



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, April 20, 2022

Day 21

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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

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

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

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

Executive Council

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

Parliamentary Secretaries

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

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Are you moving Bill 2 on behalf of the minister?

Mr. Nally: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you moving some sort of motion?

Mr. Nally: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given how important it is to provide support to Albertans facing higher utility bills, it's important for this Assembly to immediately pass Bill 18. Therefore, I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive the necessary standing orders in order to proceed immediately to second reading of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Speaker: We'll proceed with the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to move third reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 2 would implement many of the technical measures introduced in Budget 2022. Budget 2022 marks a fiscal turning point in the province. It marks a time when we stop adding to the debt burden of future generations of Albertans, and that's why, Madam Speaker, fiscal discipline remains the cornerstone of Alberta government's fiscal plan. Measures presented in Bill 2 will further integrate financial responsibility across government operations, leading to better outcomes for Albertans and a stronger financial position for the province.

I would encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join in on the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and have another opportunity to speak to Bill 2. Bill 2 is an implementation act which implements a budget, a budget with which my colleagues and I disagree for multiple reasons, and I am happy to go on to talk about those.

This is a budget which, first off, it needs to be noted, has been balanced because oil prices are high. The UCP would love to run around and tell you about how this was because they punished

Albertans and they hurt working people and they punished families, and that's why the budget is balanced, but the truth is that this budget is balanced because oil prices have gone up.

Mr. Long: To 70 bucks.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. They're not 70 bucks. You might want to check that one out.

Mr. Long: It's balanced on \$70 oil.

Ms Ganley: Oh, boy. Heckling that's wildly incorrect. Okay. [interjections] Yeah. I mean, you're welcome to stand up and join debate if you'd like to join debate, but maybe you just want to shout from the sidelines.

Mr. Shandro: How about through the chair?

Ms Ganley: Oh, boy. We're sure in a feisty mood this evening, aren't we? [interjection] Okay. Apparently, I'm going to spend the evening getting yelled at with misinformation about the price of oil and random insults.

Mr. Shandro: Just consider decorum.

Ms Ganley: I should consider decorum? You're the one shouting at me. I have the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

We are not off to a great start, so let's reset everything here. The only person with the floor in this debate right now is the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I will thank the hon. Minister of Justice to keep his comments to himself.

We're here to discuss Bill 2. [interjections] I'm not really sure why this is so funny, but here we go. We're here to discuss Bill 2. Apparently, the members opposite think this bill is absolutely hilarious, or maybe he's actually looked up the price of oil and realized how wrong he got it. Anyway, Madam Speaker, the point is that this bill is bad. It's bad because it implements a budget that does nothing for Albertans.

I had the opportunity earlier today to speak about the priorities of my constituents and about the priorities of the people across this province, and those priorities are the ability to have a decent-paying job, to be able to pay for their mortgage, to be able to pay for their utilities, to be able to pay for the cost of living, to have a decent lifestyle. They would like as well to be able to . . . [interjections] Honestly, I don't really know what the Member for West Yellowhead's problem is this evening, but I have the floor.

An Hon. Member: She's wasting time.

Ms Ganley: Okay.

An Hon. Member: Carry on.

Ms Ganley: I'd be happy to carry on. Do you think you can maybe hold your comments? No? Okay. Fair. Well, apparently, this government isn't interested in hearing debate this evening, which is, I guess, pretty much in line with their general behaviour towards the people of this province, so I shouldn't be totally surprised that they have nothing but sneers and insults.

This government has brought forward a budget that doesn't respect those priorities, that doesn't respect the priorities of the people of Alberta. This budget is balanced off the backs of the people of Alberta. The average family will lose \$500 just because

of the changes in the basic personal exemption in the income tax act. This is something that the current Premier used to rail against when he was in opposition in the federal government. He called it pernicious, he called it insidious, he talked about nasty tax grabs, and now he brings forward a budget that does exactly that, that takes money out of the pockets of working Alberta families.

In addition, we're seeing families lose from the child tax benefit. Madam Speaker, I think one of my favourite things that we accomplished while in government was cutting child poverty in half. We cut child poverty in half in the province, and that was in large part because of the Alberta child tax benefit. It supported working families to make sure that they were able to provide a decent standard of living to their children, and I think that that was incredibly important.

I think it's also worth noting that this budget has deindexed a number of benefits that this government promised to keep indexed. When we were in government and we brought in an act that indexed things like AISH and seniors' benefits and a number of other benefits of which many Albertans rely, the UCP voted in favour of it. They said they would maintain it. They said they were in favour of it. They spoke at great length about the importance of that measure, yet as soon as they got into government, they repealed it. For a recipient on AISH: they lose about \$3,000 in purchasing power. I mean, that's incredibly hard.

In addition, they've been altering the way the seniors' benefit works. They've altered who is eligible for the seniors drug plan. I know that they think it's hilarious to talk about how the seniors drug plan should only be for seniors, but, Madam Speaker, I think it's worth understanding who it is we talk about when we're saying that. I've certainly heard from families who are in situations where, whether through the devastating loss of a loved one or a loved one's struggles with mental health or addictions issues, the grandparents have taken on custody of the children. I think that's the right thing to do. I think that that's something they do out of love for their family, and I think that it's something that a government should respect and support. I think that throwing those children, those dependants, off the seniors' benefit is absolutely the wrong thing to do. We saw recently a report that came out that demonstrated just how many people were thrown off as a result of those decisions.

Those are a number of ways in which, you know, this government has been extremely problematic for families. It's worth talking as well, I think, about other costs that have been rising. Recently we saw a report released, very, very late, into insurance costs and demonstrating the hundreds of millions of dollars more that families were paying in insurance costs. Unfortunately, the government has sort of supported that happening by removing the cap, and that has been very, very challenging. Some people have seen it go up as much as 20 per cent or 30 per cent, and of course, you know, their incomes have not gone up with that. Add to that the fact that they're losing a lot of their purchasing power by this deindexation that the members over there used to rail against and now apparently support this year. A lot of families have had incredible struggles with that.

7:40

This is a government that tried to hide that report. They tried to keep it from Albertans. They claimed that the information was available online until we proved that that wasn't correct, and then they had to correct themselves and release the report. So it's no great wonder, I suppose, that no one trusts them.

Adding on to utilities is also the cost of tuition. Tuition is increasing. In some programs it's increasing by sort of massive percentages. This is incredibly challenging for people. The higher tuition gets, the more it is the case that someone who's entering university is entering based not on their merits, based not on their

academic record or their abilities but instead based on the relative wealth of their parents. I think that that's wrong. I think that people who want to access education should get to access that education based on the work that they put in and the work that they did and their sort of ability to work hard for that and not based on the family into which they were born. People don't choose to be born rich or choose to be born poor; they're born where they're born. I really think that this government's choice to punish them by cutting off their access to education is just wrong. Those students deserve to learn just as much as any other students. I think that's incredibly problematic.

On top of increases in tuition fees, we have increases to the interest charged on student loans. The interesting thing about this is – so what happens is that the government borrows money; the government loans that money to students. It used to be the case that the government loaned that money to students at the same rate that they've borrowed it. They don't do that anymore. Now they add on an additional percentage. Essentially, what they're doing is making money off student borrowing. I also think that that is incredibly problematic.

As I'm sure many members of this House are aware, I've gone back to school a number of times. You know, I have talked to a lot of students, and particularly when I was in law school, where we're subject to differential tuition, a lot of people came out of that with a lot of debt, like, six-figure debt often, which is pretty hard to get out from under. It forces people to make choices in their career, where they may want to choose to go into a public interest pursuit, but they're not able to because they're having to pay off that debt. It forces them to choose what they're going to go on to do in terms of graduate work. It limits their choices. It limits their choices to pursue what contributions they can make to the world around them. I think that that is incredibly problematic.

First they get hit with tuition fees, and then they get hit with this increased interest. It just makes it harder and harder for those who have put in the work, who have the grades, but just didn't happen to be fortunate enough to be born into a rich family to make it through university, because it has just gotten out of reach. That's incredibly problematic as well.

Other things in this budget. I mean, certainly, the government seems to love to go on about the Education budget. I think it's worth noting that the thing we educate at the government of Alberta in Education are students. They're not capitas. They're not dollars. They're students. When there are more students in the system and the same amount of money, that means there's less money for each student. Most people would call that, I think, a cut. There have been a lot of years of cuts. I, personally, am incredibly aware of this because I have a daughter who's starting public school in September, and when she enters, she will enter a system in which there are tens of thousands of additional students and a thousand fewer teachers, not to mention the number of fewer educational assistants that will be available for those students.

This is all incredibly problematic. I think it is emblematic of a government and a caucus that doesn't understand the priorities of Albertans. Like I said, those priorities are generally pretty straightforward. They would like their children to have access to the same or better opportunities that they had access to. That requires education. It requires advanced education. It requires that everyone have access to a doctor.

There's another area in which this budget and this government have fallen down. You know, if you live in Lethbridge, it's next to impossible to access a primary care physician right now. That's challenging. It's genuinely challenging for people. They're having to drive several hours to access primary care in another location. It's all well and good for the government to tell them that they're

thinking about working on a plan to someday have a plan to implement something to work on it. But it's been years like this, and that is an incredible challenge for individuals. They don't want to wait. When your kid is sick and you have to drive them two hours to see a doctor, that's not something you're willing to wait years for someone to fix. I think that that is incredibly problematic. What people want is access to education, access to doctors, to an ambulance when they need to call an ambulance. They want a job that can pay their bills. These priorities of Albertans just aren't reflected in this budget. They aren't reflected at all.

We see a government that has, you know, billions of dollars to give away to profitable corporations, that defends increases in insurance, that defends an Americanized health system, that takes away overtime pay from workers. This is problematic. This affects people. It affects the people around us in this province every day. I think, at the end of the day, this government would be well served by listening to those Albertans and by listening to what it is that they are going through and to what it is that they want and what it is that they need.

I think it's worth talking a little bit as well with respect to one of the bills – I guess I can't talk about another bill that's before the House. This government has indicated to folks that they want to come forward and assist them with the cost of their utilities. I think that's great. The problem is that this has sort of been delayed and delayed and delayed and delayed, and I think that fundamentally what they fail to understand is that this is urgent. It's genuinely urgent for people. I don't know. I mean, I sat in a government. I've seen a fair amount of legislation drafting happen. I'm, I've got to say, a little surprised that it takes five weeks to copy an act from 2001. But I think the situation is urgent.

You know, those are the things that I am primarily concerned about: people's access to education, to teachers, to a modern curriculum that will help them as they go forward in the world, people's access to health care, to doctors, and to an equitable health system. I think that that's worth pointing out as well.

7:50

You know, there's a lot of talk about publicly funded versus publicly delivered. It's worth noting that pretty much every credible study ever done has demonstrated that adding a private tier to a health care system assists everyone only in situations where more money is put into the system. If no more money is put into the system, if the same amount of money is put into the system, the addition of a private tier not only doesn't help people, but overall it drives metrics downwards. The reason that happens is that the private facility can take the simplest of the surgeries, the least complicated of the patients, that require, you know, less time, less stay in the hospital, probably less time in surgery, and they get the same amount of money, leaving the public system with patients that require more care, to be dealt with with the same amount of money. So instead of those who need the most care getting the most care, those who need the most care get the least care, and that sort of slows the entire system down. That's been, I would say, fairly heavily demonstrated, and I think it's problematic.

Ambulances: also another area. Nobody ever wants to call 911 because their kid is choking and hear that there's no ambulance available for them. Nobody wants to call for their loved one having a heart attack and hear that there's no ambulance available for them. That's incredibly problematic, and it's a problem that really ought to be treated with significantly more urgency than this government has treated it with. It's a huge challenge.

Other priorities include, you know, decent-paying jobs that are able to cover the cost of living. We talk a lot about the cost of living going up. It's going up for a number of reasons. Obviously, tuition

and the servicing costs on that tuition are directly within the control of the government. Electricity and insurance rates were both subject to a cap that's been removed, so again government decisions. There are some other costs that, arguably, have other causes.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join debate on Bill 2. Like my colleague, I'll stand in opposition to this bill as well. It's difficult to have respect for a bill that does not continue the fight against child poverty that we started. We reduced child poverty by 50 per cent in two years as a result of the government programs that were there. This government has chosen to stop that and to let child poverty increase.

I was incredibly proud of the work we did, and my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has talked about some of those programs, the Alberta family benefit, so that children can have at least an equal start from the get-go. What they make of that start becomes up to them further down the line, but at least they have the opportunity. This government, as I've said, has done the opposite with regard to that, so I will not be supporting this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

You know, I also agree that it's fairly simple, the kind of focus, I think, of a government. There's a focus on the important things that governments can do around education, around access to health care, around respecting workers in this province, around doing their part to ensure there's a decent quality of life for every Albertan. Just on those four brief points that I've mentioned, my colleagues, both the critics for K to 12 education as well as PSE, have pointed out how the significant cuts to both of those programs have caused significant disruption across this province, hundreds of millions of dollars removed from both of those systems, which has left them scrambling.

Even today the superintendent of the Edmonton school board talked about how this is the most difficult budget. He's been there for nine years. He said that this budget is the most difficult one for the Edmonton school board that he has ever had to face. Now, he's not talking about the NDP years of '15 to '19. He's talking about this budget from this UCP government. It's corroboration there of the lack of interest and care this government has taken to ensure that important systems like the primary education system in this province stay strong and healthy and do the best job they can for our young future leaders.

With regard to health care we know that hundreds of millions of dollars, again, have been taken out of that system, that there has been open warfare between huge sectors of the health care system, whether you want to start with doctors, whether you want to go to nurses, whether you want to talk about allied health professionals. They have all suffered under this government and are exhausted, have worked through two years of COVID, and protected the people of this province. They get in return from this government the derision that comes across because of the ongoing fights with those sectors.

You know, you just have to look at the number of closures of health facilities or reduced services of health facilities across this province under this government. I saw a number of them were closed. I think it was up to 20 that I actually counted up that were either reduced services or closed, and the citizens in those areas could not go to them, or they had to wait incredible amounts of time to be seen. My colleague the critic for Health talked about – I think it was just earlier today – how one doctor had to see a patient in the parking lot, in that person's car, because there was no room in the emergency ward to see that person. Now, that's happened under this

government, this government that talks about balancing the budget – balancing the budget – and I think we're making it very clear that it's balanced on the backs of Albertans and the services that they depend on.

Respect for workers in this province. You know, every Albertan wants to be respected. They go to work. They want to come home at the end of the day healthy and happy and continue to provide that support through their wages to their family. Again, fights with members of this government bureaucracy: prosecutors, Crowns. As a result, we have a demoralized public service, who are just waiting for the opportunity to see a government change so that they can be actually respected in their workplaces.

Lastly, the quality of life. I think it's pretty remarkable that Alberta continues to have a decent quality of life when they've got the UCP at the controls of government. I know from my own critic portfolio that municipalities are saying that their lives in municipal government are extremely more challenged as a result of not only cuts. Certainly, there have been hundreds of millions of dollars of cuts to municipal programs, things like MSI. You know, \$5 million were directed towards the city of Calgary to help revitalize the critical central business district that is downtown Calgary. Five million. When the city of Calgary put up 200 and about 30 million dollars to incentivize and improve the downtown, which has taken such a hit as a result of the change to the oil situation in this province that now 30 per cent of the towers in downtown Calgary are vacant – and potentially they're not going to get filled up by oil businesses anymore.

8:00

They're going to have to look at diversification. They're going to have to look at other businesses who will come into the downtown but not only businesses. They're going to have to look at – and it's happening right now with regard to HomeSpace – you know, refurbishing older buildings so that they house people, and that's being done right now. The report that we put together called revitalizing downtown Calgary, that can be found at albertasfuture.ca, explains how we would work with the city of Calgary to make that happen, while this government: all that can be found in its budget is \$5 million for the downtown.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about in addition to balancing the budget on the backs of Albertans is that, you know, a lot has been made by the amount of personal income tax revenue that's coming into this province as a result of not indexing the tax brackets. I heard the Premier earlier tonight talk about: "Well, we might do that. We might do that. We're going to take a look at it." This is the third budget where Albertans are paying more and more in taxes, where other provinces – in the government of Canada the norm is to index brackets. It was not a surprise to me that this government decided not to do that because they were looking for any way to continue down the road of sharing those profits, sharing those monies with corporations in this province.

Another thing that I think we need to look a little longer at is how the \$4.7 billion in corporate tax giveaway was, for instance, said to fill up the downtown Calgary towers. Well, that's not happening. That won't happen. What will happen is, under a different government, working with the city of Calgary to ensure that the downtown gets the care and attention it needs as the most important central business district in this province.

The budget also talks about the estimated inflation. Already it's pretty offside with the inflation that's currently present in Alberta. It's offside by about half the amount, which is going to be – and we're already seeing it. Albertans are struggling with the costs and the impact on their daily budgets as a result of the high increase in

inflation. This government has got no help for that. Well, they do talk about helping with electricity and helping with natural gas. Natural gas may be coming sometime in the future – it's not here – in terms of a rebate. And electricity: we know there'll be \$50 for Albertans. That's starting sometime in the future. Again, this government is overpromising and underdelivering, overpromising or not delivering at all, overpromising and bungling rollouts. That's what you see in this fiscal plan. That's what you see in this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Madam Speaker, the budget provides no real relief to families in this province at this time. That's something that when we were government, we were most mindful of. Families are the backbone. Families and the workers that are embedded in those families are the backbone of this province. But this government, the UCP government, seems to believe that insurance companies are the backbone of this province. They seem to believe that corporations who can count on \$4.7 billion of tax giveaways are the backbone of this province.

That's not why any of us, I think, got into politics. Perhaps I'm being too generous with the other side, but I think people got into politics because of a desire to ensure that there was a good quality of life for their neighbours, for the people in their communities, you know, that they help work out the problems and issues that would be brought to them. I didn't get into this to ensure that insurance companies could walk away with billions of dollars in profit and Albertans would suffer as a result. I didn't get into it for that reason. I got into it as a result of an interest to try and change policy at the local level, and I think many of us did.

But this statutes amendment act is not something that I think Albertans should be rightly proud of. The balanced budget is only in name. It's as a result of being able to ratchet down supports for Albertans, and my colleagues have talked about some of those supports, whether they be in the lack of indexing of AISH, of seniors' benefits, of income support programs. All of that saves you a lot of money when you're not investing that money in people and they're not investing that in the economy. So, yeah, you can get to a balanced budget if you start to turn the tap on the things that people depend on, people are supported by.

If you turn it down significantly, then you've got problems in your health system. You've got problems in your judiciary as a result of more people needing to go for health care, more people winding up on the streets, more kind of conflict with the law. But those things aren't counted by the budget that we have before us. Those things are overlooked, Madam Speaker. Those things are pushed down to the personal experience, to saying that, you know, that's their problem. They're somehow lesser as a result of not being able to have the . . . [Member Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I look forward to speaking tonight to the Legislature and talking about the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and making some comments around that as well as the budget that it actually implements. I'd like to start by saying that even as earlier as today in the Legislature – maybe it was yesterday – we heard a number of MLAs remark about their meagre beginnings and how proud they were of what they were able to rise above. I think there are a lot of similar stories in this Legislature, and it has been a theme throughout other Legislatures in the past, where MLAs and their families have started with basically nothing or went through hard times and have come through the other side and made good.

It makes me wonder, Madam Speaker, given this budget, especially from members on the government side, how easily they forget those hard times and when they were or their family was in financial trouble or just getting by or scraping by or maybe not quite making it, how easily that period of their life is forgotten or just pushed aside when considering, in cabinet or in caucus, budgetary measures that will end up extending the period of time for many, many Alberta families that they will end up remaining in poverty or an impoverished state and struggling to get by or not really getting by or making do or doing without.

I, too, came from a family of six which went through some difficult times. There was no money left over at the end of the month after my father suffered construction accidents, and we knew we'd be wearing our cousins' winter coats the next year. My mom never had a winter coat, a new one, for 17 years, the whole time I went to school until after I was in high school. I mean, lots of stories abound in this Legislature about that type of difficulty in families.

8:10

It, I think, behooves us as MLAs, Madam Speaker, to remember those times and reflect upon them and incorporate that understanding into the Legislature, into the budgets that we build so that the onus is never forgotten, is always upon us, is always upon legislators, especially the Finance minister, to never forget those who are hardest hit, those who are suffering the most, those who are just scraping by, those who, through no fault of their own, are not able to provide the means to sustain themselves. These are the people that should be uppermost in the mind of any Finance minister in order to ensure that these people have a dignity and quality of life that we would be proud to say that we provided to our own family, because, in fact, these people are part of the Alberta family.

That's something that I'm saddened by when I see some of the measures in this legislation, in the budget indeed that has been before us and in the implementation act that we're debating here tonight. This government is operating on a wing and a prayer. They're winging it, and they're praying that the price of oil will once again resurrect their chances at the polls and get us out of the economic crisis that's been caused by a number of difficulties, including the pandemic that we've been going through in Alberta in the last couple of years. But, Madam Speaker, the government says one thing and does another in attempting to convince Albertans that happy days are here again and that the pandemic is over when, in fact, the happy days are happening for a select number of people.

But the pandemic certainly isn't over. We're looking at a sixth wave that's oncoming, and we may not know exactly when it hits because we don't have the data to verify exactly what's going on in the province with respect to the COVID infection rate. A lot of us are in the dark to know exactly what risk that we're facing, and it's a risk that I think has caused a lot of economic damage over the last two years, whether you'd be in business, whether you're in family. It's something that the budget doesn't take into account because, of course, costs are going up for everybody, and those individual families who are suffering with COVID and have had family members who had to isolate, leave their jobs and employment for periods of time are those that are being hit even harder than everybody else during the pandemic, that is on its way up again.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Now, for example, I have in my constituency a number of seniors' bungalow complexes, and one would think that these adult bungalows of significant square footage with double-attached garages would have in them fairly well-off people with substantial means. In fact, if indeed you do the door-knocking that I've done in the constituency, you find out that these folks as well as just – just

– getting by, if they're getting by, because, of course, they will suffer in their elderly years some debilitating diseases and injuries, and there are costs there that they've had to bear.

This measure in the budget is going to cost the seniors big time. A seniors couple getting the Alberta seniors' benefit will lose \$750. That's a chunk of change when you look at an individual, say, who's worked in a clerical position for a significant part of her working life after raising a family, may have an income around the \$30,000 mark. You take \$750 out of that and you're taking away something that every month you might have enjoyed: a night out maybe, a movie, a new pair of pants once in a while. That \$750 is real money, real money that the Finance minister has to be aware will be felt, will be a loss that's felt by an individual who's getting the Alberta seniors' benefit, and if they lose that, it affects their quality of life.

If you're looking at another failure of this budget and of this government, it's women, Madam Speaker. Women, in fact, were the hardest hit in the employment sector. They were the ones who first lost jobs and lost them the most, and they're the last ones to have the jobs recovered. They're still behind in that regard.

The young high school grads: unemployment is very, very high among our young people. This budget doesn't address their abilities to enter the job market.

I'm thinking most often about the AISH recipients. I have in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung three complexes that are operated by Civida, formerly capital region housing. Of course, if you knock on doors there, you'll find stories of various range which usually involve some sort of single parent and broken home and perhaps an illness, could have been an addiction issue of some kind, domestic violence, lots of different situations which find people ending up in affordable housing. These individuals are often on AISH as well. If you're looking at losing \$3,000 in real purchasing power, which is what happens to individuals on AISH as a result of this budget, and you're looking at earning approximately \$22,000 on an annual basis, take that out of your wallet on an annual basis, Madam Speaker, and see how much more difficult it is for you to get by. It's not a simple thing.

I think all of us can relate to that. There are thousands of people in Alberta who live on that kind of money, who exist on that kind of money. Taking \$3,000 out of their pockets in purchasing power as a result of the failure to index to inflation the benefits is something that I'm hoping this Finance minister argued against in cabinet, but apparently he wasn't able to convince the rest of his colleagues to see the wisdom of protecting the most vulnerable people in the province. I can't imagine it was him making the proposal. I'm sure he was defending those individuals but, unfortunately, wasn't able to win the day.

I did mention earlier, of course, about the fact that this government is singing *Happy Days are Here Again* and the pandemic is over. You know, my mother received a phone call about a week ago. It was from a woman she's known since childhood from her small village of Thorhild, Mary Yachimec. She was in tears because her son Bobby Yachimec, a fellow that I'd known, a little bit older than me, had just died. He'd contracted COVID-19, and he ended up having a case of pneumonia, and he died – it took him about three weeks – aged 72, otherwise healthy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So to be told that things are behind us and COVID is in the rear-view mirror and it's a mild disease doesn't give me any comfort, Madam Speaker. I certainly fear that we are going to see increasing evidence about the long-term effects of COVID, long COVID. It appears from the emerging science that anybody who's infected has

a chance of having some form of brain damage. It's something that we hope doesn't become established as scientific fact, but it certainly seems to be emerging as a residual effect of this so-called mild disease.

Now, one of the things that we'll also see as a result of this budget is that the Alberta child and family benefit not being indexed to inflation is going to cost Alberta families about \$450. That's once again another failure of this budget and this Finance minister to look after people in this province when, in fact, the coffers of the government are filled with oil money as a result of the global price of oil going up due to global conflict. The government is still suggesting that the plan to balance their budget is one that they made a great success of.

8:20

In fact, what they've done is balance the budget on the backs of those least able to afford it, and that always seems to be the go-to place for Conservative governments. Rather than looking at ensuring that always those people able to afford it least, those who are hardest hit, those who are underprivileged, those who are disabled, children – all these individuals are seemingly the last ones to benefit and the first ones to pay when it comes time to balance the budget under a Conservative government. It pains me to see this story repeated generation after generation. It was one that I saw growing up under Progressive Conservative governments and, previous to that, Social Credit governments.

It doesn't seem to be that a budget is really balanced if indeed you have these outstanding debts to pay, these debts, these real unpaid burdens that need to be borne by the provincial government to keep people afloat. How can one say, Madam Speaker, as a Finance minister or as a government, that the budget is balanced when we're taking \$3,000 away from AISH recipients, when seniors are being deprived of \$750 of benefits, when a family is losing \$450 a month? Those additional cuts to the pocketbooks of families are what's adding up to this Finance minister's claim that the balance has resulted from having a sharp pencil. Without a sharp pencil – another way to describe a sharp pencil is a sharp, pointy stick. That's what he's done to Alberta families, and he's got the numbers he's wanted to arrange to have a balanced budget by hurting Alberta families.

Indeed, the really challenging part for me, Madam Speaker, is that this government seems to say and do one thing and then actually execute in another way. They like to say things loud enough and long enough, and they hope that people will accept what they're saying as the truth. It assumes a certain amount of stupidity.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to speak on this important piece of legislation, and I wanted to correct a few things. It's interesting to hear the folks on the other side complaining. I heard them complaining about the empty towers in downtown Calgary. In fact, it's really interesting to hear from the worst Finance minister in the history of this province when the government that he was in charge of the financial affairs for drove out \$100 billion worth of investment, mostly from energy companies that had their head office . . . [interjections] See, he can't stand hearing the truth, so he's trying to interrupt me here. But he can't stand the fact, the absolute fact, that their government drove \$100 billion worth of investment out of this province. Companies, including Murphy Oil, Total, many, many others: \$100 billion worth of investment; 180,000 jobs. They drove out all this investment. They drove out all of those jobs. The fact is that now

they're complaining that the office towers are not full. Well, if you wanted to look for why they're not full, look for the people that left town when the NDP was in government.

Member Ceci: Look over there.

Mr. McIver: I can see. I have to say that I've got the floor, and I intend to speak right now. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that they drove people out, 180,000 people, and many of those occupied those buildings in downtown Calgary, those buildings that, until the NDP showed up, were paying a big portion of the property taxes for the city. Now they actually have the chutzpah to come in here and complain that the office towers are empty when they are the absolute source of the emptiness.

They didn't just drive them out gently; they told them that they weren't welcome. They had an Energy minister go into the head offices with their financial reports and say: write me a cheque for that because that's my money. Of course, that actually was the shareholders' money. The fact is that they had an Energy minister that told Albertans to go to British Columbia if they wanted to keep a job. That's what the NDP did. They were unbelievably bad for Alberta, which is why they got fired after one term. Madam Speaker, the folks . . . [interjections] See, I love it. They can't stand hearing the truth about their terrible track record.

In fact, you've got a former Finance minister that is guffawing over a balanced budget. I appreciate that when he was the Finance minister, one year he'd come in with a budget that was \$1 billion less deficit than the year before and pretty much had a parade for himself right here in the House because he was coming so much closer to balancing the budget. Now he's actually making fun of a government that actually succeeded under our current Finance minister. This is a Finance minister where, when he had that parade for himself, at the rate that he was going, it would have been 95 years to balance the budget – 95 years – and he actually is in here complaining about a real balanced budget . . .

Member Ceci: Real on the backs of Albertans.

Mr. McIver: . . . that this government and this Finance minister put – well, let's talk about whose back this is on.

At the rate the NDP were going, the biggest threat to providing health care, education, social services, income supports to Albertans is having a government that can't afford to pay for those things, which is exactly the straight line an NDP government was headed for, either bankruptcy or a complete inability for the government of Alberta to pay for the services that Albertans most needed, under the leadership of that former Finance minister, the same person that actually has the tenacity, the incredible gall to come in here and complain about a real balanced budget and a balanced budget in the same year with record investments in health care, record investments in social services, record investments in education, record investments in mental health care and addictions care, the things that the NDP used to care about when they were honest with themselves.

When they were honest with Alberta, they used to actually care about those things. Now they actually make fun of a budget that is both balanced, with record investments in all the things that they used to care about, and puts Alberta in a position to pay for the things most important to Albertans not just this year but for years going on, because that is what a balanced budget does for you. That is what sharpening your pencil does for you. That is what getting better value for the taxpayers does for you. You can provide the things that Albertans most need forever, not just till you get kicked out of office in four years.

I mean, listen, let's look at Bob Rae in Ontario as an example of where the NDP was headed. Everybody was getting raises. Everybody was happy. All of a sudden the workers for the government found out they were getting every second Friday off. Beautiful till they found out that their pay just got cut by 10 per cent because they weren't getting paid for that second Friday that they got. That is the NDP way of doing government. That is the NDP way of doing finances: spend it till you haven't got it, and then take it away from the people that are doing the work, and expect to be thanked for it. Well, they weren't thanked for it either. Bob Rae and his crew got tossed out, and this crew across the aisle got tossed out. [interjection] Sure, hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, hon. minister. It's a great opportunity to jump in here. You had touched on something that I thought maybe you could elaborate on a little bit. I know the members opposite could never balance the budget. Heck, they couldn't even balance a diet. But I will say that I do remember Rae days, and I do remember how that really affected public-sector workers in Ontario. Maybe the minister could talk a little bit more about the devastation of the NDP in other provinces and this province and how it was going to take us so much work to get back to balance, but with the genius of our Finance minister and the Premier we are there already, something that the members opposite couldn't have done, not even in their wildest dreams. In fact, with the current projection of \$70 oil they still would have run a massive deficit, something that we have overcome. Maybe the member or the minister could talk a little bit more of the devastation of the NDP in other provinces and even here.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: A great time for the Speaker to maybe offer some remarks on the matter of relevancy. Just a reminder that we're on Bill 2 and that the remarks should be tailored as such, which I know the minister is more than capable of.

I'm going to take also a minute to remind all members that the minister is the only one with the floor at this time. There is a significant amount of heckling, which the minister has stated he quite enjoys, which is why I have not intervened up until this point. But just a reminder that what goes around comes around, and I don't think we want to proceed down this path for the rest of the night.

Lastly – and my apologies; I promise I will let you have the rest of your time, Minister – when a lack of acknowledgement on an intervention has been made, that is considered an acknowledgement and an unaccepted intervention and should be taken as such. Try and proceed in such a way. If it is ignored, that is considered a nonrequest to the intervention.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue to talk about the bill and why it's important. It's part of this government balancing their budget. Really, it's important to point out the opposite, what the NDP did comparatively, which is why they should be voting for Bill 2, which is before us. This is a bill that will allow Alberta to pay for those social services, those income supports, the health, the education forever, which will also make Alberta more competitive to provide job opportunities for young people.

I heard people across the way talk about young people, yet they drove them out. When the NDP was done after four years – and we haven't recovered from it yet, Madam Speaker. We've got a lot of work to do. The NDP created such a negative employment situation that unemployment amongst those less than 25 years old is at a

terrible high, and they're still at high rates. They're still at higher rates than we want, but the fact is that right now there are jobs.

In many areas there are more jobs than there are people to fill those jobs. I heard the Premier tonight on Facebook Live talking about, you know, that if you search oil and gas jobs or search jobs in almost any industry, you will find hundreds if not thousands of them unfilled right now. When the NDP was done, there was hardly a job in sight in the whole place and people were leaving Alberta as fast as they could. Now we actually have a different problem, one this government needs to do more work on, to get more people in here, because we have so much work.

We have re-established Alberta as the economic engine of Canada, something the NDP tried very hard to stop – well, succeeded at, actually. If there's one thing they succeeded at, it was at taking the Alberta swagger away, taking away Alberta's place at the top of the economic ladder of Canada. They started with a government that was at the top and took it to the bottom in four years and then wondered why they got fired. It might have been because they weren't paying attention to what matters to Albertans.

That is why we need to support Bill 2. It supports job development. It supports opportunities for our young people, to keep them here. It supports postsecondary education and much more. The minister here always talks in question period about the fact that there's much more support for low-income Albertans and those that might otherwise not be able to support postsecondary education. That's the future. That's the future. Under the NDP the future was running out the door. We haven't solved that yet as our government, but by gosh we're sure working hard at it, and there are way more opportunities for them now than there were two and a half years ago, when this side took government.

Madam Speaker, that is why it's important. That is why, when the other folks laugh at controlling expenditures – I don't know why they do. We balanced the budget. Again, it's really important. This is why they should support this. We balanced the budget with record spending for health care, record spending for education, record spending for social services, record spending for addictions and mental health. We actually are supporting the things that Albertans care about much better, in a much stronger way than the folks across the aisle did when they botched government, and we're in a position to do it potentially forever, because that's the beauty of a balanced budget. I've got to say that it wasn't easy – there were some hard decisions made – but we are supporting the most important things, more than the NDP ever thought about, and we're setting the province up for success again.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think that says what needs to be said. You've got a tale of two governments, a tale of two Finance ministers, a radical success versus a radical failure across the aisle, and that's why we should support Bill 2.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak at third reading of Bill 2. I had the opportunity to speak at second reading. It's always great to speak again. You know, I was going to start to complain that it was starting to get a little cool in the Chamber. I was feeling this blast of air conditioning coming from this side, but then I just felt this large blast of hot air from the other side, and now I'm all warmed up again.

I'm feeling good, Madam Speaker, and I'm pleased to speak to Bill 2 again. A couple of things to say about this bill. The first is that what I find very striking is that this bill really solidifies the decision by this government to continue to tax inflation, which really is on the backs of Albertans. You know, we've been, on this

side of the House, raising this issue for some time. It's a bit of an in-the-weeds kind of thing that not a lot of people would see happening, the decision to deindex personal income tax from inflation, which really means that all Albertans are going to be paying a little bit more.

What I find striking, Madam Speaker, is that in the number of times that we have brought this issue up, we have never actually heard the Premier or the Finance minister actually respond to that, like, actually acknowledge that they have done the very thing that the Premier used to call insidious and a sneaky tax grab. It is such a blatant hypocrisy for claimed fiscal conservatives. The Premier railed against it when he was the head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and spoke about it at length and critiqued it, and as an MP he spoke up. Yet not once has the Premier even acknowledged it, nor has the Minister of Finance. Now, listen, this government has done a lot of things that are hypocritical, a lot of things that they've gone back on their word on, but on this one they remain incredibly silent consistently. Just once I would appreciate one member of that UCP caucus, one member of that front bench to actually stand up and acknowledge that they are doing the very thing that they claimed they would not do.

Now, we know that Albertans have kind of gotten used to that from this government, but this one is, like, key to the heart of who they are as fiscal conservatives, key to the heart of who the Premier is, key to the heart of who I suppose the Minister of Finance is, key conservative values about not taxing individuals' income tax, certainly not increasing their income tax behind their backs, yet they've done that very thing. The fact that they continue to remain silent and all their heads are down and they're not going to stand up and speak to this very issue – and I'm certain they'll stand up and they'll yell at us and do all kinds of other things, but none of them can actually stand up and speak to the fact that they are doing the exact thing that they claimed they would never do and that is core to who they are.

Let's be honest. At this point do they even know who they are, honestly? Like, what are their values anymore? What are their principles? They can't seem to agree with each other. They can't seem to listen to Albertans. One side is calling the other side lunatics. The other ones are calling them – I don't know what they're calling them behind their backs. We can only imagine, I guess, based on what we hear on recorded tapes of conversations. I don't even know if this caucus has a clue what their values and principles are. Frankly, the bigger issue is that Albertans don't know either.

This is something that I would love, for one member of the UCP caucus to stand up and admit: yes, we have done the very thing that we said we wouldn't do, which is bracket creep. Just, like, say the words. The Premier has said it many times as an MP, but will they say that in this House, admit that they did bracket creep?

We hear a lot of bluster about two things. One, I'm not surprised that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and many other UCP members will stand up and want to rail against, you know, the NDP when we were in government, from 2015 to 2019. Of course. What they're hoping that Albertans will forget is that they've actually been government for three years now. So they can talk as much as they want about what happened in 2015-2019, but where are they on their record from 2019 to today's date? On their record – let's be honest. Before this international rise in oil prices this government was actually going to have the largest deficit – the largest deficit – of any government in this country. The only reason they don't is because they won the lottery.

Now, they won the lottery, but Albertans have not. They got a special benefit of rising oil prices, which they know they did nothing to create. So that balanced budget, as they keep talking

about – this is the second issue, Madam Speaker – is good for them, but as we are seeing from this bill, from everything we're hearing, which I know they're hearing from their constituents as well, is that it is not helping Albertans.

8:40

Albertans are paying more every step of the way. They're paying more in income tax because of this government. Their benefits don't get them as far as they used to. In fact, they're actually losing money because of the rise in inflation. We know that Albertans are paying way more in utility rates, way more in electricity, way more in car insurance, all the things that this government not only lifted the caps on, which would be a huge benefit for Alberta families right now as they're trying to pay the bills – all of those rebates that they've now promised: we actually found out they're not coming for months and months and months.

Now, I know it takes months to do a leadership review for this party. I understand, especially when the rules keep changing and they're fighting with each other, that that can take a long time, and we all hang in the balance. But you would think they'd be able to – I don't know – copy a piece of legislation that was already written and produce that in faster than five weeks. You'd think, by how quickly they, say, fired the Election Commissioner or fired 20,000 EAs at the beginning of a pandemic, that they'd be able to create regulations to actually benefit Albertans right away.

An Hon. Member: They fired you guys.

Ms Pancholi: I think, actually, that if we had an election tomorrow, we would find that this government would also be fired pretty darn quickly. I invite them to call the election.

Honestly, given the chaos that's going on in their party right now, maybe some of them want an election. Maybe some of them don't because they wouldn't get their seats back. I understand there are going to be conflicted feelings about that. But over here we're pretty confident that an election is something that Albertans want, and we're pretty confident that it's something that we would welcome as well.

Madam Speaker, I think this government should take a look in the mirror and take a long, hard look at their record, because it isn't so shiny. While it may be good for the bottom line of their budget, balancing their books, Albertans are paying the price. They see and they know that this budget has been balanced on their backs, and now it's about time, I think, for this government to take accountability for that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to take the opportunity to talk a little bit more about our government's record and the things that our government has accomplished. As the member says – and I agree that it's not useful and worth while to talk about what happened between 2015 and '19. We all want to erase that period from our minds because it was a very dark time in the province. I remember, when I was out door-knocking in that period, that when I would ask people at the doors what their number one issue was, a lot of people would just laugh and smirk at me and say: I don't know; get rid of the NDP. That was their number one issue.

You know, I'll happily agree with the member that we shouldn't focus on that period. Let's talk instead about the last three years and what our government has been able to accomplish. Let's look at the record. First and foremost, as it relates to this bill, Madam Speaker, we've been able to deliver a balanced budget, the first balanced

budget in more than a decade, and we did so with the same oil price projections that their government used. So to try and assert that we've balanced the budget because of a large cash windfall due to large energy prices is simply not true. We're using the exact same predictions for oil prices at \$70 a barrel that the members opposite used.

But you know what the difference is, Madam Speaker? Under their projections, their revenue projections of \$70 for a barrel of oil, their government would continue to see massive deficits, but because our government made challenging and difficult decisions to get reckless and uncontrolled spending under control, we have now been able to present a balanced budget to Albertans. This is important because a balanced budget will ensure that we have the capacity to continue to invest in needed and necessary social programs that, I believe we can all agree, are necessary and worth while to contribute.

Apart from delivering a balanced budget, Madam Speaker, let's continue to look at our record over the last three years. From an Advanced Education standpoint, as I've mentioned in this House many times, we're investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions. That's more spaces than the NDP created during their time in government. But, again, let's not focus on their time. Let's focus on what we're doing. As well, we're providing \$15 million in new spending to create new bursaries for low-income students. We're investing \$12 million over three years to continue to ensure that our scholarships are able to meet demand. We're investing \$30 million over three years to expand apprenticeship programming to ensure that all Albertans are able to find successful career pathways. We're investing more in work-integrated learning to ensure that Alberta students can benefit from co-op opportunities and internships. We're investing more in supports for Indigenous learners to ensure that every Albertan can access postsecondary education.

As well, we're seeing record investment in many other areas of our economy: film, television, the tech sector. All of these aspects and facets of our economy and society are increasing significantly, and that's a direct result, Madam Speaker, of the actions that our government has taken over the last three years.

I'm happy to spend the 15 minutes that I have here before you this evening and talk about our government's record in doing precisely that. I won't do that. I agree with the member opposite. I won't spend the entire 15 minutes – she has my word on that – but I'd be happy to because I am very proud of the record of our government in delivering what we were elected to do in 2019: balancing the budget, strengthening the economy, returning job and economic growth to the province, and fighting to build pipelines. Madam Speaker, that is precisely what we campaigned on. That's precisely what we are delivering.

I'm proud to stand by that record, and I'll be doing that by supporting this bill this evening. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate? Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close?

Mr. Toews: Yes, Madam Speaker. I would like to make a few comments in closing tonight. I've been listening with interest to the debate on both sides of the House. I appreciate all members engaging on Bill 2, the budget implementation bill. I do need to correct the record. Now, my colleagues have done a good job, I would suggest, already of really correcting the record, but some of these points bear repeating.

We certainly heard the members opposite talk about the fact that this budget is balanced simply because of the high price of oil. Well, Madam Speaker, oil is high today. WTI was over \$100 today.

That's a high price of oil. But I want to remind all members of this House that we didn't use \$100 in our projections for the price of west Texas intermediate, the price of oil. We used \$70 for the upcoming year, \$69 for the mid-year, and \$66.50 for the out-year. So, yes, higher energy prices were part of the story but only a small part of the story.

In fact, had we continued on the spending trajectory that we inherited from the members opposite, Madam Speaker, we would not have a budget surplus this current fiscal year, the next year, or the following year; we would have deficits in all three years. In fact, for the current fiscal year, which is the first year of this budget, instead of a \$500 million projected surplus, we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit.

Madam Speaker, fiscal discipline, fiscal responsibility matters. That's what the members on this side of the aisle have brought over the last three years, and it has been a team effort. But there's more than fiscal discipline, albeit fiscal discipline is so important, to this budget.

I want to talk about one other thing. As we have worked hard to bring fiscal discipline, we've done it surgically and thoughtfully. We've done it by maintaining the highest levels of support for seniors of any province, the highest levels of support for families of any province. We've done it with the highest levels of support for the most vulnerable. Why, Madam Speaker? Because that matters to Albertans and that matters to this government.

We've done all of that and still balanced the budget. We've done all of that yet have turned down that spending trajectory, that irresponsible spending trajectory, that would have left this province with perpetual deficits, downloading irresponsible fiscal decisions onto the next generation. We will not do that. This budget demonstrates our resolve, Madam Speaker.

But there's more. Budget 2022 was about positioning the province of Alberta for investment attraction, disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth that leads to expanded fiscal capacity. Madam Speaker, there are a whole number of pieces that go into a business environment. One of those is our tax rate. Tax rates matter. Business tax rates matter. In fact, I can point to an investment project here just outside of Edmonton. Fortune Minerals has announced that they're going to build a plant just out of Edmonton. Why did they choose Alberta? This was their rationale, and they made it public. Because of Alberta's preferential corporate tax rate. Corporate tax rates matter.

8:50

Madam Speaker, I need to also state this. We've dropped Alberta's corporate tax rate by one-third to attract investment. The result of that measure, along with a number of other measures to position this province to be most competitive, has resulted in economic growth, expanded fiscal capacity, where we will be collecting on average \$400 million more per year in corporate tax revenue over this fiscal plan than the members across the aisle, when they were in government, collected over their four-year term.

I know my time is almost up, but Budget 2022 is an inflection point in this province, when we round a corner. It is the time when, ultimately, we position this province not for perpetual deficits, not for downloading irresponsible fiscal decisions onto the next generation, not for sending tens of billions of dollars of investment out of the province, creating job loss and business loss for thousands and thousands of Albertans, but in fact, Madam Speaker, Budget 2022 is about ensuring this province has a future, ensuring the next generation of Albertans can choose Alberta to raise a family, pursue a career, start a business, live in prosperity, and live in freedom.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure tonight to recommend to every member of this House to support Bill 2. Let's pass this bill. Let's support the budget. Let's put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory. Let's put this province on a trajectory where the next generation can live in freedom and prosperity.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 13 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again this evening to speak this time about Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act, in second reading. I've been doing a little bit of searching to prepare myself to make remarks this evening about this piece of legislation. To be clear, the legislation, I think, is a necessary addition to our laws on the books in the province to govern appropriately new innovations and technology and financial services companies that are arising to meet the needs in a very fast-moving, changing world.

The biggest issue that I think can be had with this piece of legislation is not that it's not needed; it's just that it gives the Minister of Finance unwieldy powers, asking us to trust him. This legislation, like many other pieces that we've seen before us from this UCP government, is a piece of legislation which demands that the government be trusted to not go too far one way or the other in making regulations, in this case in a new field.

If one simply does a quick search to find the number of different types of fintech companies that are out there, whether here in the province, across the country, throughout North America, or globally, it's a massively multiplying and exponentially increasing field of new fintech companies to serve any variety of needs that one might imagine.

It's actually very interesting to see some of the things that are coming up, whether it be a firm like Catalyx, that provides blockchain trading platforms, or PayShepherd, a fintech payment platform. ATB Financial is in fact listed as one of those in Alberta that's involved in fintech. If you just go right on through, you can find places like Chroma technologies, financial technology and property solutions toward the rental experience; Bitcoin Well, a Bitcoin ATM company headquartered here in Edmonton. There are lots and lots and lots of companies that are fintech company start-ups in many, many, many cases that, I think, should be covered under legislation so that they have a, quote, unquote, sandbox that they can be governed within.

The trouble with the legislation as we see it before us today, Madam Speaker, is that this sandbox, this framework that these companies will be regulated within, basically, is filled with players that are decided upon by the Finance minister according to the legislation. Whether or not it is something that needs to be done is not the question with this legislation. It's, in fact, a sector that employs more than 60,000 Albertans and growing, and we support the innovation in this space to grow and diversify the economy, but it's the latitude that is given to the minister involved that we have concerns with.

These powers might assist a regulatory sandbox, but they also require the Assembly and the public to just trust the government to do the right thing, and in this province in many, many ways, I think, it's been demonstrated that we have lost trust in this government, and unfortunately that's caused people to lose trust in government itself. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about supportive services to human beings like AISH, as we talked about, whether it's education, firing educational assistants and getting into major spat with the ATA and teachers in general, firing doctors and ripping up contracts. Any manner of portfolio that one wants to speak about, Madam Speaker, this government has found a way to create distrust and disharmony.

That's why it gives me pause to see in Bill 13 a piece of legislation that once again requires us to fully put our trust in this case in the ministry and the Minister of Finance. I think the better way of going about it was to not have all that authority rest with the minister himself and to narrow the discretion that he has under the legislation.

As you look at the field itself, it's truly an exciting field. It almost bears some resemblance to the oil patch and its resourcefulness as far as new companies are concerned and how companies, local ones, many of them, are seeing a niche opportunity and taking advantage of it by creating a start-up. But, indeed, that entrepreneurialism, which is part and parcel of our province and many jurisdictions throughout the world, still has to be governed by rules and regulations which protect the public.

The financial services sector is one that's undergoing a great revolution globally, and the public deserves to know that it can trust that financial services sector. Typically when an Albertan goes to bed and they've got \$5,000 in their savings account, they feel pretty comfortable that when they wake up in the morning, that \$5,000 will still be there and that that financial institution wouldn't have failed. I think that's the kind of confidence that the people of this province want to have in their financial services sector and in the fintech sector that will be regulated by this Financial Innovation Act, that the government has so much control over through the Minister of Finance.

9:00

There are a number of entirely appropriate safeguards that ministers can apply, but they're not quantified in the legislation as it would be impossible to know what's appropriate for new ideas that don't exist yet. They could include, for example, a capital threshold to support a venture, appropriate insurance coverage, risk management procedures and policies. Certainly, Madam Speaker, if one is to take even a cursory look at the multitudes of small companies, small start-ups that have begun here in this province and around the world to identify and then serve a niche sector of the financial services sector, it certainly begs to be properly regulated so that people are protected. You know, appropriate insurance, risk management procedures, and capital thresholds to support the ventures are governing guideposts that one would hope are things that the minister would be having within the legislation.

Finally, Madam Speaker, any certificate issued by the government would be made public in this case. If the regulator – for example, the superintendent of financial institutions of Treasury Board and Finance – finds that any company breaches their terms, the fines are up to \$100,000 for a first offence, \$200,000 for a subsequent offence.

Now, it's been legislation that's been received warmly by a broad cross-section of people in Alberta. Indeed, the intent is, of course, to provide comfort in, actually, its implementation as we progress through the period of time that we have right now, where it's – I wouldn't describe it as the Wild West, but it certainly is a very, very

effervescent field in financial services. It's exciting, and there are tremendous business opportunities that exist. It's a realm where, while not deterring the entrepreneurial activity, you also want to make sure that there are sidelines and goalposts that are not breached. The minister has tremendous scope and power in this legislation and discretion, which I think may be beyond what the minister should be exercising in the regulation of this new industry.

Now, another element that we seemingly have come to the surface regularly when we speak about our financial services sector or any sector that has clients and collects data – the real estate industry was no different when I was working in it. It had many, many rules around the protection of data and the privacy of your clients. But when it comes to protecting the privacy of Albertans and the powers to issue exemptions to our privacy laws, is there anything that's on or off the table here for this government? How will consumers know, Madam Speaker, that when they're using a new product or service or technology that's operating within this regulatory sandbox – if it's regulated at a much lower level to allow the preponderance of successful new start-ups, is the government prepared to consider some type of a warning label to individual consumers so that they really know what they're getting into?

In this country we have a very large and well-deserved faith in our major financial institutions. We have a trust in them because they've earned that. We know they're not going to fail. They're very, very well regulated. We know that our banks and our trust companies and our credit unions are very, very sound and secure because they're regulated quite well, and they're respected around the world for that. That's the type of faith and confidence that we need to ensure Albertans have, and those investors from outside Alberta who want to come and invest in these start-ups must have that faith and confidence in these start-ups because of the regulations that govern them. That's what I hope we don't lose by having too much discretion given to the minister in applying the regulations to these start-ups in this new regulatory sandbox, as it's called.

It's legislation that would create a sandbox where financial services companies and financial technology companies could test new products and services and technology, and it's the first sort of regulatory sandbox of its kind regulated directly by a provincial government, as in this case by Treasury Board and Finance. It builds on a regulatory sandbox initiative that was started under the previous NDP government in Alberta and in other provinces in the securities space, which is regulated by the Alberta Securities Commission in Alberta. It's something that is novel, but it's not brand new.

It's important, I think, to keep in mind the goal of these new regulatory sandboxes, to ensure that the public confidence is secure, to know that we have in this country a banking and financial institution framework and network that is the envy of most of the world, Madam Speaker. We have had a history of very, very solid Canadian banks emanating out of sort of the British banking system, a counterpart to those that have developed in the United States, and we have had very, very few financial institutions fail in this country, because of our acceptance of very, very careful regulation and tight regulation to ensure that the soundness of these financial institutions is never brought into question. I think that even during some of the most extreme times in the financial meltdown in 2008, 2009 we never came to the point that many other financial institutions in the world came to, where it was thought that they might actually fail. There were measures taken by government to assist then, but we withstood those tumultuous times because of the strict regulations that Canadian financial institutions must adhere to.

I think the same type of attitude, the same dedication to careful regulation has to be maintained in this legislation in a new field, which is really burgeoning. It was quite astonishing to see the numbers of small start-ups in Edmonton and Calgary, provincially, and throughout the country, in Canada. We're not talking tens and twenties; we're talking hundreds of small fintech companies, small start-ups. Of course, with the start-ups, Madam Speaker, as in any business, you're going to see significant failures. Some of them just won't get off the ground. Some will get to a certain level and fail for a variety of reasons. Quite often scaling up is a difficulty. Indeed, all the more reason for the government to be very, very careful with legislation regulating this new sandbox that the new, exciting companies will be playing in. It's serious business, because we're looking for investment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. I do appreciate and acknowledge the comments by our opposition member previous. I think he has pointed out some key messages, that we do have to regulate this in a very careful way. That's why it's my pleasure to rise and thank the minister, through you, Madam Speaker, for the great work in bringing this bill forward, particularly to second reading, Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

Our government has been working continually for Albertans in nearly every economic sector. Alberta's economy is more diverse than ever as we intensely focus on creating more jobs and building our economy.

A little bit of history from what we were able to dig up in this sector. From 2000 to 2020 Alberta's real gross domestic product in the financial services sector grew at an average annual rate of more than 4 per cent, outpacing growth in all other provinces and contributing over \$14 billion to the provincial GDP in 2020. Nearly 63,000 Albertans were employed in the financial services sector in 2019, and we want to continue to build on this growth and the attractiveness of doing business in Alberta.

9:10

In Bill 13 the proposed rules will make it easier for entrepreneurs anywhere in the province to test products in the emerging field of cryptocurrencies and online banking. If passed, this bill would set up what is known as a regulatory sandbox, allowing companies, under strict government supervision, to test new programs and products, with temporary exemptions on select regulations and requirements. Companies would also gain access to certain information, with strict parameters and individual permissions governed by the Minister of Finance and his advisory team. These are just some of the reasons I think Bill 13 is essential to the growth of our economy here in Alberta, by exploring, challenging the status quo and engaging with industry to provide new and innovative ideas to all Albertans and potentially all Canadians.

The government of Ontario had the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce, which recommended the creation of an Ontario fintech regulatory sandbox and a Canada-wide regulatory sandbox for all financial services. So this idea isn't only being considered here in Alberta. This regulatory sandbox is already being used in various industries and sectors world-wide in places like the United Kingdom, the United States, particularly the states of Arizona and Wyoming, Hong Kong, and Australia. The regulation helps create tech jobs and keeps these regions at the forefront of cutting-edge financial technology, which also attracts world-class companies and minds searching for new ideas. No other Canadian province or territory has yet established a regulatory

sandbox for the finance and fintech sector, but Alberta seeks to be the first.

Regardless, the Canadian Securities Administrators, the CSA, in partnership with the Alberta Securities Commission, the ASC, established their securities-related regulatory sandbox in 2016. The establishment of an Alberta regulatory sandbox would be complementary to the CSA and ASC's regulatory sandbox and provide the certainty, security, privacy, and governance needed for the financial technology sector to operate here in Alberta more fully.

Margaret Paproski, the chief operating officer, general counsel, and co-founder of InvestDefy, stated on March 31:

I applaud the Alberta government's commitment to supporting innovators and businesses in financial services and fintech with its proposed Financial Innovation Act. With so much regulatory uncertainty making it difficult to create and launch cutting edge products, the regulatory sandbox is an extremely welcome initiative and demonstrates Alberta's commitment to being a leader in this space.

That's something I think we should all be proud of.

I want to take a moment to talk about some of the specific criteria each of the applicants would have to meet to be eligible to operate under this legislation. The first: the physical presence requirement. Applicants must maintain a corporate physical presence right here in Alberta, meaning that applicants must have an office in Alberta or senior staff living in the province of Alberta.

The financial services requirement: the regulatory sandbox is designed for companies that offer financial products or services. This isn't just a broad, blanket legislation applying to all kinds of different sectors but specifically to fintech and financial products.

The innovation test: applicants must adequately explain how each eligible product or service is considered new and original or a new adaptation or a material improvement on another product or service. Applicants would not receive exemptions for products or services currently offered in Alberta by other companies. They must be new.

The business plan requirement: applicants must provide a sound, viable business plan, including details for testing their financial product or service and plans to exit the regulatory sandbox.

In addition to these requirements, there are also case-by-case dependent requirements like risk management policy, security, privacy, and insurance qualities that would be decided by the minister's expertise and governing advisers.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about the attention to detail to ensure transparency. The government will be making a website available to the public, which would outline, one, the name of each participant issued acceptance; two, a description of the product or service each participant is offering through the sandbox; three, a list of the exemptions provided to respective participants; four, any terms, conditions, or restrictions imposed by the minister on a case-by-case basis; and five, any amendments, revocation, or cancellation of the acceptance certificate.

Once and if passed, the goal of this bill is simply to create a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies in Alberta. Alberta would be Canada's first province or territory to establish a regulatory sandbox for these sectors. These measures would ensure that Alberta remains a growing destination of choice for financial services and financial technology companies, growing business and creating jobs. It will benefit Albertans through innovative products and services for generations to come as well as diversifying our economy even further. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for bringing this bill forward. I would ask that all of our colleagues in this place support this bill.

Thank you.

Member Ceci: I appreciate the opportunity to address this at second reading, Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13, and I appreciate the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing some information that I think will be helpful to Albertans. This is a new area to venture into, and we need to be as clear as possible so that Albertans understand what their government is doing. There obviously is a huge interest not only from the 63,000 employees who work in this area but also potentially for the new sector that will flourish and develop in Alberta as a result of this bill. I'm certainly hoping that that's the case and that we see even more billions added to our provincial GDP. That can only be a good thing for Albertans.

I do want to say that I'm glad to hear ASC, Alberta Securities Commission, mentioned. They have always been stalwarts in terms of ensuring that the securities sector, the security space, in this province remains strong and trustworthy. They do good work in terms of ensuring that the capital Albertans invest and others invest in securities is regulated, that the commission goes after people who are taking advantage of the investments of Albertans.

I remember that back when I was Finance minister, I got a call from the Finance minister of the day, who was a member of the Conservative Party of Canada under the Harper government, and he said: "I want you to essentially get rid of the Alberta Securities Commission. I want you to consolidate it across the country. We want to consolidate it across the country." And I said: "Why would I do that? We have different companies. We have an energy sector here that we know well and our Securities Commission knows well. They can stand up for Albertans better than a consolidated commission out of Toronto likely could." And he said, "Well, I think you're going in the wrong direction." I said, "Well, I don't think so."

Alberta needs its own security commission, and the Member for Lethbridge-East was correct in saying that they were innovative and they were strong and they did things that this Financial Innovation Act is building off of. We may not have had that – we likely wouldn't have had that – had I listened and taken the direction of the federal Finance minister at the time of the Conservative Party of Canada.

I, too, want to say that there are positive aspects of this bill. I think it is something that should get a lot of airtime, publicity. There should be media about it so that Albertans can understand what this bill is all about. I think on this side we have general broad policy agreement in this approach, and I would stand up and support it. I will stand up and support it.

9:20

It's new legislation, however, so that's why I am suggesting that we need to be speaking about it frequently through potentially our own communications to our citizens, because where it is a regulatory sandbox, that's new terminology for Albertans. I think it's a place where new products and services and technology should be tested so that we keep, essentially, a bit of a tighter grip on it initially so that it proves itself over the long term. I do think it's important that there be the necessary expertise, whether that be in Treasury Board and Finance and bureaucracy, where this initiative can be understood, transparently worked on, and ensured that we're not going down the wrong road.

For the kinds of exemptions that will be sought out by companies that want to work in this area, they are significant in number, so we need to ensure that the decisions made in this area – because they're not unsubstantial. I mean, they're in the following acts: the loans and trust act; the Credit Union Act; ATB Financial Act; Consumer Protection Act, with the additional approval from the Minister of Service Alberta in that area; personal information and privacy, with additional approval from the Information and Privacy Commissioner;

the Financial Consumers Act; and other acts that could be added via regulation at a later date.

The Member for Lethbridge-East talked about how entry into the sandbox can take place. I won't go over that. But that's useful to know as well because there is direct skin in the game or investment in Alberta that must be a case. They must make it in terms of making a business case for participation in the sandbox.

The information about the exemptions that are granted: I think it's necessary that that information be clearly laid out in terms of the conditions and the restrictions, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, as well as an expiry date so that Albertans can know what decisions are being made on exemptions that other businesses have to meet or not get exemptions for but in this space they're granted so Albertans on their own can come to some understanding if there is additional, I guess, benefit for the entrance into the sandbox for Alberta.

I wonder about the size of the penalties, fines for offences, with \$100,000 being for the first offence and \$200,000 being for any subsequent offence, when companies are found in breach of the terms that they have already been approved of having. I just wonder if that's an adequate amount, seeing the potential problems that will be caused to Albertans if offences are committed.

I'm glad, as the Member for Lethbridge-East talked about, that there is a cross-section of support for this endeavour in this province. I'm glad to understand that and hear that. I think that shows that things potentially are on the right track. The challenge, I think, will be to ensure that the broad powers given to the minister in this case have some checks and balances along the way and that there is transparency in terms of the decision-making that is made by the minister with regard to these businesses that are starting up in this space, because we do have some pretty problematic decisions that have been made by government as a whole over the last two and a half, three years, and I wouldn't want to see those recreated in this space as well, nor would Albertans benefit from some of the bad decision-making that has been made, for instance the pipeline investment of \$1.3 billion that was made by this government with no return at all.

Those are some of the concerns that I would kind of just want to put on the record, recognizing that this is a start and needs to see some positive steps taken. I'm willing to give it that support so that it can take those steps but with some caution around the lack of transparency, the size of the fines.

I'll sit down. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise just to add some brief comments here around Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I think my friends from Edmonton-McClung and Calgary-Buffalo have pretty much spoken to most of the points I want to make, but I guess there's something I do really want to highlight here.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I guess, to begin with, when it comes to innovation, I'm certainly in favour of that. You know, getting a chance to do new things, cool things that make things easier for people: that's always a desirable effect. Of course, when those things do go sideways – and you can certainly ask my wife this. When she doesn't get the services that she is expecting and certainly that she's paid for, I could probably go up onto the roof of my house and find a few missing shingles because of those cases. I don't think there's anything wrong with Albertans demanding a certain level even when we're talking about

a potential new innovation, say, for instance, around financial services, which is what Bill 13 is starting to enable here.

As my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, the one concern I do have in this bill is around the great leeway that this bill does grant the minister. You know, I can't help but think again: serving back in the 29th Legislature, members of the government bench, members of the government caucus who also served during those times had significant concerns every single time it was thought that extra abilities, extra powers, extra creative decision-making was being allowed to a minister. I can't help but wonder what members who had served back at that time would have thought when reading through Bill 13, because those are some of the concerns I have. Really, at the end of the day, what you're asking members of this House and quite more broadly the public in general: trust us; trust us to get it right.

Well, there's my concern with this, Mr. Speaker, you know, trusting the government, trusting the Premier. I trusted the Premier to disclose his donor list. We see how that worked out. Albertans trusted him to disclose his donor list, and that never happened. The government had said: well, trust us; we're going to give this very big corporate tax giveaway, and it's going to create 100,000 jobs and it's going to fill the business towers.

Mr. McIver: Check.

Mr. Nielsen: That kind of fell up a little bit short, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

They said: trust us on the new curriculum revamp. We've seen how that has gone over with people, you know. "Trust us to fix the insurance premiums." Those have been running wild. I've got constituents that have come to me and said that their auto insurance went up 46 per cent, their condo insurance went up 57 per cent. Yet the Premier went and asked, "Please reduce the premiums" and somehow managed to haggle – what? – a 3 per cent to 5 per cent reduction after them going up 10 per cent to 30 per cent on average. There was the trust.

9:30

Again, my friend from Calgary-Buffalo also mentioned that we trusted you: you bet \$1.3 billion on Donald Trump, and you lost that bet. You know, the government said, "Trust us to get the word out around our energy sector; it's only going to cost \$30 million a year," bumbled two logos, and the biggest thing we have to show for it is chasing after Bigfoot. What's next? "Trust us to go after Opopogo." I don't know.

Bill 13 significantly asks us and Albertans to trust them, so I'm really going to try to encourage the government that you need to work on this trust issue because it hasn't been going very well for you so far. I just really wanted to highlight that, Mr. Speaker, at this point.

I think what I will do is motion to adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Debate adjourned April 20: Member Loyola speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely an honour to rise in this Chamber and to speak to Bill 14. In fact, I did not get a chance to speak in the Chamber yesterday, so as is my tradition, I'd like to just acknowledge all the front-line workers who are

continuing to work so hard for all of us. Of course, we are still in a pandemic, so a shout-out to all those workers in health care and education and retail and on the front lines, wherever you are. You're seen and you are valued.

You know, I'm actually quite pleased to be able to speak to Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, and, in fact, to be able to speak to it as the critic for Status of Women, because, of course, it was the Associate Minister of Status of Women who has sponsored this bill. Yeah. Gosh, this is a bill that is certainly overdue and a long time coming.

I'm very happy, actually, that I get – I was joking about the fact – to speak before the two lawyers who are planning to speak, not that I'm referring to their presence or absence but, spoiler, they will be speaking on this bill. I'm happy that I get to speak before them because I will admit, of course, that my knowledge of the legal system is not quite as strong as the members for Edmonton-Whitemud and Calgary-Mountain View, but, you know, I can talk about this a little bit from just what I've heard from stakeholders and from stories that have been shared with me.

I shared earlier today that one of the most powerful parts of my job – I don't know if all the MLAs would agree – for me is to be able to hear people's stories and to meet folks. Actually, earlier today I met two lovely young women here in Edmonton who are both health care workers. One is a respiratory therapist, and the other is a nurse. Their names are – I'm sure they won't mind because I already posted on social media – Sabreena and Anna. I met them because they actually met at the beginning of the pandemic. They are going to get married in September, and they asked if I would be their wedding officiant. Yeah. It's really exciting – and they're both, obviously, doing so much on the front lines of health care – just to be able to meet them.

I tell that story and just, you know, the power of story because when I saw this bill come up, I thought about the survivors of sexual assault and sexual violence who I've been able to connect with in my role as the critic for Status of Women. A few stories stand out, but I'll share one, and that's the story of Emma Nikolai-Wilson. She actually stood with us when we opposed this government's horrific cuts to victims of crime. She had reached out to me, and she said that she was willing to share her story of sexual assault. Don't worry; I am tying this back to the bill, and I'm not going to solely use this as an opportunity to remind this government of their poor choices in the past but to talk about why we need to be taking sexual assault and sexual abuse seriously. I know that no one in this Chamber would disagree with that sentiment.

Emma is one of the, believe it or not, 1.95 million people in Alberta every year who have survived sexual assault or sexual abuse. Basically, I mean, you're talking about close to 1 in 2 Albertans experience sexual violence of some form. That's according to data from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, and those are just staggering numbers, absolutely. You know, we know that one of the significant challenges when it comes to sexual assault and sexual abuse is that numbers show that roughly only 5 per cent of survivors in Canada report the incident, so you can't even imagine how many people are struggling, suffering in silence. Yeah. I think about people like Emma, who shared her story with me. I can think about others who've shared their just incredibly heartbreaking stories of sexual violence, and it's on all of us as legislators to hear those stories and to act.

You know, this is why I'm happy to see that this government is making it a requirement for sexual assault training for judges to be a requirement. I do want to get on the record, though – and as I've already alluded to, I know my colleagues will be able to expand in even more detail on some of the concerns that we have, but I saw this actually right away when the bill was introduced as a concern

– that the sexual assault training actually applies to future judges; it doesn't apply to sitting judges. I think what the government said in response is that they're hoping that sitting judges will get training through existing education plans.

Well, it's hard. You know, they're kind of justifying that they'll address this eventually, but I think it's hard to trust that that will in fact be the case. Again, I can come back to the example of victims of crime and the slashing of those funds and being told, as an example there, that: "Oh, no, no" – I try not to use the word "victims," but of course that's the name of the fund – "survivors will have supports." Sure enough, I heard from countless Albertans who didn't get supports, who were denied claims.

This is what we've raised, and I truly actually believe that we might be able to get some movement from this government on that decision on victims of crime. We know that survivors of sexual assault, sexual violence: many often don't report, and if they do report, they take their time reporting because it's incredibly traumatic, right? So the changes to the victims of crime fund meant that if survivors didn't apply within a 45-day window, they would be denied. That's exactly what has happened to some folks. I give that context to say that you can imagine why we are concerned. We are skeptical about this government just promising that they'll address some of these issues later on.

9:40

A couple of things, a couple of other concerns that I want to raise. I will actually point out that I'm going to use the words of somebody who's far more versed on these issues than I am, and that's Jennifer Koshan. She is a law professor at the University of Calgary. I think she's only so far issued a tweet thread, but I think – I'm looking at my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud – she is planning on writing a blog about this. Yeah. I've read much of her work before, and although I still often need it explained to me by my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, she does do a good job of distilling some of the issues.

She did this with one piece of this proposed bill in front of us, Bill 14, and that's on the definition of – oh, I'm sorry; I closed my window; here we go – social context. This bill, Bill 14, that we have in front of us is built on some of the work in federal Bill C-3. In Bill C-3 they explain social context "to include education on systemic racism and systemic discrimination as well as myths and stereotypes associated with sexual assault complainants." I can share that with *Hansard* because I am quoting her tweet directly. One of the issues that we see here in Bill 14 is that this term is not defined, and that's troubling at a time when, you know, we should be absolutely equipping judges, well, all Canadians in fact, with an understanding of systemic racism and systemic discrimination and taking an intersectional lens to look at the causes of some of these issues. She points out as well myths and stereotypes associated with sexual assault complainants.

I mean, we know, anybody who's followed some of the past on what led up to Bill 14, the issues with – was it Justice Robin Camp? – you know, the perpetuation of rape myths, of awful stereotypes. It's clear not just in the justice system but in the justice system as well that these myths persist, right? So what an opportunity – perhaps it's the teacher in me – to really educate and to talk about or to dig into some of the bigger issues around myths and around stereotypes.

Again, I really want to reiterate the piece around systemic racism as well, right? You know, we've talked in this Chamber about the barriers that racialized folks have experienced in navigating the justice system. No one in this Chamber needs to be explained the fact that Indigenous folks are overrepresented in the justice system. This is why we need to ensure that judges are equipped with a really

broad understanding of these issues, including systemic racism, systemic discrimination as well, and just really given a good understanding of what social context issues really mean, and I would add to that looking at issues around gender.

We also know that there are – you know, there is homophobia and there's transphobia in the justice system as well. Perhaps it's not always as obvious. But again, this is where taking that intersectional lens is so critical. I know intersectionality is not a word that this government seems to embrace, and I'm not saying that just to start anything. It was, in fact, their Premier who said that intersectionality is a, quote, unquote, kooky theory. We've seen that very ideology play itself out in the crushing of GBA plus, gender-based analysis plus, across this government. For folks who don't know, GBA plus is a really important policy lens to ensure that policies and programs from governments are very much analyzed from an intersectional lens before being passed and before impacting the lives of Albertans. I've called on the previous Associate Minister of Status of Women and the current minister – I called on them both – to do better because when asked if there was any sort of lens being applied to legislation, policies, programs, the answer is no.

That was something that I was so proud to see under this government, under the NDP government, because when there is a gender-based lens applied, we know that the results are better as well. I know I'm explaining it in a simplistic way, but the reality is that I'm concerned. I'll come back to Bill 14. I'm concerned, when we've got a record like that from this government, that we won't see the proper education and training for judges that they ought to have. So I'm calling on this government to really think about that as well, and like I said – I know my colleagues are going to speak to this as well – I do hope that we get some responses from this government on some of the questions that we're going to raise.

Again, I'm happy that this piece of legislation is before us – and perhaps there will be some amendments forthcoming – but we've got an opportunity to make a really important bill, a good bill a lot better and a lot stronger. I think everybody in this Chamber can agree that on an issue as important as sexual assault and sexual violence we want to get it right. When you've got experts in law urging you to amend and to make it better, I think we should listen to them.

With that, I think I will wrap up my remarks here right away and again, you know, just point out that I am happy to see this from this ministry, but I urge the minister to take our points seriously.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this incredibly important piece of legislation. I'd like to start out by saying that I am supportive of the bill insofar as it goes, but I think that there are a few things that could be done to make it better. I think it's worth starting with the importance of this bill.

There is a long-standing legal tradition of sort of separation of powers between the legislative branch, which is us, and the judiciary. It's important that people not be intersecting unnecessarily into each other's jurisdiction. I think we see in the U.S. a system where judges are elected. That has some problems because it can sort of result in the pushing to do things that people are reactive to in the moment. Rather than thinking of the system, rather than thinking of the overall law, it can cause people to react in the moment, and that's problematic.

Our system doesn't suffer from that problem, and I think that's important, but a problem that I think it potentially does suffer from is somewhat of a problem with inertia. There has been a lot of movement in the science and the understanding of trauma and the understanding of how individuals behave after a trauma, and I think that while the law itself has done a good job of keeping up with that, we need to make sure that the people who hold the discretion of the application of that law, in this case judges, are keeping up with the advances in the law.

The law has been clear for a long time that certain myths and stereotypes are impermissible and that a judge cannot use those things in their reasoning. So questions about, you know, "Why didn't she report it right away? Why did she put herself in that situation? Why didn't she wear a longer skirt?" those pieces of analysis, aren't allowed anymore. Unfortunately, some of those myths stay with us in society and have followed us to the justice system. That is incredibly problematic, so it is very important that we make advances in this way.

9:50

I will give credit to the Provincial Court. I know they have done a lot of work around offering this training and ensuring that all of their judges are in a position to take it. There are some systems in place to deal with problems that arise. I, obviously, got a very sort of up-close and personal encounter with this when I served as the Minister of Justice in this province. I received a letter from several professors, several of whom had actually taught me, about a case that had occurred before the Provincial Court of Alberta in which a number of those myths and stereotypes were used in the reasoning. That was incredibly troubling. The transcripts were long. I read them in detail, and I ultimately took a very rare step, potentially unprecedented in the history of Alberta, of writing to my federal counterpart to make a complaint with respect to that judge.

The reason for that was that the treatment of the victim in that instance by the justice system was deeply inappropriate. The application of reasoning, questioning like "Why didn't she keep her knees together?" reasoning around whether or not she had consensually engaged in activity because she was homeless and she was essentially trading that for a place to stay, was extremely problematic, and the myths and stereotypes in the decision were very troubling. Ultimately, the judge was removed from the bench, which I think was the right outcome, but we need to keep in mind that this is just one case, and there are probably many in which similar things have occurred.

Even when we're talking about cases, we're talking about a very small fraction of the sexual assaults that are actually occurring out there, because the evidence is quite clear that women do not report, and they don't report in part out of fear for how they will be treated by society and how they will be treated by the justice system. There are a lot of problems, and this is definitely a solution to one of them, so I don't think it should be understated, the importance of this. However, I think that by itself it is insufficient.

One of the things that happened early on in the UCP's tenure is that they made changes to the victims of crime fund, changes that I think are extremely problematic. Essentially, what those changes did: prior to that, the victims of crime fund, which is a surcharge placed on – it actually primarily comes from speeding tickets, but basically most financial things that go through Provincial Court have a victim's fine surcharge on them, and it goes into the victims fund. The victims fund is intended to be used to support victims of crime in this province. The UCP changed that so that was no longer necessary. Now the victims of crime fund is essentially used to fund other projects. Now, I'm not presuming that those projects are bad – many of those projects are fine – but those should be funded with

government funds, because the results of these changes are that a large portion of the fund is now going to fund government services and not going to victims of crime. The government actually refused, at that time, an amendment that would have ensured that at least a certain portion of the fund was reserved for victims' programming.

The result of this is that the funding that goes to groups that support victims has been decreased when, in fact, it needed to be increased, and victims have been denied benefits. One of the ways in which this happens is that certain streams of benefits have been cut off, so that's extremely problematic. Another way in which this has happened – and this is important when we're talking about victims of sexual assault – is that they have put in place a time limit of 45 days. The victim has to apply to the fund within 45 days.

I don't know how many members of this House have had the misfortune of knowing someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault, but 45 days isn't enough time. People are still processing their trauma and what has happened to them, and they may not choose to come forward in that amount of time. They may need longer than that, and in fact I believe that these victims who have survived a sexual assault – we're talking about people who have survived sexual assault. They have had agency taken away from them in a very deep and personal fashion, and we should give them as much agency over how they process that as we can.

That was one of the reasons why, when we were in government, we removed the limitations period on their ability to sue in civil court. The civil process you can now pursue at any time so that people are not forced into making that decision by an arbitrary timeline. They have the time to process it in whatever way they see fit, and then they are able to come forward when they choose. Having this 45-day limit on the application is extremely problematic.

Now, it wasn't a lot of money that people got, maybe enough to cover, you know, some portion of the counselling they needed or to take some time off work just to emotionally process what had happened or maybe even to pay for a course they had to withdraw from at school because they just weren't able to cope in those circumstances. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was meaningful and it was something, and it was something that we could do for them. I think that that's a big part. So I think that this, without reforms to that victims of crime act, is not sufficient on its own.

I think another thing worth noting are a couple of issues with the bill itself. One of the questions that we've had sort of around this is about definitions of terms. It requires education in sexual assault law and social context issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already gone on longer than I intended.

Social context issues is a term that is taken from federal legislation, and in federal legislation social context issues is defined. The reason I think that that is important is because it is defined to include systemic racism. That is important. I think it is important that we put into legislation the requirement that some of the training be around systemic racism.

I mean, certainly, in my experience many lawyers don't even really understand what that means. Many lawyers still think and many justice system participants still think that when you say "systemic racism," what you mean is that the individuals in the system are racist. That's not what it means at all. What it means is that the results of the system in its entirety have a differential impact on people of different races.

I honestly don't think that anyone who is paying the slightest bit of attention to the justice system can deny that that is the case. The incarceration rate for Indigenous people is wildly disproportionate, and that is a result of the systems. What else can it be a result of? If

you are getting an outcome that doesn't reflect the distribution in the population, if you're suggesting that the system isn't responsible for the outcome, what you're suggesting is that certain people have a greater proclivity to criminality, which is obviously false. It's obviously not true. So I think systemic racism is fairly well demonstrated, and I think it's worth using that definition in this legislation to make sure that those issues are being recognized by the system as a whole.

10:00

Finally, another one of the questions I have about this is that since this legislation occurred at the federal level, there's been a lot of conversation about survivors of domestic violence and whether there should be training specifically in that because it is a very similar problem to the way sometimes the system misfires with respect to sexual assault law. The law is clear that you can't use myths and stereotypes, but sometimes those myths and stereotypes still get used because the people who apply the law are members of society, and society still, unfortunately, suffers from those biases. That is clearly the case with domestic violence as well, so I think it's worth considering the inclusion of that sort of training as well.

Again, we get the same sort of recurrent themes both in society and potentially in the legal system, where people are, you know, "Well, why didn't she leave sooner?" or "Why didn't she seek help sooner?" or a series of questions like that, that we know just are not reflective of the way people process the trauma. A lot of people stay because there are children involved, because they have no place to go, because they wouldn't have money to buy food, because maybe they don't have a work permit in this country and they wouldn't have anywhere to go. They don't have any family or friends to protect them. Even if those things aren't the case, there are many psychological reasons that people won't necessarily leave in the first instance.

I think it's important to recognize these things, and the bill, again, as far as it goes, I think, is very important. It definitely is a step forward. I think there are some things we can do to make it a bigger step forward to make sure that it is more inclusive, so hopefully we will have a chance to bring those amendments.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, and in particular it's a pleasure to follow the comments from my colleagues the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, both very thoughtful sets of comments about this bill and incredibly important, reflecting their commitment to these issues as well.

I want to begin by, as well, expressing my happiness, my pleasure that this bill is being brought forward before this Legislature to require training around sexual assault and sexual violence for judges. I do think it is important legislation that I believe pretty much, I'm assuming, most of the members of this House are going to feel that they want to support given that the objective of the legislation, which is really to make sure that those in positions of judgment in our court system are operating and assessing their judgment in a way that is free of myths and stereotypes around sexual violence, is something that we're all committed to. I support the basis of this bill.

However, as my colleagues have mentioned, there is some room for improvement here, and I hope that the comments that we're making today and suggestions that we're making are met with that

spirit of: let's try to make this bill as good as possible and really achieve the objectives that I believe we're all committed to in this House. I want to give credit to Professor Jennifer Koshan, who has certainly provided her insight, but she's one of many legal academics, practitioners, survivors of violence, sexual violence who have brought forward their experiences, and we can learn from that information and those experiences to improve this bill, I believe, to better serve survivors of sexual violence.

My colleagues have mentioned a number of them. As indicated, you know, the reason why this topic has, well, gotten a lot of media attention was because of the comments specifically of an Alberta Provincial Court judge, Justice Camp, who, during a trial on sexual assault in 2014, made a number of shocking comments that revealed not only that myths were still certainly present within the judicial system but were actively being applied by a member of the judiciary. I think we were all rightly shocked to hear some of those comments. I actually thought about whether or not it's appropriate to repeat the comments only because I always worry about revictimizing those who have survived it to have to hear these comments again. But it is important context to know that we had a sitting judge in the Provincial Court of Alberta who, during a sexual assault trial, said the words, "Sex and pain sometimes go together. That's not necessarily a bad thing" and said, "Young wom[e]n want to have sex, particularly if they're drunk" and also said, "Why couldn't [the complainant] just keep her knees together?" Those words shocked many of us. Of course, it led to an inquiry into Justice Camp and led to this public conversation around judicial training around sexual violence.

But we have to be clear, as my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View indicated, that this was a high-profile case. The concern is that this may have and likely is occurring more often than we know about, and I'm sure there are many practitioners of the bar, many survivors of sexual violence who have experienced this. Sometimes it's as obvious and as explicit as these comments, and sometimes it's not. It's underlying some of the decisions that are being made and the judgments that are being made, so that's why we talk about this now, and it's a good thing that we're talking about it, and it's a good thing that we're bringing forward legislation to require judicial training around this.

However, there's room for improvement, as I mentioned. As noted, you know, Bill 14 does indicate that newly appointed judges – or nobody may be appointed as a judge unless that individual has completed education in sexual assault law and social context issues. I echo the comments of my colleagues that we should follow the lead of the federal legislation Bill C-3, which does actually provide a definition of social context. That is a very broad term, and upon just reading it in this legislation, in this bill, it's not clear what is meant by that.

I think it is important to be clear what we're talking about. Since we are saying that newly appointed judges must receive training in this area, what do we mean? Training in what? So I think it's important for us to consider amending this legislation, if that moves forward to Committee of the Whole, to consider adding a definition of social context issues that mirrors – unless there's other feedback as to how it should differ, but I believe I support the definition in Bill C-3 which talks about looking at systemic racism and systemic discrimination.

I believe that's incredibly important because, as my colleagues have noted, intersectionality is a key piece of sexual assault and sexual violence. I think we only have to think about, for example, another shocking case, the Gladue case, which was an Indigenous woman, where there was actually a debate – I mean, this woman died as a result of a very violent, violent activity, and there was some suggestion that she consented to it, and that was a matter of

debate in that case. I'm not sure if we necessarily would have been having those conversations in the same way had Cindy Gladue not been Indigenous. That underlies so much of the discussion that happens around sexual violence.

We also can't ignore that women with disabilities are actually at higher risk of sexual violence as well. In fact, I note that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned, you know, if any of us in this House have the misfortune of having known somebody who has been sexually assaulted. Actually, the statistics show that not only do we, all of us in this House, know somebody who has been sexually assaulted; there is a chance that 30 per cent of the women in this Assembly have been sexually assaulted. The statistics show that women over the age of 15 in Canada: almost actually close to 39 per cent have reported that – not reported. They report not solely to the police, but they have indicated that they have experienced sexual assault.

This is not an uncommon issue. It's incredibly common. What is uncommon is actually that it gets to the courts. Only about 5 per cent of sexual assault cases actually end up being reported to the police, and then even fewer than that move on to the court system. The reality is that many of us have been impacted or know somebody directly close to us who has been impacted by sexual assault.

How those matters are dealt with in the court system is critically important because we know that myths and stereotypes actually prevent reporting. It is very much that fear of being judged when you go into the space, all of the rape myths that many of us, unfortunately, have heard before: how the woman was dressed, was she intoxicated, what was her past sexual activity? All of those things are not only sometimes explicit but very implicit in some of the decisions that are being made. That discourages women from actually reporting.

10:10

If we're going to be serious about dealing with sexual assault and violence, we actually need to be encouraging women to understand that it is a safe space for them to be able to report, that they can go forward, that they will be believed, that they will be heard, and the matter will be dealt with. Certainly, we need to be clear that we need to make this legislation as good as possible, but this is only one small piece of addressing it. So I encourage that we consider moving forward by including a definition of social context to address those systemic racism issues and systemic discrimination.

I also note that the federal Bill C-3 also – when it talks about the judicial training that's required in sexual assault, it actually indicates in the legislation that that sexual assault education training must be developed in consultation with sexual assault survivors and persons and organizations and groups that support them as well as in consultation with Indigenous leaders and communities. I think that's a really important piece because when we're talking about sexual assault training and education, again, what do we mean by it, and who's going to be involved in the development of that training? I think that's something as well for this House to consider.

I also want to note that Bill 14 as drafted only applies to individuals who may be appointed in the future as judges or those who are currently on the eligibility list. It does not mandate sexual assault education training for existing judicial members. I think that is a concern. I was just actually having a conversation with my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood about what training I received when I was in law school, which was now 20 years ago, and did we talk about sexual assault myths and sexual violence myths? You know what? We didn't explicitly. It was sometimes. It was brought up by the nature of – depending on the professor, depending on the nature of the cases that were brought up, and

sometimes in conversations in classes that conversation happened and we did discuss it a little bit, but it wasn't actually part of our training to become lawyers.

Now, I'm not familiar with whether or not that's now required. I hope it is certainly part of at least the criminal law and family law courses, but certainly there are many sitting members of the judiciary who have not had any exposure to training around sexual assault and sexual violence. I think that we can certainly consider in this bill the potential for requiring an undertaking that they do some kind of training like that.

I also want to pick up on pieces that were brought up by Jennifer Koshan around similarities around domestic violence. The way Professor Koshan put it was very good. She said: we have an opportunity here with Bill 14; why don't we expand it to include training around myths and stereotypes around domestic violence? This is an opportunity because, as noted, there are certainly many similar stereotypes that apply to domestic violence. You know, we've all probably heard or read stories about where there was this implied sense of, "Well, if a woman was really being assaulted or there was really domestic violence going on, why did she stay?" or "If she fought back, maybe it wasn't so bad to begin with." There have been stereotypes in family law for many years around that domestic violence is only raised or intimate-partner violence is only raised in custodial disputes, implying that perhaps they should not be believed.

So there are many myths and stereotypes that apply in the domestic violence context that we have an opportunity to address here as well. We have an opportunity to be leading in this issue by bringing forward required training for new judges on those myths as well, and I think there is a lot of good research and academic work that's been done as to how that can be implemented. So I hope that's an opportunity that this government takes in the spirit, of course, of making the best legislation possible.

Lastly, I want to mention that, you know, I appreciate that there have been a number of pieces of legislation since this government was elected that are around the issue of violence against women. We've seen Clare's law and human trafficking legislation as well as now this piece. This is important. I'm not going to deny that. I think that's good work, and I think members of this side of the Assembly have supported those pieces of legislation.

However, I do have to comment on the fact that whenever I do see legislation or action taken by this government specific to women, it seems to be around this idea of women in positions of victimhood, positions of violence, and there are bills that are brought forward that are focused on legal mechanisms to address that. Those are important. Those are important parts of the work that we need to do to address violence against women. However, this government also continues to ignore the other factors that lead to both physical, financial, and so many other types of insecurity for women. Those issues may not be within the law and order framework of this government's, I guess, predilection to go towards, but certainly they are equally as important in addressing issues of violence and also to treat the security of families and children and women as a whole.

We can't talk about family violence or sexual violence without also addressing issues of poverty, without also addressing issues of access to affordable quality child care, which gives women the security and independence to be able to work, to go back to school, which sometimes gives them the ability to leave violent situations. We can't talk about addressing violence against women without also talking about drug poisonings, without talking about housing insecurity and food insecurity. All of these factors lead to situations where women are not supported, don't have the ability to be able to

leave violent situations, whether that be domestic or intimate-partner violence or whether that be sexual violence.

I appreciate the efforts that are made to bring forward law and order type of measures. This is a good bill. It can be better. But we cannot ignore all those other pieces that provide women the agency to be able to speak out when they experience violence and to also experience independence so that they can extricate but also not have to be in situations where they are facing violence. I'd like to encourage this government to look at this issue a little bit more holistically than only about law and order preventions. We have to be talking about poverty and financial security. When I read the reports of the children and young people who have been in the child intervention system and died from care, these issues are prevalent throughout. I encourage this government to consider these issues and to look into the issue more broadly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 14 for second reading, the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity this evening to rise and to add a few comments. You know, like my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I now get the opportunity to try to follow up from two amazing colleagues who are lawyers. Frankly, it is a little bit intimidating, to say the least.

So far this evening I've heard some very, very great discussion about this bill, and it got me to thinking here just a little bit, and I feel like there's something I need to – I don't know if it's to get it off my chest or have it come out from my heart when listening to the story of this judge, the decisions the individual made around a case, and hearing about the comments: well, why didn't she keep her knees together? You know, Mr. Speaker, this is the 21st century, and quite frankly I don't understand why some men can't get their big-boy pants on and start owning up to the decisions that they make. But, more importantly, when are the rest of the men going to step up and call them out for it? That's the big hurdle there.

You know, I really believe – I guess this training, I'm hoping, will help, but there's a broader message here, as was said, you know, that kind of systemic issue, the societal issue: well, she made me do it. That's ridiculous. You decided. Start owning up to it, and the rest of us need to call those individuals out on it. I'm hoping that maybe within my lifetime we'll see that societal shift.

10:20

I guess one of the things that I wanted to briefly comment about on the bill: I agree fully with both of my colleagues. You know, we have a good bill here. I think it can be better. We have some opportunities here. The bill suggests that we train judges going forward. If I can be quite frank, Mr. Speaker, not good enough, okay? We also need to train the judges that we have here currently, right now. Everybody has seen these videos in the courtroom, these ridiculous outbursts that we've seen on cases. It's unacceptable, so we also need to deal with who we have right now.

Here's how I kind of – again, not being a lawyer, not having the opportunity to participate in that world, I have to try to relate it a little bit with my own. Before my life as an MLA I was responsible as the co-chair of the health and safety committee in my workplace. I was also responsible for all of the training of anybody who was going to operate power equipment within the plant, and that included a forklift, a power jack, you know, anything else that required moving stuff around. It wasn't enough for me to just simply train them once and then that was done. We had to renew that training on a regular basis.

Now, here's the thing. I found that there were times when I retrained individuals on a forklift and then when they go to do the test again, they're doing some strange things that I never taught them to begin with and were not acceptable. Actually, there was even one time where an individual passed the training with flying colours, and a month later I see them in the middle of the freezer spinning doughnuts on a forklift. I pulled the person's certificate right there. I think through Bill 14 we have an opportunity not only, again, to get future judges training but the current personnel that are available to us right now.

We also need to come up with some kind of ongoing training system on a regular basis to make sure that the information is current, nothing has changed, and that they're still actually indeed practising what they originally learned to begin with. As I said, all it takes is one to kind of, you know, make all those efforts useless for all the work that we put in.

But it's not enough just to put that in place. There's a responsibility on government to be able to fund that ongoing training as well, so my hope is that the government is looking at not only actually funding because, as my colleagues have pointed out, we've seen some reductions in funding in the justice system. There are a lot of problems right now. I hear it from folks within the system. As it is now, there's some trouble brewing, you know, with prosecutors. I'm certainly hoping the government is going to be able to work their way through that so that we don't have any kinds of disruptions and any other larger problems.

My hope is that as we move through the process of debate, as was mentioned, and get into Committee of the Whole – I think my colleagues have some very, very good suggestions which could

make this even better. I mean, let's not just settle for mediocre. Let's, you know, as they say, shoot for the Cadillac because by not doing that, we're doing a disservice to Albertans. For the victims, as my colleagues have pointed out, who struggle for a very, very long time trying to process what they've gone through to finally get to the point where they can maybe tell somebody and seek justice and restoration, only to hit a brick wall once they get to the system would be just incredibly, incredibly disappointing.

I do hope that as maybe we craft some of these suggestions, the government will look very seriously at them. Again, we have an opportunity not just for our future judges but what we have currently providing service to us here in the province right now as well as a continuous ongoing program to, I guess, to some degree, recertify individuals so that they still continue to practise the good things that they've learned around this. My hope is that we'll see some of that.

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to add comments to the debate this evening?

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

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

The Speaker: The deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Thursday, April 21, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 2	Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022	715
--------	--	-----

Second Reading

Bill 13	Financial Innovation Act.....	724
Bill 14	Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022	727

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca