the House, because I would think that this is not a partisan issue. I'm so curious to know what they're thinking. How can they be against the collection of race-based data if this is going to get us to where we want to be, making sure that all individuals, all Albertans, all people who call Alberta home are going to be treated more justly within our political system?

You know, this is another thing where I feel like we get lip service from the members of the other side of the House when it comes to multiculturalism, when it comes to actually communicating to Albertans that, yeah, we all want an Alberta where it doesn't matter what faith you are, it doesn't matter what ethnicity you are, it doesn't matter what nationality you had prior to coming here to this great province, but now you're an Albertan, and it doesn't matter what the colour of your skin is. We say that, but then when it comes down to every word in legislation, we're not seeing it come to fruition from this government. And you can bet that when I'm out in the communities talking with people, I speak about the fact that all we're getting is lip service from this particular government when it comes to these issues.

Don't get me wrong. I think it's really important to protect the private property of places of worship. It's important. Nobody wants a swastika or racist, negative terms being scrawled on places of . . .

The Chair: Are there other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and provide a few comments at this committee stage on Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I'm trying to see if I can find a rename for this act. It might be: the public's right to ask the question as to whether this bill is even required and whether the minister already has the powers that are enumerated in this act. Or it might be: the public's right to ask the question if the minister does not have

specific powers in order to report this data and needs to overstep even further, then perhaps it might be the public's right to ask the question of what the budgetary implications of a Charter challenge are. Might be a little long.

But this bill, reading it through, does not seem to solve any real problem. The minister can already publish this data. The minister could have reported on this data already. So here we are discussing this when we could be discussing far more substantive matters with respect to crime.

Now, I believe that people, regardless of any ideology or other priors, if you will, want to be financially secure, physically safe, and socially free. That's what people want. You go and talk to them. That's what they want, and they want the government to get out of the way and help them do the things to make them financially secure, physically safe, and socially free. So the extent to which this bill might do things like violate personal information or privacy, that violates the third principle here, which is socially free.

I would like to see the minister's opinion from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner any time government brings forward legislation that has to do with the collection of information or private data or the dissemination of information such as this, especially with any identifying information. They run it past the OIPC, or at least they should. It is at the committee stage when this is the appropriate time for the minister to respond to those questions, for Executive Council to discuss those matters with the public, and I think they should.

There is no question that we do have law enforcement resourcing issues. Law enforcement, like health care, is a people-intensive service. Despite all of the technology and new ways that we find for people to be able to do their jobs, the fact of the matter is that boots on the ground, delivering the service, is the most expensive part of this service, and it is that part that has been cut. Those transfers to municipalities have been held constant now in the JSG budget for some three years, not adjusted for inflation, which is a real thing that we're learning, or population growth. The policing grants to municipalities have changed considerably. So the boots on the ground are, in fact, diminished. Even in the priority area of rural crime reduction, with the addition of what the province called RAPID, which was allowing fish and wildlife officers, for example, to respond to rural . . .

Mr. Bilous: RCMP.

Ms Phillips: Yeah. RCMP calls, I guess, is the way to put this. I don't want to characterize them as crimes, but do responses to calls for service. That's the right language. Even there, you know, the government's sort of crown jewel, signature piece of, "Oh, we're going to get tough on rural crime; we're going to do something about this," well, we just learned literally today, Madam Chair, that 10 of those fish and wildlife officers have been removed from that service. That is a lot of boots on the ground, especially if you are deploying them to specific problem areas. Ten of them just – after all of that training, which they do require, because you're not going to, you know, send a fish cop without proper training into an RCMP call for service, in a possibly very volatile situation. Yet those folks were – the Crown invested in that service, and that was cut, and we just learned that by a news release today. In the rural communities where those folks were responding to RCMP calls for service, there are 10 fewer pairs of boots on the ground to do that job for people who are victims of crime.

Now, I myself have seen quite a bit of increase in crime in my neighbourhood. I think in the last year or so I've had to file at least three reports. I am now the source of camera footage for all of my neighbours when something happens, which is frequently. It got

dialled up so much over the summer that the community association began to engage much more fulsomely with the city council. My neighbours, who are, you know, the most granola-crunching lefties that you'll ever meet, are sick of it. We are all sick of it. In fact, I wasn't altogether pleased at 2 a.m. when somebody was trying to break into my house. It is not something that we want to wish on anyone, being a victim of any kind of crime.

In particular, when we see crimes that are of such severity that they, in fact, affect a person's ability to accomplish any of those three things that I talked about, being financial secure, physically safe, and socially free – for example, the kinds of egregious crimes like sexual assault or those kinds of other assaults that fundamentally alter the course of someone's life, someone's life chances, their ability to get any kind of postsecondary training, their ability to navigate the world without the scars and the constant mental presence of PTSD. And that's where the victims of crime fund was supposed to go for all of those years, towards that kind of healing so that people could in fact accomplish those overarching goals that I believe we all have. Yet there, what did the government do? They raided that victims of crime fund under the auspices of hiring more Crown prosecutors, said that they were going to return some of those benefits to victims of crime. But, really, the amount of supports were cut down to a point where they were, essentially, meaningless. Those kinds of supports that were there before are no longer there.

Where are the Crown prosecutors? I just noticed a couple of weeks ago the Crown prosecutors in the news saying that, you know, time to go on strike. The resources aren't there. This is the dead end that these constant cuts in Justice and Solicitor General have driven us into.

5:40

So the public has a right to know all right, the right to know: where are the resources for law enforcement, and how long is it going to take when I phone the police, when I do a call for service, for them to come to my house at 2 in the morning when someone's trying to break in? Whether there's going to be enough resources there to respond to – I was talking to some friends on the north side who own a liquor store, and they say they don't even bother calling anymore. That's not the police service's fault when there's not enough folks to be able to attend; that's the fault of the resources there.

The fact of the matter is that those challenges are real. They exist. Some of them are as a result of the budget legislation, that we just have been debating for the last couple of weeks, and some of them, which is what happens after that crime has gone through the justice system, are as a result of what the province did in 2020 around the victims of crime fund. That could have been fixed in this legislation; it could be fixed right now; we're in Committee of the Whole. Now, there's no question that other pieces of reporting, that are actually within the bounds of the Charter and our personal information protection of privacy act, could have also been included in this legislation.

Now, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I think, spoke in a far more erudite way than I could ever do on this topic; however, I will say this: the public does have the right to know where the response to the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls inquiry is, which reported in June of 2019 with 231 recommendations. The minister received a report on January 5, 2022, saying, "We'll release our response to the report sometime," in due course, I guess. That's an answer that we sometimes get. It's not a good one, but it is one. The public has the right to know what's happening with that. These are big problems to solve. They require

resources. They do, in fact, also require having good evidence and good data.

We have a bill in front of the House right now, again, that could be imported into this legislation at this stage of debate. It has happened in the past; private members' legislation has in fact been adopted by government, by Executive Council, as government legislation and then brought into the Chamber. I have a couple of memories of this happening in the Klein years. There's no question that this legislation would be significantly improved, because then it would actually give more practical effect to this legislation and probably help even the government accomplish its goals just a little bit more, because this legislation does not.

Now, I want to just return to a point that my hon. friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs made, which is: what is the point? What are we doing here? Why are we doing this? What would be the point of having more information by judicial district than is already contained within Statistics Canada's crime severity index or that the minister is not already empowered to do? So what is the point? What more information is this bill allowing the minister to cherry-pick? It's not really the public's right to know; the minister's right to decide what you get to know is maybe the better name for this bill. You know, what is accomplished by publishing this by judicial district? What will be published by judicial district? Will it be different information for different places? That's a question that I haven't seen articulated anywhere.

As the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs said, you know, there are crime severity index statistics and other things when you're buying a house, when you're deciding on your kid's school, that kind of thing. For sure, the public does pay attention to those things. I know I do. But I'm not sure what more information I actually need other than that I would like my property taxes to go towards fighting crime in my neighbourhood. I would like my provincial taxes to go with those municipal disbursements to appropriately fund a well-trained law enforcement service.

I would like public resources stewarded in a way that reflects both common sense and the will of the people with respect to how our law enforcement contract with the RCMP is developed and maintained, with appropriate consultation with municipalities and in a way that doesn't cost us an extra \$300 million just because sometime 20 years ago Stephen Harper wrote a firewall letter. It doesn't really seem like a super solid reason to make a massive public policy change and put public safety at risk while we do it because we are just worried more about the colour of the uniforms or whatever than we are about making sure that our communities are safe.

Those are the kinds of things that – I mean, some of it is maybe legislative, but some of it's just: get up in the morning and go do the job. That's where we haven't seen that commitment to the physical safety of Albertans from what the government funds and what their priorities are.

You know, this is something of a husk of legislation. There's not much to it, and that's fine, I guess, if the job here is to kind of fill the agenda full of things that everybody on the government side can get behind so as to not risk a piece of legislation crashing on the rocks because the caucus is so divided. I mean, I guess that if that's what we're here to do, that's fine. It's the government's prerogative. But the fact of the matter is that there are serious problems to solve, and the government should get busy doing that instead.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 9? I will go to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, I want to thank the Minister of Justice for creating this critical bill. I believe all

Albertans want to have relevant and timely information provided to them about crime in their communities, and bills like these are vital to those communities and for the knowledge of all citizens about the state and safety of those communities in which they live, so I rise today to speak in support of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

Madam Chair, Bill 9 is a bill meant to highlight the importance of transparency and accountability within the government of Alberta regarding the criminal justice system and crime in Alberta. The government of Alberta has sought to continue to do better in providing accountability and transparency in its relationship with the public, and these are critical pillars in our democracy. This bill will only strengthen the Alberta government's ability to provide relevant justice information to Albertans, increasing that accountability and transparency.

Bill 9 would ensure Albertans have relevant information about crime within their communities if passed. It will strengthen the public's ability to understand the Alberta justice system and increase awareness of activities and dangerous individuals within their communities. Passing this bill is common sense. I hope my colleagues in the opposition can push past any hesitations on their part and support this bill as it will only strengthen our communities, our democracy, and our criminal justice system no matter who is in government.

While our government has been moving forward on steps to decrease crime, rural crime is still a significant issue for many people living in rural Alberta, including constituents of mine in Lethbridge-East who have property or family who live outside the city proper. My constituents and all Albertans deserve and have the right to know about crime rates within their community and within Alberta. Providing Albertans with an annual report on crime will ensure that Albertans can make the correct choice on how to go about their lives within their community.

After the Premier toured rural communities in 2019, our government heard time and time again that there needs to be an improved system to increase the accessibility to crime data within rural communities. Madam Chair, these recommendations to disclose crime rates come straight from Albertans. Promise made, promise kept.

5:50

Bill 9 will ensure that Albertans from rural, metropolitan, or mid-sized cities will have up-to-date information about crime in their area provided to them in a user-friendly manner. Now, some may argue that this bill will increase the amount of red tape reporting. The last thing that our government wants to do is increase red tape, particularly around reporting on such vital statistics. That is the opposite of what this government plans to do, Madam Chair.

We will be committing to working closely with the RCMP, municipal police forces, multiple court systems within Alberta, the government of Canada, municipalities, and Indigenous councils and bands in streamlining, collecting, and delivering this needed and wanted data. The obligation of the government to provide reasonable and pertinent data to its citizens should not be construed as red tape even though it does require additional work on behalf of the ministry, which it should be its duty to do.

Some also may fear that this bill will place monetary burdens on municipal police forces and other entities within the judicial system of Alberta. That is an unwarranted fear, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Justice has available funds to produce the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the monetary cost of collecting and distributing this data does not fall onto police forces, municipalities, or other governing bodies. Any expenses attached to this bill are superseded by the importance of collecting and distributing data to the greater public as having easy access to this vital information is necessary for Albertans.

Madam Chair, I'm concerned that Albertans cannot already access data on crime within our communities. Families and citizens of Alberta rely on knowing what is going on within their community to ensure that children, spouses, and families are safe when moving through their day-to-day lives. Although this bill does not directly tackle the issue of crime rates in Alberta, it starts a process of ensuring that Albertans are up to speed on what is going on in our communities at large. The government must take the lead and the responsibility for providing relevant crime information to all Albertans. From there we can ensure that families feel safer within their respective communities and then continue to move forward on preventing crime in Alberta.

I'm extremely proud of Lethbridge's new police chief and the tremendous work he and his force have done and undertaken independently to provide some of this level of data within specific jurisdictions within Lethbridge to correct errors of the past and provide transparency, accountability, and stability to its citizens for the future. We must do more for our families and communities across the province.

For these reasons, I urge my fellow members of the Legislature to support Bill 9 and the lives and livelihoods of all Albertans. This piece of legislation is a strong step in the right direction.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 2 and Bill 9.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 2 and Bill 9.

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.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m.]

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