



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 26, 2022

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

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 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Vacant
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to introduce to you a group of officials visiting from the United States. Many of you had the opportunity to meet them earlier today, but I hope that you will join me in welcoming the U.S. consul general to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Northwest Territories, Holly Waeger Monster; accompanied by Karen Choe-Fichte, minister counsellor for economic affairs; Nathan Donohue, deputy principal commercial officer for the U.S. Commercial Service; and Connie Haider, commercial specialist. Joining them are: Andrew McIntyre, Matt Morrison, and Christina Steed. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, it's with the greatest admiration and respect – there is a gratitude to the members of the families who have shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome the family members of Dr. Winston O. Backus. His family is present in the Speaker's gallery today. Dr. Backus was the former Member for Grande Prairie, who served two terms in the Assembly from 1971 to 1979. He passed away on June 15, 2020, at the age of 99. I would like to ask each of his family members, as I call their name, to rise as they have been introduced: Dr. Backus's wife, Myrtle Backus; his daughter Myrna Sherstan; and grandsons Jesse Sherstan and Cody Sherstan. Please rise. Thank you so much for your service to the province of Alberta through your family members. Now accept the gratitude of members of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also seated in the gallery today is Marilyn Buffalo, the chief executive officer of the Nechi Institute: Centre for Indigenous Learning. She is a special guest of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Government Record

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, families in Alberta are struggling. They are coping with higher income taxes, higher insurance premiums, higher utility bills, higher school fees, higher tuition, and it goes on and on and on. These are times where families are being forced to make tough choices about whether or not they can afford to buy groceries that week or if they need to pay their utility bill. Families are being forced to take vehicles off the road because they can't afford the insurance bill this government is delivering to them. These are serious times that require a government focused on addressing these issues, but instead they've got a circus running the Legislature.

The Premier is campaigning for his job round the clock and has dispatched the majority of his staff, that should be working to support Albertans, to save his job instead. The Premier is even going to those same families, that he doesn't think deserve support to recover from the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, to beg for their votes. The Premier's staff are attacking UCP MLAs, calling them clowns, sad and sour, and more. This would be

hilarious if it wasn't coming from the very same people who are supposed to be addressing the cost-of-living crisis they created.

It makes sense now why it's taken 10 weeks and counting for this government to get around to delivering their utility rebates, because it's not a priority for them. This is a government that spends more time clowning around and engaging in the drama created by the nonleadership of the Premier.

Albertans during this crisis are looking for a government that prioritizes them, that ignores the drama, ignores the politics, and focuses on making life better for Albertans, for them. The UCP has made it clear that they aren't interested in that, so when Albertans go to the polls for the next election, they will have a clear choice between the NDP, who is laser focused on them, and the clowns in the UCP who can't get their act together. I think, Mr. Speaker, I know who Albertans will choose.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Government Policies and Southern Alberta

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few days I've heard NDP MLAs stand up and pretend to care about southern Alberta, but for the years they spent in government, the NDP failed southern Alberta and failed to make any progress on the issues that matter most. They've made all sorts of claims, but, fear not, I'm here to set the record straight.

Our United Conservative government has made huge investments in southern Alberta. We scrapped the NDP's carbon tax, and we did what they could never do: we balanced the budget. Our United Conservative government has negotiated a \$780 million deal on rural broadband. We funded the single largest investment in irrigation, a lifeline for our drought-stricken agriculture industry, and approved several new projects, including the Snake Lake reservoir in Brooks-Medicine Hat.

We accelerated capital maintenance and renewal funding. We've committed \$90 million to recruit, attract, and retain rural doctors, and we've provided the John Ware youth empowerment program with \$150,000 so that newcomer youth are able to be connected to employment services.

We've completed new school projects in Tilley, and we're building a brand new francophone school in Brooks. We've expanded mental health and addiction services through the virtual opioid dependency program and the digital overdose response app, and – get this, Mr. Speaker – we provided \$825,000 to Our Collective Journey to enhance their recovery coaching program, but most recently we delivered on funding for HALO air ambulance, an essential service that southern Alberta relies upon. The NDP failed to provide stable and predictable funding, but because of our United Conservative government HALO has a multiyear commitment for \$1 million per year to keep HALO in the sky. This came as a direct result of advocacy from UCP MLAs like the MLA for Drumheller-Stettler, the MLA for Cardston-Siksika, the MLA for Taber-Warner, and myself.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, southern Albertans know that this government is here to deliver on the promises that we made. We don't just talk the talk; we take real action. Southern Alberta and rural Alberta will always have relentless advocates in our United Conservative caucus, and I'm proud to be one of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I proudly reflect on the incredible personal, cultural, and economic bonds we share with our closest neighbours, friends, and allies to the north and south in the United States of America. Through the Pacific NorthWest

Economic Region, of which I'm humbled to serve as president, we're able to align the shared interests and economies of: Yukon, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, B.C., Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, and, of course, Alberta.

The bridges we build through our engaged, cross-sectoral working groups, forums, and annual summits are instrumental to regional collaboration and deeply impactful in relationship building and advocacy on common interests between our two nations. Now more than ever it is clear that strengthening ties with the United States is essential not only to Alberta's and Canada's interests but to a shared vision with respect to economic and strategic priorities.

Our shared history and the democratic principles we respect and uphold are but a few of the strengths we build upon each and every day in mutual prosperity in the world's largest trading relationship and along the planet's longest undefended border. PNWER has a strong 30-year history and vision for the shared potential of our two countries while embracing the influence that nonpartisan organizations and people of like mind can have on policy development in our respective jurisdictions and in our national capitals.

Mr. Speaker, the 31st PNWER annual summit will be hosted by Alberta in Calgary this summer, and with all of your support and the attendance of public, private, academic, and nonprofit stakeholders our collaboration and focus on a bright, ambitious, and responsible future will be both immersive and inspiring for those that share our vision for friendship, collaboration, and prosperity for all.

Thank you.

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

Nechi Institute

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. In my time as Minister of Indigenous Relations I had the opportunity to visit many important organizations created and maintained by Indigenous people. These agencies are deeply entwined with the community and provide services based on intimate relationships that are simply not possible in non-Indigenous agencies.

1:40

One such agency is the Nechi Institute of Alberta. The Nechi Institute is recognized as one of the finest Indigenous training, research, and health promotion centres in the world. Nechi Institute is a powerful resource for Indigenous people and communities addressing issues such as: drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions; family violence; and prescription drug use. Nechi provides counsellors, health care workers, social workers, educators, community service agencies, government agencies, and other members of the helping professions with the tools and resources to help heal the pain and devastation caused by addictions and abuse.

Unfortunately, in November 2019 the UCP government summarily evicted Nechi from the building it shared with Poundmaker's Lodge for 36 years without consultation. The government has never been able to explain the reasoning for this drastic assault either in the House or to the institute itself. When I questioned the minister about the issue, he assured the House that he would work with Nechi to find them a permanent home. Unfortunately, this never happened.

For the last two years Nechi has been housed in temporary trailers on the site of the former Edmonton Indian residential school. Elders have expressed concern that the trailers are likely on top of unmarked graves. Nechi has made numerous attempts to move forward with the government only to be met with cancelled meetings and ignored phone calls.

Today the chief executive officer of Nechi, Marilyn Buffalo, is here asking the government to come back to the table and help the institute to find a new permanent home, as they promised but failed to do over the last two years. This government claims to support healing from addictions. We see no evidence of that here. The institute is asking for help to continue to do the important work they have engaged in for over 40 years in Alberta. It is time for truth and reconciliation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Female Genital Mutilation and Bill 10

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. We've received some input recently, and I want to clarify that this bill was not introduced unnecessarily and is by no means redundant to any existing law. The bill is imperative for the protection of girls and women.

Female genital mutilation is a global concern, posing a serious threat to psychological, sexual, and reproductive health of girls around the world. We are putting forth efforts at a grassroots level and from a policy level, but the most successful interventions are led by communities affected by FGM and within the associations that are privileged to work within these communities and, ultimately, answer directly to them.

Mr. Speaker, in this way we uplift community through building and bridging capacity and supports, ensuring that survivors and opposers of this practice are not silenced. Countries in the United Kingdom have introduced education surrounding forms of honour-based abuse, and as of 2020 England introduced FGM education as part of the sex and relationships curriculum for secondary students. This includes education on physical and emotional damages caused by FGM. This is about educating and raising awareness for both the consequences and implications of FGM and the supports available to those who have suffered. Survivors must gain agency to speak about their experience because if social change does not happen, then the stigma and fear will continue, as will the status quo.

Mr. Speaker, this is about building trust and having the conversation surrounding the protection of girls and women no matter what college, agency, or organization is involved. The scope of this bill is not intended to undermine the credibility of regulatory agencies but, instead, to further focus on FGM. It is our collective responsibility to make sure that we are educated and not afraid to engage in important conversations around the health and well-being of our children, specifically girls.

I would like to thank all the consulted stakeholders and the agencies as well as members of the opposition for their excellent input. Mr. Speaker, this is about societal levels of influence. We need a critical mass of advocates to be speaking out; otherwise, change will not happen.

Jan Foster and Lethbridge Schools

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this member's statement is for the memory of Jan Foster, who passed away on April 19 at the age of 81. Jan Foster was a seven-term Lethbridge public school division trustee. Her commitment to public education spanned 23 years of public service. Jan was as committed to her community as to her son Greg and his wife, Stephanie, and her two beloved grandchildren Aiden and Jordan.

For their sake Jan worked for schools that served the community and understood that schools themselves are a community. That's why she stood up for an inclusive curriculum that sets children up

for success. That's why she was a consistent advocate for more funding for children with diverse needs and a fierce defender of early-intervention funding for children with disabilities. She always made sure Lethbridge was heard, advocating for new schools and modernizations to keep up with our growing population.

Indeed, Lethbridge needs several new schools: one more elementary each in the public and Catholic system, at least eight modernizations in district 51, two modernizations in the Catholic system, and a gymnasium modernization at l'école La Vérendrye.

Given that our school-age population is growing, Lethbridge district 51 is disadvantaged by the UCP changes to funding, and we will have staffing challenges. The UCP decision to have 1,700 fewer teachers in the classroom province-wide this fall will have an effect on us down south. Our public district has been critical of the new curriculum, writing a letter as recently as two weeks ago inquiring about resources for implementation.

The last time I saw Jan last fall, though – I chatted with her on social media quite often – she was most worried about the curriculum. Her primary concern was for the students. Her focus was always on children. Perhaps that is why she fostered 60 children and at-risk youth over 15 years.

Rest in peace and rest in power, Jan Foster. We share your vision of public education as the most effective way to build the world we want for our children. You can rest now, Jan. We will attend the meetings, the school celebrations, and community functions for you. For your grandchildren and all children we will defend public education as fiercely as you did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Federal Travel Vaccination Mandate

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is punishing Canadians because they made a different decision than what he wanted or commanded of them. As the world returns to normal, Trudeau and his coleader, Jagmeet Singh in the NDP, doubled down on the divisive policy, continuing to require double vaccinations in order to fly anywhere in our country. Despite Trudeau's top doctor saying that we need a, quote, more sustainable approach that needs to be taken, Liberals and their allies press forward with their politically driven policy that damaged the well-being of our country's social and economic strength.

Within weeks of the UCP removing vaccine passports here in Alberta, the federal government strengthened their ideological plan to punish the unvaccinated. While virtually all countries and jurisdictions world-wide have removed their mandates, especially on travel and flights, Trudeau still doesn't budge. He claims to stand up for minority rights while at the same time calling members of this minority racist, misogynists, and white supremacists. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fed up with Mr. Trudeau and his antiscience and ineffective, capricious policy, whose purpose is to vilify good, honest, hard-working Canadians like those in Alberta who made a decision not to vaccinate.

These pointless travel restrictions can no longer be justified. New Zealand to New York, the world is taking off while Canada keeps millions grounded. Unvaccinated individuals, unable to visit their own family, deserve better from this government in Ottawa. They deserve a Prime Minister who listens and follows the science and cares for their families and his society, not someone caught up in the political theatrics of the woke left. Mr. Speaker, Alberta chose a different path, and soon every single province followed. Happily, COVID-19 is not threatening our health care capacity today, not here, not anywhere in Canada. With millions upon millions of

comparatively mild COVID-19 cases in Canada on any given day, this punitive policy has no public health benefit.

I ask that fellow Albertans here today enjoying the full freedoms of movement within our country do not forget those who are still not vaccinated. Don't forget those who cannot visit their family, who cannot go on vacation, who cannot attend a funeral of a loved one, or a wedding. I believe that we need to stand up and stand with those who are being punished by Mr. Trudeau.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Federal Travel Vaccination Mandate

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the world is opening back up and removing COVID-19 restrictions, including travel restrictions, the federal government of Canada is not. We're over the worst part of COVID-19 and have been out of a state of emergency for quite a while now. The federal travel vaccination mandate is simply unnecessary. To board a flight or to get on a train, anyone that is 12 years plus four months of age or older must be fully vaccinated. They must be ready to show their proof of vaccination at any given time along with several other rules.

Not only does a travel vaccine mandate prevent Canadians from travelling outside of Canada, but it prevents international travellers from coming into Canada as well, hurting our country's tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, Canada is an amazing place, and frankly people are less inclined to come visit our beautiful country when there are excessive, unnecessary mandates making it difficult.

Provinces within Canada are lifting most if not all of their COVID restrictions and vaccine mandates. Unvaccinated people are finally allowed to return to work, go out to eat, go to a gym, and enjoy the many things that they've been eagerly waiting to get to, except for travel. This mandate is causing red tape, and we are one of the only countries left to have it.

I've heard frustrations from many Albertans who disagree with the travel vaccine mandates regardless of their vaccine status. Those who are vaccinated are fed up with the difficulty of extra steps when they have to travel, and those who are unvaccinated are fed up with not being able to travel at all. I've heard one story about a girl who was unable to go to her grandfather's funeral and is still waiting to be able to travel to her home country to gain closure. Mr. Speaker, the time and the place to move restrictions is now. The federal government needs to get rid of the travel vaccine mandate and allow its citizens and international travellers the right to come and go.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Private School Financial Data Reporting

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UCP tabled legislation that signalled the government's intention to stop reporting tuition amounts at private schools. This issue matters to Albertans because at a time when the province is cutting significantly from public education, Alberta is maintaining the most generous subsidies for private schools anywhere in Canada. The higher the tuition at these schools, the greater their exclusivity. Why is the Premier trying to hide this information from the very Albertans who subsidize these private schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Unfortunately, there's misinformation on the other side coming towards us because, in fact, private independent schools do have to report on their audited financial statements, both the public and the private money that they get. They only get 70 per cent of public dollars. What we're actually doing under Bill 21 is increasing the accountability and the transparency on this. They will in fact have to report online their financials as well as to their parents. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a tremendous amount of confusion on this because the UCP is always muddying the waters. Yesterday the red tape minister was explicit: Alberta would no longer collect this kind of financial information from these publicly funded institutions, and officials at her briefing provided documents confirming that. Then the Education minister fired off a late-night tweet saying the opposite was true, almost like these folks don't talk to each other. One of these ministers is either incompetent or intentionally misinforming the public. Which is it, and which minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was correct in explaining that we are in fact increasing transparency and accountability. What we are no longer requiring is a duplicative, redundant piece of information, because we do have that information already coming in audited financial statements. In fact, I believe the members opposite missed the line in the publication where we said that we would be reducing the collection of financial data. Not eliminating; reducing. There is a big difference.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two stories, and let me say that this is about trust, and the story coming from that minister is coming from a minister who doesn't enjoy a whole lot of trust. Albertans won't know how much private schools charge to get through the door at a time when the Premier is telling students in the public system to make do with much, much less. His cuts to PUF for 5-year-olds with special needs is just one of many examples. Why don't the parents whose kids are struggling with overflowing classrooms and fewer teachers get to know all the details about the private schools they are subsidizing but cannot afford to go to themselves?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely ludicrous. In fact, independent schools get 70 per cent funding for operational uses and no capital funding whatsoever. They save dollars for Alberta taxpayers. That being said, this is all about red tape reduction, which the members opposite continue to put on all of our school systems. We are very deliberate about ensuring that we no longer have redundant, duplicative information which we already have through audited financial statements and many other documents.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Private School Financial Data Reporting and Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to kids' education, the UCP's priorities couldn't be more wrong. Right now class sizes are

growing, and we're losing teachers. Students have suffered learning loss throughout the pandemic. There have been serious cuts to supports for children with disabilities. But the Premier's priority isn't to support children struggling in public schools; it's to hide financial reporting for private schools. To the Premier: before he stops collecting this information, can he stand in this House and tell Albertans what the average tuition is to attend a private school in Alberta?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to share the fact that, in fact, the member opposite continues not to do her homework. We added an additional 160 teachers in this upcoming school year. At least that's what school boards are telling me. In fact, they are the ones that are hiring. We've added \$700 million to the overall . . .

Ms Notley: Read your budget.

Member LaGrange: Yes; I have read my budget, and I wish you guys would as well because, in fact, we have added \$700 million over three years for operational, an additional . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: . . . \$110 million for mental health and wellness, 191 additional million dollars for implementing curriculum.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, under this minister's leadership there are 1,000 fewer teachers in schools than there were when the NDP was in government. I know the Premier has friends who want to open more private schools in Alberta, but that's no excuse to underfund public education. Some private schools charge \$20,000 or more to attend, and it's public schools that are taking the hit. Edmonton public: there are 1,700 students who are unfunded this year alone, Minister. Why is the minister covering up the finances for private schools flush with cash while cutting supports for kids in public schools?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to provide misinformation. In fact, if she read the budget and if she continued to look at the estimates, what I provided in estimates, 160 more teachers is not a cut in the number of teachers, \$700 million – I'm proud of the fact that we added \$45 million to address learning loss disruption just this very year. We're seeing tremendous results as a result of that. Edmonton public school division has notoriously reported the wrong number . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: The minister actually wrote me this morning to pump her own tires and pat her own back about the job she's doing in public schools. Seriously. After that she spent the whole night on social media justifying a bill that puts the finances of a private school on a pedestal while the budgets of public schools are being slashed and burned: unfunded students, no new schools in major cities, a curriculum supported by virtually no Albertans, no mental health supports, less supports for disabled students. Does the Premier really think that this minister should be congratulating the UCP when the vast majority of Albertans are giving this minister a big red F?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is continually upset because we're seeing success in our education system. In fact, we've added additional dollars. I have

school authorities constantly thanking me for the additional dollars, the additional supports, the fact that we have engaged. I have school authorities saying that they've never seen this level of engagement on a new curriculum. We are proud of the fact that we have put children first. While the members opposite continue to politicize education, I'm focused on student learning and improving it.

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

Postsecondary Student Financial Aid

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this morning I was at the University of Alberta, where I heard from a number of students who had been facing significant challenges due to UCP cuts to student aid. Across the province students are struggling. Tuition is skyrocketing, loan rates are going up, and this UCP government has both underfunded student aid and refused to spend the money that they actually allocated for it. At a time when tuition is skyrocketing and student debt is even more expensive, the UCP is withholding student aid money. Can the Premier explain why, when students need the help the most, he is withholding their supports?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That statement is completely false. We're doing nothing of the sort, but I'm not surprised to hear statements like that coming from the NDP because, as the member said, we're cutting student aid. I can't understand. We're providing \$15 million over three years in new spending to support student aid specifically for additional bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million more in new funding for existing scholarships and bursaries. Only in NDP land is more funding a cut. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, last summer the UCP combined eligibility grants under one main student grant program. The current offerings don't even come close to covering the amount that they need nor the number of students who are eligible, \$59 million in needs-based grants. Even just to reach the national average, Alberta needs to spend somewhere around \$150 million, nearly three times as much. Is the Premier really going to stand in this House and tell Alberta postsecondary students that they deserve a third of the financial assistance that other learning in other provinces is actually eligible for? Is that really how to encourage people to attend our colleges and universities?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to tell students in the province that they need and deserve more in financial assistance, which is exactly what our government is doing. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're providing \$15 million more over three years to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to support our existing scholarships and other awards. There's more work that we need to do when it comes to strengthening student assistance, but we're moving in the right direction. I want to thank our student leaders, who have been advocating for this and bringing this to the attention of government.

2:00

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister can talk to someone who I was talking to, a woman named Christina, this morning. She was eligible for aid, but she lost her grant because of the government's refusal to spend the money that was there. She had to drop out of school. Christina said, and I quote: the whole situation has ruined my motivation to attend university again;

student aid is supposed to be there to help students, not stress them out financially while they are attending. Unquote. Will the Premier, the minister, or anyone else on this side of the House explain how ruining Christina's postsecondary aspirations is actually good for our province's future?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're taking serious action under Budget 2022 to create more opportunities for students. We're investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions, \$15 million over three years to support new bursaries for low-income students, \$12 million over three years for existing scholarships, \$30 million over three years to expand apprenticeship education and trades education in the province. We have a robust vision to strengthen postsecondary education, unlike the members opposite.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Ganley: Alberta families are struggling, and this government simply doesn't care. If they cared, they would have acted on skyrocketing utility rates in November. If they cared, they wouldn't have waited weeks before finally bringing in legislation. If they cared, the minister would be able to answer a simple question like: when will Albertans get the money? Instead, he told Albertans they would have to wait at least a couple of months more. To the minister: when will Albertans actually see this money?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly recognize that there are affordability concerns here in the province of Alberta, affordability concerns brought on by a whole host of reasons, in part due to the tax, spend, and borrow fiscal policy of the Trudeau-NDP alliance. That's the reality. Now, we're bringing in real relief measures for Albertans, including a utility rebate for every electricity consumer. More details very shortly.

Ms Ganley: The Premier seems to be just fine with leaving Albertans in the dark, literally, rather than protecting them from out-of-control utility costs. Our amendments to get the money to Albertans by May 31 were rejected. They opposed our amendments to improve the legislation by preventing power shut-offs. Albertans are losing patience with this dithering government. Can the Premier explain why he thinks Albertans deserve to have their heat or lights turned off while he dithers, blames, and fails to deliver?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are bringing real relief to consumers with an electricity rebate. We're working with electricity providers to ensure that customers are not shut off... [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: ... that there's a pathway forward to keep them connected.

But, Mr. Speaker, the members across the way are pretty disingenuous being concerned about electricity affordability. It was their policies that created the conditions for the high costs we're experiencing today: the carbon tax, the excessive build of

the transmission system, and the early purchase payout of the coal agreements.

Ms Ganley: Despite the increasingly desperate spin coming from over there, Albertans know that the UCP government lifting the rate cap is to blame for skyrocketing electricity prices. Albertans are being forced to choose between their groceries and heating their homes, and they need help now. The associate minister opposed our amendments to ensure that future rebates would be to Albertans within 30 days. Can someone over there tell this House how long they think Albertan families should have to wait to get their paltry rebates: 10 weeks, 20 weeks, 50, forever?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're moving forward with electricity rebates. More details to come very soon. But we're taking other action with respect to affordability. We immediately suspended the fuel tax, recognizing that the fuel tax adds costs to Albertans. That is real relief experienced every day by every family, by every senior, by every nonprofit every time they fill up their vehicle with gas. We're bringing real relief to Albertans. The members opposite simply jacked up costs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has a question.

Sexual Assault Awareness Training for Judges

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public confidence is a fundamental component of a strong and effective justice system. It is because of this that lawyers and judges must be diligent when engaging with all those involved within our court system. This is even more prevalent when sensitive cases involving sexual assault come before judges as the court must be especially compassionate when hearing these matters. To the Associate Minister of Status of Women: what is this government's plan to ensure that survivors of sexual assault are treated with dignity and respect within the court system of this province?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government has introduced new legislation, Bill 14, requiring individuals applying to be a Provincial Court judge to complete sexual assault law and social context issues education before they're eligible to be appointed. If Bill 14 is passed, it will foster stronger confidence in the administration of justice; encourage greater engagement in the justice system by victims, Indigenous people, and people from minorities and vulnerable populations; and encourage more reporting of sexual assaults, which will contribute to reducing sexual assault in Alberta, which is ultimately the goal.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for your answer. Given that there have been past examples where sexual assault survivors have been revictimized in the court system and given that there is a desperate need for sexual assault training to be developed in a manner that is survivorcentric, again to the Associate Minister of Status of Women: how do you expect to tailor this sexual assault training program for judges to ensure that training is survivorcentric?

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

Ms Issik: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, we need to remember that judicial independence is of paramount importance. The actual training will be run through the province's Judicial Council or a similar governing body. It's government's role to set up broad requirements and work with judges to ensure the training requirements are being met. The end goal is that victims of sexual violence and their families are not retraumatized during the trial process and that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. Sexual assault survivors deserve to know that the judges who oversee their cases are fully educated in sexual assault law and will not make mistakes in . . .

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you once again to the minister for that answer. Given that Bill 14 states that a judge in Alberta must complete sexual assault law and social context training after being appointed and given that there are numerous judges already in the Alberta court system that do not have this training, to the same associate minister: how will the government ensure that current judges are trained in this invaluable sexual assault training?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Issik: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're going to work with the provincial Judicial Council to ensure that new and sitting judges receive the training promptly while fully respecting judicial independence. Judges have their own education plans and regularly update their skills and knowledge, and we'll ensure that sexual assault and social context training is part of that ongoing education. Sexual assault law and social context issues education for Provincial Court candidates will provide candidates with the knowledge, awareness, and skills to avoid being influenced by attitudes based on stereotypes or prejudice. This will help victims and their families feel safe and secure in the knowledge that future hearings will be fair, impartial, and free from mistakes.

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

Hospital Emergency Room Wait Times

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency department wait times are soaring in Alberta, forcing people to go without getting the care they need. AHS data shows that in 2022 10 per cent of patients are leaving our emergency rooms in Edmonton without care, an increase from 7 per cent in 2021, so 3 per cent more people walking out of Edmonton hospitals because of the wait times created by this government. Can the Minister of Health tell this House exactly how many Albertans have left without getting care because his predecessor and the Premier decided to repeatedly push our hospitals to the brink?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for raising this important issue. We've acknowledged several times that the system is seeing a high number of patients. Some of the larger hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary are over 100 per cent occupancy, and I want to thank all of our health care workers, who are delivering incredible service at this point in time.

But, Mr. Speaker, this issue is not unique to this period in time, and it's not unique to Alberta as well. You know, the increase in pressures on hospitals happens on a regular basis. It's seasonal. We understand that, and that's why we need to fix it, and we are investing in the capacity in our system to be able to do that.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this minister may want to speak to the actual front-line staff and given that, as has been reported by emergency room doctors, people who aren't able to access emergency departments are often forced to return sicker and more critical than before and given that this then puts their lives at risk in addition to the additional pressure on our front-line staff, who are already dealing with the ongoing impacts coming from the pandemic and risking their ability to provide care, and given that this is making an already difficult situation in our hospitals even worse, rather than these same old talking points, what is this minister doing today to ensure that someone who seeks help in an emergency room can get it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in capacity in our system. We are investing \$600 million this year, another \$600 million next year, and a third \$600 million the year after that. That's \$1.8 billion to expand capacity in our hospital system. We appreciate the tremendous work that's being done. We do have seasonal increases in our emergency departments, but we need to fix that. That shouldn't happen every year, and it's happening here in Alberta, and quite frankly it's happening in provinces across the country. We know we need to address it. That's why we're investing in building capacity. That's why we're hiring more nurses. We're hiring more EMS. We're investing across the entire system.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it was only here in Alberta that this government thought a pandemic would be a perfect time to start a fight with doctors, a catastrophically bad decision that Albertans are still paying for, and given that the Premier and the Health minister have an open invitation to tour the Royal Alexandra hospital here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre, will the minister and the Premier take the time to tour this or any hospital that asks them to, speak with the staff, that are struggling with this unprecedented pressure, struggling to provide care, and see firsthand the devastating consequences of the UCP's failed decisions in our health care system?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I speak with AHS and practitioners on a regular basis. I understand, as I indicated earlier with Dr. Hinshaw in our weekly reports, that there is stress on the system. That's why we're acting. We should not have stress on the system. This shouldn't happen every year. That's why we are investing over \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years to expand capacity, to increase the number of nurses, increase the number of health care professionals. We have increased 1,800 nurses over the last two years, and the staff in AHS is going to go up by 2,800. We are investing in health care.

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

Nechi Institute

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Nechi Institute is recognized as one of the finest Indigenous training, research, and health promotion centres in the world. Nechi is a powerful resource for Indigenous people and communities addressing issues of addictions and family violence. In November 2019 the UCP evicted the Nechi Institute without consultation from the location at Poundmaker's Lodge, that they had used continuously for 36 years, with only three months' notice. Marilyn Buffalo, the CEO of Nechi,

is here in the gallery today. Will the minister tell her why he evicted her and Nechi from their building?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had the lease expire with the Nechi Institute, who was sharing the facility with Poundmaker's Lodge, which is offering critical Indigenous addiction treatment services in that area. When the lease was lapsed with the Nechi Institute, we couldn't extend that because Poundmaker's Lodge wanted to expand the services, critical services, for addictions treatment.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the minister promised this House in 2019 that he would personally assist Nechi in finding a new building and given that the minister has broken his promise and failed to do this, leaving Nechi stuck in derelict trailers on the grounds of Poundmaker's Lodge, and given that this is hampering Nechi in continuing their important work at a time when the drug poisoning crisis is more deadly than ever in the Indigenous community, will the minister tell Marilyn Buffalo why he has not taken her phone calls, not met with her, and not delivered the help he promised in this House?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, respectfully, when the member opposite is claiming that there is no consultation, it's not true. Alberta Health and Alberta Infrastructure offered them help, which they declined to take. That is the fact.

Mr. Feehan: Incredible.

Given that Poundmaker's Lodge is on the site of the former Edmonton Indian residential school and given that elders have reported that the trailers Nechi has been forced into are on top of unmarked graves of children who are buried at the school, can the minister explain to Marilyn Buffalo, who is here to hear your answers, and to all Albertans why he has refused to keep his promise and refused to address this intolerable situation for the Nechi Institute?

Mr. Shandro: Well, that's not true, Mr. Speaker. Staff from both Infrastructure and Indigenous Relations will continue to work with the Nechi board of directors on resolving their concerns. The Poundmaker's Lodge, though, has reported no further issues, and the Nechi continues to provide training through distance learning. This is why it was important for us to make sure that the Poundmaker's treatment lodge continues to have its opportunities to expand and be able to work with us in providing more services to Albertans who need the addiction recovery treatment that they needed, the residential treatment. The Nechi Institute will continue to provide those services at a distance. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Loewen: Health care continues to be one of the greatest concerns of rural Albertans. When a community comes together to raise money for medical equipment, as a government we must work collectively to facilitate their efforts. In the past the Fairview community bought a bilirubin tester, that took nine months and five levels of AHS bureaucracy to gain approval. Albertans need us to do better. Now the community is working to gain approval to purchase a CT scanner for their hospital. Another CT scanner in the Peace Country will help with patient safety and reduce ambulance trips. Minister, will you please provide an update on when we can expect an answer on this important acquisition for rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. First of all, I want to recognize the dedication and selflessness that Fairview residents – I met with representatives on a couple of occasions – have for their community in raising money for a new CT scanner. That is the Alberta spirit. But this simply isn't about placing a piece of equipment in a space. It also means staffing the clinic with specialized health care professionals. The member knows that AHS has challenges recruiting and training staff in rural and remote communities, and we are working to address that. We will continue to engage with local leaders on the best way to provide rural health care for all Albertans.

Mr. Loewen: Given that there are other health care issues in rural Alberta and that one of them is the lack of health care professionals and given that there have been many talented, aspiring health care professionals forced to leave Alberta and even Canada to receive their medical education and after completing their education elsewhere faced the arduous and lengthy process of receiving approval to practise in Alberta, forcing them to practise elsewhere, and given that this has left OR rooms in Grande Prairie underutilized at the expense of patients in need, Minister: what work is being done to find a more efficient process to bring our health care workers home?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. The mechanism that matches medical school graduates with residencies, the Canadian resident matching service, is a nationally administered program. Now, while the process is not directly in our control, we are working in collaboration with the ministries of Advanced Education and labour and the medical schools of the U of C and the U of A to improve the way we train doctors in our province. We're also providing \$6 million over the next three years, through the RESIDE program, to attract 60 recently graduated doctors to communities of need in Alberta such as the town of Fox Creek in the member's constituency.

Mr. Loewen: Given that rural Alberta was chosen to be one of the first areas in Alberta to implement connect care and given that there have been many concerns expressed regarding connect care and the amount of time it takes doctors, already in short supply, to input data while navigating this complicated system rather than focusing on patient care and given that locums, which are substitute doctors desperately needed to provide coverage and keep rural hospitals open, are being driven away due to their dislike of connect care, can the minister please tell us if AHS and the ministry are working on creating processes that will make connect care a less time-consuming process for doctors?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, connect care is an AHS resource dedicated to charting a patient's progress. Consistent charting is an important piece that enables care teams to support patients and gives patients access to their own information. We recognize that this does create challenges for physicians who have multiple roles within AHS and at their own private practices. I want to assure the member that Alberta Health is working with AHS and the AMA to work through these problems to ease the transitioning to connect care.

In addition, we continue to invest in attracting and retaining doctors across all of rural Alberta; not only the RESIDE program but the \$90,000 that we devoted . . .

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

2:20 Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Edmonton is set to lose 44 per cent of emergency shelter capacity serving people experiencing homelessness by June. Nearly 3,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, with 800 sleeping outside each night. Sadly, the UCP have been inconsistent with emergency shelter funding, forcing shelters to close. They have ignored requests from the city to build permanent supportive housing and have left hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars untouched. Why is the UCP forcing so many Edmontonians to sleep on the streets?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of community services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising this very difficult, complex issue here. Supporting our homeless population, helping them find the pathway to recovery, is important for this government. We invested \$49 million with Budget 2022 committed to supporting homelessness initiatives. In Edmonton Homeward Trust received \$29 million of that portion there. On top of the resources we committed to, we established a provincial task force. We're looking for a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach addressing this complex issue.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that I stood with our leader and the Member for St. Albert in Trinity Lutheran church in September, where an emergency shelter had just closed because of funding cuts, and given that in the last two years the UCP have underbudgeted regarding homeless supports by tens of millions of dollars while poverty has increased, why is the UCP continuing this failed plan of underbudgeting for the most vulnerable, leaving them no place to stay but on the streets?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. This government continues to commit our support for this sector here not only with increased resources there, but also we're taking a different approach. Those one-off, isolated approaches no longer address this issue. That's one reason we have the provincial task force established. The Edmonton city manager is a member of that task force along with a federal government representative and significant other stakeholders in the community. We're working hard to address this complex issue here.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the solution to homelessness is investment in affordable housing and given that the national housing strategy has billions of available dollars and that Alberta needs to step up to get their fair share and, however, given that the UCP have continually ignored the city of Edmonton's request for permanent supportive housing and have left hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars untouched, when will the UCP be announcing details of how they leverage every available dollar from the national housing strategy to provide Albertans access to a home?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is so shameful, that the NDP once again totally don't understand. We've been telling once again, more and more, repeated again that we spent every single federal dollar. We have allocated \$561 million in cost matching for the next nine years to build affordable housing. I don't understand what the hon. member doesn't understand. Maybe math is hard for her.

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:24.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Bilous: A recent report shows that rising interest rates are driving Albertans toward bankruptcy. While the picture was not good for Canadians in general, from the effects of rising interest rates coupled with soaring cost of living, Alberta was in worse shape than the rest of the country. Currently 52 per cent of Alberta households are within \$200 of not making all their financial obligations by the end of the month, yet the UCP keeps piling on costs. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, park and camping fees, utilities, and insurance have all gone up under the UCP. Why is the UCP adding these costs onto Albertans already struggling to make ends meet?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard to ensure that Albertans can in fact live in the most affordable jurisdiction in the country. That, in fact, is true. We have the lowest business taxes, the lowest personal taxes, no sales tax, no payroll tax, no land transfer tax, no capital tax. Folks are moving from every province into Alberta right now. Why? Because there's opportunity, because our economic policies are attracting tens of billions of dollars of investment, creating jobs and opportunities for all Albertans.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Albertans are only \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of the month and given that the UCP's income tax increase will cost Alberta families \$900 per year by the end of their fiscal plan, cuts to AISH will cost recipients \$3,500 per year, and cuts to low-income seniors on the seniors' benefit will cost \$900 per year and given that utility bills have increased by hundreds of dollars after the UCP lifted the rate cap, can the minister explain how exactly this government's plan to push Albertans into bankruptcy is good for the economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I reject the assertion in that question. We did not reduce AISH payments, we've not reduced seniors' payments, and we've not increased taxes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Members of the opposition don't just get to yell at the government at their pleasure. They're welcome to heckle strategically. As you all know, the Speaker is a former heckler. You're welcome to heckle strategically, but just yelling at the government is not a heckle.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat that. We have not raised taxes, we have not cut AISH, and we've not cut seniors' benefits. Alberta maintains the strongest, most generous supports of any province in the country. On top of that, we're positioning the province for disproportionate investment attraction, and we balanced the budget.

Mr. Bilous: Deindexing is a cut, and it's in your budget.

Given that Albertans are in the worst financial shape in the country according to a report by MNP and given that Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, with

Calgary having the highest unemployment rate in the country amongst major cities, and given that the UCP keeps adding on costs to Albertans already struggling to find work and make ends meet, why are Albertans falling further behind under the UCP? Would somebody please step up and take responsibility for your budget?

The Speaker: That sounds like a preamble, and it's in the standing orders.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most major banks and economic think tanks are projecting Alberta to lead the nation in economic growth not only in 2022 but in 2023. Our policies are working. Investment is pouring into this province. Jobs are being created; in fact, employers are struggling to find employees. That's why we've invested \$600 million in Budget 2022 to reskill Albertans, to ensure they can take part in the new economy, the economy of the future. Our policies are working. Alberta is back. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past two years the COVID-19 pandemic caused huge disruptions in Alberta's economic growth. Thousands of Albertans lost their jobs as a result of the world-wide response and damages caused by COVID-19, including many of my constituents of Calgary-Falconridge. Now that we're learning to live with COVID, Albertans need to know whether or not the UCP plan is working to get Albertans back to work. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: is our plan working?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last week our government introduced a game-changing \$600 million investment in Alberta at work to support education, on-the-job training, and to reduce barriers for underrepresented groups. Alberta's unemployment rate is lower than it's been since December 2018, and each month it keeps getting lower and lower. Alberta's recovery plan is working, and more Albertans are sharing in our province's success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's economy was severely damaged by the previous NDP government's job-killing policies and given that their taxation on corporations led to billions of dollars of investment leaving Alberta, putting thousands and thousands of Albertans out of work, and given that our government was elected to clean up the mess made by the members opposite, to the same minister: how are we cleaning up the NDP's mess and getting Albertans back to work?

2:30

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Sure. Thank you. As my colleague has mentioned, we have a lot of work to do to clean up the mess that the NDP left us. But rest assured, the cleanup crew is here, and we will get things done, including the \$600 million investment that my colleague

mentioned to the Alberta at work initiative. This initiative is going to help Albertans who are struggling to find employment find those job opportunities. It's going to help other Albertans reskill and upskill for the jobs of the future, and it's going to help young Albertans make sure they have the skills they need to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta is currently in a labour shortage crisis and given that our government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to helping Albertans get job training through the Alberta at work program, thus attracting more workers and tradespeople to come work in Alberta, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how will this \$235 million investment into postsecondary help address the skilled labour shortage?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you. As the member mentioned, we are investing \$235 million in Advanced Education over three years. A big portion of that, \$171 million, is going to create spaces in our postsecondary institutions. We'll be creating so many spaces, Mr. Speaker, 7,000 additional spaces, in our postsecondary institutions in high-demand areas, including aviation, tech. As well, we're providing \$30 million over three years to support trades and apprenticeship education. We are focused on ensuring that Albertans have the skills they need to succeed.

Education Policies and Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, every day this UCP government is making life more expensive for Alberta families. Thanks to the UCP, families are paying more for income tax, more for property tax, more on tuition, more interest on student debt, more for car insurance, and more for utilities, but it doesn't end there. The UCP is also driving up school fees with their cuts to school districts. In Sherwood Park, Elk Island schools announced a 20 per cent increase to transportation fees for students. Why is the UCP making it more expensive for kids in Sherwood Park to get to school?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that 98 per cent of all the funding goes directly to school authorities. School authorities have the ability to set their school fees, and they set school fees. Besides for busing, et cetera, they also set them for extracurricular activities and field trips. This is what school fees are for. Under the previous government they were very upset that there were controls on school fees, et cetera. They were not happy when that happened. We fixed their mess.

Ms Hoffman: Given that at the Parkland school division transportation fees are going up by \$70 in some cases and even more than \$100 for a maximum family rate and given that families in Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and surrounding communities are already struggling under all of the mounting costs that this UCP government is piling onto them – the NDP government did work to lower school fees, and we would have continued that work, but this minister repealed our legislation – Minister, will you explain to parents why this current government has cleared a path for massive school fee hike increases and why it's set on making things more expensive for kids trying to get to school?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I hear continuously – and I still hear it – is: thank God the NDP aren't in office. Just to clarify, in 2019 we had 711,000 students, and our

budget was \$8.2 billion. Right now in this upcoming year we have 716,000 students. We have an \$8.4 billion budget. I've increased dollars to transportation 5 per cent to the year before, 5 per cent to last year, and 4.6 per cent in this upcoming year.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the current government is deliberately underfunding public education and given that the UCP is forcing parents to pay more in school fees at a time when many Albertans are already struggling to make ends meet and given that the UCP is forcing a rushed curriculum on students that's not supported by parents or teachers and fails to support students, why is this government forcing struggling parents to pay more and get less support, and why are they forcing a broken curriculum that parents don't support, teachers don't support, school boards don't support on Alberta students?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear from the Queen of Misinformation, but I want to clear things up. In fact, school authorities: as I said, we've added an additional \$700 million over three years. We have \$191 million for the curriculum implementation. We have an additional \$110 million to address mental health and wellness. That's on top of the \$45 million I added last year in terms of dealing with learning loss. School boards have gone from \$363 million in operating reserves to \$464 million as of August 2021.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Ms Gray: Yep.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:35.

Drug Poisoning Death Prevention

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP's response to the drug poisoning crisis has been shameful. They have denied evidence about harm reduction [interjections] so they could fulfill the Premier's campaign of stigmatizing proven life-saving methods. January was the deadliest month on record from drug poisoning; 160 Albertans tragically lost their lives. Over five Albertans died a day. [interjections] My question to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions is simple: when will Alberta stop breaking records for deaths and start to see a decrease in drug poisonings?

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

Sorry. I'm just a little distracted by your colleague the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Perhaps he might come to order.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I thank the member for the question. As I've said many times in this House, the loss of one life is one too many, especially in the addiction crisis. But let's be clear. What is the NDP's plan? The NDP's plan is for publicly funded addictive drugs. That's right. The NDP wants to put drugs on the streets. They want to put hydromorphone on the streets. That is their plan. I don't see how more drugs helps a drug situation. [interjections]

The Speaker: I might just caution members of the opposition, whoever is making comments like, "Sit down," that that may seem

to be intimidating another member. Of course, members have the opportunity to rise in their seat and answer the question.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP has continuously stated that harm reduction methods do not work, like the minister just said, and given that I've been advocating for increased affordable housing with mental health support and given that here in Edmonton emergency shelter beds are set to decrease by 44 per cent in June and that continued requests by the city council for permanent supportive housing so people with mental health concerns can get help while having a stable home have been constantly rejected by the UCP, why is the UCP opposed to providing mental health support and stable housing to the most vulnerable?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, you know, I know the NDP always want to talk about the science and believe in the evidence, but the NDP had an opportunity to hear evidence from people from Harvard University, from Stanford University, from Yale University. You know what? They quit. They don't want to hear the evidence. They don't want to hear the truth. We're listening to the evidence, and we are trying to move forward in helping people with severe mental health and addictions issues.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the January deaths from drug poisoning in 2022 are 21 per cent higher than 2021 – 758 Albertans died in 2021, which is double the total in 2019; the UCP's approach is clearly not working – and given that the UCP has focused on recovery but that cuts to social services such as deindexing income support and AISH, not funding permanent supportive housing ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has every right to ask a question and the Speaker to hear the question. If she wants to rewind about five seconds, I'd be happy to allow her to do that.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP has focused on recovery but that cuts to social supports such as deindexing income support and AISH, not funding permanent supportive housing, and cutting critical mental health supports do not serve the mission of recovery, to the associate minister: over five preventable deaths ...

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

2:40

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, the drug crisis is affecting not just Alberta. I know the NDP wants to think that it's only an Alberta issue, but it's not an Alberta issue. This is a Canadian issue. This is a North American issue. You know, their close friend and ally in the federal Liberal Party – let me be perfectly clear. They are supporting publicly funded drugs. Even the federal minister, their close friend and ally, has indicated that these are addictive drugs. I do not see how, in any rational mind, we can put more addictive drugs on the streets of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members ... [interjections] Order. Order. Order. That concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has a statement to make.

Oil and Gas Transportation Infrastructure

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government is creating new opportunities for Albertans, and Alberta's economy has been on the right path with the implementation of Alberta's recovery plan. One of the core pillars of this is the diversification of Alberta's economy. As part of this plan there has been a tremendous focus on diversifying accessibility to Alberta's enormous energy supply.

With the ongoing invasion by Russia in Ukraine, the global energy market will change significantly. As a result, there will be likely growing demand for responsible and ethically produced Alberta oil and gas. The future of Alberta's energy supply requires us to make rapid and long-term investment in oil transport infrastructure. In order to achieve this, it is critical for the federal government to do more, remove regulatory gridlocks that deprive our energy supply to global markets.

Alberta and Canada need to work at developing an oil-handling system which will reach large cargo vessels in Churchill port in Manitoba, that would enable the export of energy from Alberta. Developing access to tidewater infrastructure from Alberta will serve as a gateway to supply our energy to the world. The financial gains of this project will definitely improve the competitiveness of our energy while also providing long-term opportunities for many within the province and the country. I urge the government to look in this direction and also put more pressure on the federal government to repeal bills C-48 and C-69, that have limited the movement of the province's oil.

The future of Alberta's energy supply requires us to make rapid and long-term investment in oil transport infrastructure, and the time to act is now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, responses to questions raised by Mr. Barnes, hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, Ms Phillips, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, and Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, on March 8, 2022, Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:24 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During a question set talking about emergency shelter capacity, the real need for Edmontonians experiencing homelessness to have supports in affordable housing, and other issues of great significance, I rose under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," because, as we know, in this House personal attacks and insults are not in order, and the minister said to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, "Maybe math is hard for her."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a point of order, that that type of insult in this House is unparliamentary. I would also like to note that the last time a member of the Conservative front bench told the NDP that math was hard, it was just a few weeks before Albertans chose an NDP government. Time is a flat circle. I believe we may be repeating history here, but certainly that language was unparliamentary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It almost sounds like she's continuing debate.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this is a point of order. I would suggest that it's a matter of debate, specifically for the use of the word "maybe." The word "maybe" in itself suggests that this is a matter of debate. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing was commenting on the mathematics that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was using in the questions that she was posing to the minister. I recognize that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview did not like the answer and certainly, I guess, also didn't like the response that maybe math is hard. But from the fact that she used the word "maybe" and that other things have very similarly been said in this Chamber that have not been called points of order, have gone through, passed the smell test, I would argue that it's not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate, maybe a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. "I don't understand what the hon. member doesn't understand. Maybe math is hard for her." That is the statement that the Minister of Seniors and Housing made at 2:22. I would like to note that while the words themselves are not unparliamentary, I think that it is well accepted that this statement, that has become part of the political discourse in our province over a number of years, certainly has some insulting overtones to it. While I'm not entirely convinced that it raises to the level of a point of order, I will offer a very direct encouragement to the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Particularly, directing a statement that may be considered to be insulting at any one particular member is, of course, where caution ought to be used in the future. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. This is not a point of order.

However, at 2:35 the Opposition House Leader rose on an additional point of order, which we will hear now.

Point of Clarification

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, prior to that point of order, just under 13(2), the argument that the Deputy Government House Leader made, that making insulting statements would be parliamentary if we put "maybe" in front of them, like "Maybe the Deputy Government House Leader is bad at his job": could you let me know if that would be acceptable or unacceptable? I would like to provide guidance to my caucus, and I found that reasoning to be quite suspect. I suspect we do not want to see that behaviour in the House, but I look forward to your guidance. I'm just unclear if it was found to be parliamentary because of the word "maybe." Is that comment . . .

The Speaker: Oh. No. I would suggest that the words themselves, "Math is hard," are not unparliamentary, and given the context in which they were used, I would suggest that it didn't raise to the level of a point of order today. However, I did provide significant caution to the minister in light of the fact that such a comment was directed specifically at an individual. Of course, the use of the word "maybe" doesn't give licence to use unparliamentary language. Just because the Deputy Government House Leader said it doesn't mean that it's fact. While I appreciated his submissions, they were inconsequential to the fact that I didn't find a point of order. Maybe not inconsequential.

Ms Gray: I appreciate that clarification, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your indulgence there.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: At 2:35 I rose under, again, 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The Member for Edmonton-Glenora was asking about a 20 per cent increase in school fees when the Minister of Education referred to her as the queen of misinformation, directly calling her a liar. I do not believe this is a matter of debate. I do believe that is an insult. That is a nickname that is not referring to a colleague in a respectful manner. I believe this is a point of order.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been called many things in my life but inconsequential is not one of them. Of course, I kid.

I will get to the matter at hand. I don't find that this is a point of order, particularly because I do believe that in many instances there are members of the opposition who maybe try to pass misinformation as fact. I believe the hon. Minister of Education was pointing out that fact, and maybe that's what was so frustrating to the hon. member opposite and why the point of order was called, or maybe it was the use of the word "queen." I do know that the members opposite have a disdain for — they do not like the monarchy. Maybe it's the title. Maybe princess or duchess would be more appropriate, but I don't believe this is a point of order. [interjections]

I will retract and apologize for those comments. I'd just retract and apologize.

I will say that I don't believe this is a point of order, but I will leave that to your judgment, hon. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: I couldn't disagree with you more in this case. To be overly certain, I didn't say that you were inconsequential. I said that the argument was inconsequential, and perhaps that was a bit of an overstatement as well.

In this case, however, I would say that it is unparliamentary to refer to an individual as the queen of misinformation. I have ruled on numerous occasions with respect to the language around misinformation, including on June 7, 2021, page 5238 of *Hansard*. If anyone is inclined to look those comments up, I encourage you to do so. But this is a point of order, and I'll have the Deputy Government House Leader apologize and withdraw the comments.

Mr. Schow: I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.
We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 25: Mr. Eggen]

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would like to join in the debate on Bill 13.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just getting my timer going here. I want to, you know, speak fulsomely if I can.

I'm pleased to rise at second reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I want to begin by saying that I believe that overall we support this bill, and I believe that the type of innovation that it is setting out in this bill is something that we certainly do support.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

We know that the financial services sector within Alberta employs over 60,000 Albertans, and we have consistently stood in this space and talked about the need for innovation and for attracting talent and investment into Alberta and finding new ways to do that. It's one of the reasons why, in this House, the members of the Official Opposition have been fiercely advocating for a postsecondary system that actually, you know, attracts people and actually keeps Albertans here.

We know that within the energy sector, within the transition to a new energy economy there is enormous opportunity for innovation, and of course the oil and gas sector is using a great deal of technology and automation and robotics to really make their systems more efficient. We also know that we need more innovation because that efficiency and automation often do not actually translate into more jobs necessarily, but we do know that there is a great opportunity for more jobs in Alberta by encouraging that innovation.

We've seen, certainly, that, you know, members from the Official Opposition with respect to – actually, I'm thinking specifically about Bill 203, that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview introduced, which, unfortunately, the government decided is not worthy of debate in this House. It talked about an Alberta venture fund, which is also about encouraging Albertans to do what they do best, which is to take risks and to invest in Albertans. It was the opportunity for Albertans to participate in a small way by innovating and investing into venture funds right here in Alberta that would support Alberta companies.

For some reason the government of the day thought that this was too risky. They believed it was too risky to allow Albertans to, you know, do what we do best: be entrepreneurial, take chances, come up with new ideas, and innovate. They didn't trust Albertans to make those investments on their own, which is shocking. However, we certainly do, so I think this idea of a Financial Innovation Act – clearly, there is some risk that the UCP is willing to take, just not on good ideas from the opposition.

As I understand it, Bill 13 would essentially create what's called a regulatory sandbox, and financial services companies and financial technology companies could basically test out new services or technologies in sort of an environment where there are lowered or limited regulatory frameworks, so basically have an opportunity to innovate and to try out new things and, yes, to take some risks in an idea where regulatory thresholds are somewhat lowered, so to enable that.

Then, of course, if it's successful, you know, that work would come out and be subject to the full regulation that exists for other companies. It's to lower the risk for these companies to try new things and to make it easier and cheaper for them to do that, but it has to have, of course, some guideposts around it because while that's a good opportunity, we want to make sure that we are protecting consumers very carefully who may be investing in these kinds of new financial services and innovations. We want to make sure that they have the protections necessary so that they understand the risks of investing or even purchasing services and goods from a company that has a lower regulatory threshold. But we also want to make sure that those who are making the determination of which financial services should be allowed to operate in this regulatory sandbox have the expertise necessary to determine when it's safe to do so.

As I understand it, you know, it would allow specific companies to apply for a certificate to the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance for temporary relief from certain laws and regulation. I understand there are a number of pieces of legislation that these companies would be exempt from. It includes the loans and trust act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, and the Consumer Protection Act, which I have a bit of concern about, and the personal information and privacy act as well as the Financial Consumers Act, and we know that more legislation could be added by regulation. So, essentially, a company would apply, as I understand it, to the minister for a certificate to be exempt from these regulatory requirements.

I understand that there are some kinds of – you know, there are eligibility requirements. The company must be an Alberta company, physically located here in Alberta. They must be able to demonstrate to the government that their product is new and original, and they must demonstrate that no other company is currently offering the same products or services, and they have to, of course, submit a business case. These are sort of the requirements to apply for a certificate, and then those exemptions can be granted. I understand that they will be explicitly listed on the certificate, so at least consumers have an idea of which regulatory requirements this company is exempt from.

Again, I think that there is certainly some benefit to this, and we certainly see an opportunity from what's set out in Bill 13 and an opportunity for innovation in this space, but I also know that there are some risks that we need to be clear on. First, as I mentioned, this puts a great deal of onus on the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance to be able to apply those eligibility requirements, look at the business case, understand the innovative nature of what's being proposed, and make a determination that that company should be eligible for an exemption.

There is a risk, I believe, and as I understand it, we're talking about very novel companies and novel financial services, something that maybe lots of folks here have heard about, talked about; you know, cryptocurrency and all of that and Bitcoin. Even people who are well versed in these kinds of things find it difficult to fully comprehend, perhaps, what cryptocurrency is, and I will acknowledge that I have tried to go over it a number of times in my head. Every time I think I've got it, then something changes, and I still have to reflect on what I thought I knew.

So it's certainly a challenging space, and we need to be sure that those who are making determinations as to whether or not a financial services company should be exempt from regulatory requirements has the requisite knowledge and expertise to be able to make that risk assessment. It's relying heavily on the government ministry itself and the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance himself. I think we need some assurances that there is the appropriate level of expertise, both within the existing ministry but also, certainly, with the existing minister, to be able to make that kind of assessment.

You know, I think that sort of speaks to the even broader issue here. Really, this is going to be a certificate issued by the authority of the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, which asks for Albertans to place their trust in the minister to make good and sound decisions. Now, as we know, the current Minister of Treasury Board and Finance is the same minister who has, you know, given in to insurance company lobbying and allowed for insurance companies to make a significant amount of profit on the backs of Alberta drivers, many of which weren't even driving their vehicles much in the last two years but saw their insurance premiums go up. This is the same Treasury Board and Finance minister who lifted the cap on insurance rates.

3:00

It's the same Treasury Board and Finance minister who also advised on the decision to throw away \$1.3 billion on the KXL pipeline, a pipeline that everybody was advising was not going to happen unless Donald Trump was re-elected. I mean, that's just this minister. He's the same minister who has overseen, against what I believe are his core principles and values as a so-called conservative, allowed for bracket creep, allowed for the hike of personal income taxes without even being honest about what was happening and still refusing to acknowledge it. I mean, there's very good reason for this.

And let's be honest. This is also the Finance minister who, up until the, you know, windfall of large oil price increases in the last few months, was about to enter a budget with the highest deficit ever recorded in Alberta. Certainly, Albertans would have a lot of reason to not have a great deal of trust in the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, at least this one. Of course, more generally, I could use up a significant amount of time going through all the reasons why Albertans don't trust this government and the Premier in particular, but we don't have time for that.

The other risk associated with this bill is really about consumer protection. It's really about making sure that consumers understand that they may be purchasing services and engaging in financial transactions with a company that is subject to a lower level or exempt from certain regulatory requirements. We need to ensure that there's some kind of education being done to the public or some kind of warning label or some kind of way of transmitting to the consumer that they understand that there may be greater risks associated in this space. You know, there's also a worry that people might just simply transfer their current confidence and trust in our public financial institutions such as major banks and just simply think that the same requirements are applying to these kinds of new financial innovation and financial services companies, which won't be the case under this bill. Those are the kinds of things that we need to be cautious about.

Overall, I think our caucus has been very clear in our support for innovation, and I look forward to hearing more thoughtful debate on this subject. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other – I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 13, which is the Financial Innovation Act. I want to start by making it clear on the record that in general I'm supportive of this bill. I think members should probably vote in favour of this bill. I just have a few concerns, and I think that they are concerns that arise from the level of discretion and a lack of understanding of what the process is going to be for the evaluation of these applications.

Obviously, the act builds on a regulatory sandbox initiative started under the NDP government through the Alberta Securities Commission. Generally I think that was a good initiative, I mean, obviously. These sorts of ideas can be very useful. They can spur innovation. They can sort of create new – they can allow new businesses with new ideas to flourish in an existing environment, and I think that's really important. I'm actually really glad to see the government at least taking steps in this direction because they tend to privilege economic development measures that really, really work for established players generating large profits to the detriment of new entrants to a market.

For instance, this government: obviously, their sort of big throw when they first got into government was to drop the corporate tax rate.

Now, that tax rate is applicable only on companies that are generating \$500,000 a year or more, so it is beneficial to those companies but not to new companies because, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're well aware that a new business doesn't generate \$500,000 worth of revenue in the first year. That almost never happens. In fact, most businesses don't generate revenue in the first year. Most times it takes a little while to sort of get up to speed. It's very unlikely that a measure like that would help a new business or innovation.

Now, it's not surprising that that was the direction of the government because it was a government who said that diversification was a luxury, something we didn't have time for, something we shouldn't be interested in. It doesn't surprise me, but this represents a pretty big reversal, a reversal in direction, and I think that's good.

There are a number of other things I'd like to see them reverse; for instance, the Alberta investor tax credit. That was a program with a demonstrated history of attracting new businesses. It was a program with a demonstrated history of creating jobs. That's the challenge with the direction that this government took. They gave away billions of dollars to corporations. They got no jobs in return because that wasn't where the market was at the time. So they helped only established players, and they didn't help them in a way that created any jobs for Albertans. It just essentially sent profits overseas. This initiative looks like a good initiative. I'd like to see them take more of these good initiatives. The Alberta investor tax credit, as I mentioned, under our government was working really, really well.

They love to talk about the tech sector. Well, initial growth was spurred under our government because we made investments, and then the UCP cut those investments, so companies that were looking at coming here – because companies get legal work and I guess I talk to other lawyers, I heard from a number of people that companies that had been planning to relocate here or create an office here didn't do that because the government cut the program, and then they brought it back. Now it's starting to spool up, but the net result of this government's refusal to invest in good economic policy was that we are now behind the rest of the country in terms of that growth. That isn't to say that we aren't seeing growth, because the UCP government thankfully chose to eventually reverse course and get back onboard with initiatives that were working under the NDP government, but the result of that is that we were behind, so that's problematic. Those are the things I think are good about this bill. Those are the reasons I think it's good.

The reason I think it's problematic is that it gives enormous power to the minister. That isn't to say that there's never a need for that; it's just to say that with this government in particular I think it requires a little more explanation of how a few things are going to be handled. For instance, how are we going to ensure that there is still consumer protection? This is a government that has a long history of privileging the interests of large and wealthy insiders over the interests of regular Albertans. How do they plan to protect those Albertans?

Another big question is: how do they plan to adjudicate who gets these regulatory exemptions and who doesn't? Again, this is a government with a demonstrated history of not being particularly trustworthy when it comes to picking policies as opposed to picking friends. This is a government with a long history of demonstrating that they can't assess risk particularly well. I mean, the problem ultimately is what I would describe, Mr. Speaker, as a loss of trust. The public has lost trust in this government, so they need more explanation of how the rules are going to be applied and how those rules are going to be applied fairly than they normally would.

Now, this is sort of a concept that I'm borrowing from employment law. One of the things that can happen if you do something bad at your job and it's not bad enough that the judge or

the arbitrator or whoever it is that's deciding thinks you should lose your job: sometimes you can lose your job anyway, and that happens because there is a breakdown of trust. So when you wind up in a position where the employee and the employer are just – basically, there's so little trust between them that the relationship is nonfunctional. Any little thing that happens going forward in the future is going to, like, turn into a huge sort of catastrophic breakdown because everyone assumes the other party isn't acting in good faith. Essentially, what we have with this government is that the public assumes that this is a government that is not acting in good faith because of, again, a demonstrated history.

Some of the things, I think, that could help with this, that could go a long way to help with this. This government could learn to admit when it's wrong. When it makes a mistake and chooses to reverse course, it could admit when it's wrong. It's reversed course on a number of issues, this government. For instance, Mr. Speaker, they repealed the 1976 coal policy. They tried to go ahead with coal mining in the Rockies. Now, some projects have slipped through. But when they reversed that, there was no standing up and saying: "Yep. Turns out we were wrong. We totally misread that situation. We didn't think about it deeply enough." I really think that this would go a long way to re-establishing trust with Albertans.

3:10

Maybe it's just because I was at the hydrogen conference this morning, Mr. Speaker, but I think, you know, the public's confidence in this government would have been assisted a lot – rewind to 2020. The NDP releases a plan on hydrogen, and the UCP laughs. The minister says: it's ridiculous; hydrogen will never come that fast. The idea that we would export by 2030 is absolutely absurd, says the associate minister. And then they release a plan that has us doing exactly that, largely borrowed from our plan. So what happened in between? I just feel like it would go a long way to build trust if the associate minister could just stand up and say: "Yep. I was wrong. I was wrong when I laughed at green hydrogen and said that we would never make it in Alberta. I was wrong when I said that we would never export by 2030. I was wrong when I said that all of these things were out decades." I think that that would go a long way to re-establish trust.

In addition, with respect to this bill you have a situation where the applicants, the people being asked to be exempt from the regulations, are potentially people who know the government; again, demonstrated history of sort of, you know, friends and insiders. This is a government who, at the same time that they wouldn't let physicians use complex modifiers on telehealth during a pandemic, brought in a company to do telehealth. You know, it's pretty clear that there was some wink, wink, nudge, nudge in there. So I think this is incredibly problematic.

The big questions are: does this government have the expertise to credibly assess these proposals and still protect Albertans, and can they be impartial? I mean, if we just look at, for instance, in terms of their credibility, the issue around rebates, right? This issue comes up in November. The government says: we're going to do nothing. Then they say: we're going to do a natural gas rebate. But then the budget comes out, and it turns out that by "we're going to do," they mean, you know, eight or nine months from now, and at the time their current projections weren't showing that obtaining. As it turns out, it did.

But the point is, again, that then they say: we're going to do an electricity rebate. We wait. We wait. We wait. There's no word. There's no news. There's nothing. Then comes legislation. Okay. Fine. It took them weeks to sort of essentially crib previously existing legislation. They bring in the legislation, and on the same day that the associate minister says, "Oh, there's no way we get these rebates to people until,

you know, June, possibly July," they charge in and say, "Oh, the opposition didn't pass it in six hours, and that's the problem." The same day – the same day – the associate minister said: "We don't get them out until June. It's going to take us at least two months, and, oh, a six-hour delay is a really big problem for us."

Ms Gray: Ridiculous.

Ms Ganley: Ridiculous. Lack of trust.

Insurance caps: also a big deal. This government came in. They got lobbied by an insider. They remove the insurance cap. Insurance rates skyrocketed. There was an outcry from Albertans. They said: "Oh, no, no, no. There's no possible other way this could have happened. The insurance companies absolutely needed it. Everyone would have gone bankrupt without it." And then, mysteriously, the report that tells us how much insurance companies charged in premiums versus how much they took in in claims just doesn't appear that year. It just doesn't appear. The government trots out. They say: don't worry; all the information is online.

We proved that that is not, in fact, the case, Mr. Speaker, so finally they publish the report, trying to blame the civil service and blame the insurance companies and blame everyone but themselves, who chose not to publish the report, for that. When we see the report, we see that they took in more in premiums than they paid out in claims, significantly more, and, in fact, that that differential has expanded in the interim. Again, it's difficult for Albertans to have confidence that vesting all of this discretion in the minister will result in an outcome that is beneficial to everyone. I mean, the question is, again, whether they're going to protect consumers appropriately and whether they're going to pick companies appropriately. The best company with the best business case may come forward. What if they're not friends of the UCP? What if it's 2020 and they're coming forward with a hydrogen proposal when this government is saying, "Oh, pooh-pooh to hydrogen," before they decide to change their mind?

You know, the problem is that they just don't seem to make judgments based on the facts and the evidence before them. I think – ah, yes – this is a question of risk assessment. That's what the government is going to be doing. They're going to be looking at these companies and saying, like: what is the risk to consumers versus what is the potential benefit to innovation? This is the same government that bet on the re-election of Donald Trump when the polls were showing he had less than a 50 per cent chance of success.

Mr. Rutherford: They showed Hillary as a winner, too.

Ms Ganley: This is a government – well, I mean, that's fine, that the polls may have been wrong about Hillary as well, but we didn't make a \$1.3 billion bet with taxpayers' money on her election. I think maybe that's the problem there.

This government went ahead and made that bet. They made that bet without consultation with Albertans. They made that bet without proper financial transparency with Albertans, and they made that bet in what – I don't know. I'm not a big gambler myself, Mr. Speaker, but I think a lot of people would have looked at that and said: "Okay. So we're going to put down \$1.3 billion. We have less than a 50 per cent chance of success on any reading of the situation. I don't know. Does that seem like a good bet?" I don't think they would have made it with their own money.

Ms Hoffman: Betcha five bucks they wouldn't.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. You know, I'm not going to take that bet from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora because I don't think that the UCP would have made that bet with their own money. I would be

really surprised to hear that that was the case. I think they only made it because they had taxpayer money to spend.

I think that that is the main concern, that this is a government with a demonstrated history of an inability to credibly assess risk. And even if we assume that we clear that hurdle somehow, that we have some sort of policy or procedure that is printed online for Albertans to see in terms of how this government is going to assess risk, then the next hurdle arises, and that's a hurdle of: how do we know . . .

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. The Financial Innovation Act is poised to be the first of its kind in Canada, one that will spur investment in innovative and new technologies and position the Alberta economy for growth in the financial services sector. This forward-looking legislation provides space for innovation, disruption, and truly incredible minds to bring forward their products in Alberta. This will empower Alberta's fintech entrepreneurs to make full use of their creativity and test their products and ideas right here at home.

If passed, the proposed legislation would create a regulatory sandbox, as many have talked about this afternoon. That regulatory sandbox will make it easier for finance and fintech companies to develop new products and services in Alberta and will diversify Alberta's economy in this space. The regulatory sandbox would offer companies time-limited relief from certain legislation and regulations, making it simpler for them to research, to test, and to adapt their new technologies and services to the needs of Albertans. It would also help companies collect information on new products and services to determine if they are providing value for their customers. A regulatory sandbox would drive increased innovation and competition in Alberta, which could potentially give Albertans greater access to more products and services at a lower cost.

While this sandbox will be the first of its kind in Canada, there are models and best practices that we can use and follow. To the member previously talking about the questions around what I heard was safeguards: I think that's one of the challenges with legislation like this. It being an innovative bill and trying to legislate innovative practice, it's challenging to know how to define the specific guidelines because by definition it's going to be ill defined; hence, the regulatory sandbox. That is, in fact, the guardrails, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, there are models and best practices that we can use, that we can look to as examples that have worked in other jurisdictions. In Canada there's currently a regulatory sandbox in place for the securities industry, for example. Other countries are also using regulatory sandboxes as tools to drive innovation and economic growth while providing that safety within the sandbox, those guardrails.

3:20

Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish a regulatory sandbox for the finance and fintech sector, giving companies additional ways to grow their business and create jobs. It will help financial-related companies expand their offerings to create new jobs right here in Alberta while preparing for Canada's launch of open banking.

We want Alberta to be ahead of the curve, Mr. Speaker, not behind. A regulatory sandbox would provide time-limited exemptions from the following legislation and related regulations: the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, the Financial Consumers Act, the Consumer

Protection Act, and, finally, the Personal Information Protection Act.

Specific exemptions would depend on what kind of relief each applicant is seeking and whether or not the government can safely provide those exemptions as requested. This would be determined on a case-by-case basis as the government needs the flexibility to weigh the relative merits and risks of each application. All legislative exemptions would be disclosed publicly. There's one safeguard there. We believe this will be a strong incentive for fintech companies to move to Alberta and create jobs here, with the added benefit of further diversifying our economy and adding to our growing reputation as a hub for world-class financial services and fintech companies.

To help review applications, the government has formed a working group, including officials from the following: Treasury Board and Finance, Jobs, Economy and Innovation, and Service Alberta as the ministries responsible for some of the related acts. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner would also be consulted on exemptions to the Personal Information Protection Act, and their approval would be required for exemptions to proceed, another safeguard for Albertans and consumers in general. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted during the development of the legislation, and the feedback they provided has been incorporated into the drafting of the legislation.

Successful applicants would have to meet all of the following main criteria. First, they would be required to maintain a physical presence in Alberta. In other words, they would need to have an office in Alberta or staff living here in Alberta. Second, the regulatory sandbox would only be for companies that offer financial products or services. Third, applicants must adequately explain why the product or service should be considered new or a material improvement to an existing product or service. Applicants would not receive exemption for products or services that are already offered in Alberta by other companies. Lastly, applicants would have to provide a sound and viable business plan for the testing of a financial product or service. The plan must also demonstrate how they plan to exit the sandbox given that participation would be time limited as defined in the legislation.

I want to assure all members that consumer protection is strongly represented in this legislation, which is specifically designed to ensure companies participating in this regulatory sandbox are held to high professional standards and meet specified eligibility requirements.

These criteria: for example, participating companies may be subject to additional terms, conditions, and restrictions such as consulting a qualified expert or auditor, limiting the number of customers who can purchase the product or service being tested during the testing phase, having adequate capital on hand to support the venture, providing proof of appropriate insurance coverage, implementing specific financial security or surety requirements to mitigate risk and losses, developing new risk management policies and procedures, or having a way for customers to voice concerns and get them resolved, a mechanism for consumer protection and consumer feedback to be captured within the sandbox.

Mr. Speaker, the Financial Innovation Act signals that Alberta is willing to work with innovators and businesses seeking to offer innovative products and technologies. Alberta is willing to allow access to our residents these services, leading the way for Canada. Alberta's regulatory sandbox would provide a strong incentive for financial services and fintech companies to move to Alberta. This would add to Alberta's many other advantages in attracting new business, and it would do so without compromising consumer protection or government oversight. In fact, the sandbox would foster open and constructive dialogue between the government and companies seeking to enter the market. I think this is unique,

because this would help those companies get a better sense of the rules and regulations as they exist and open a new pathway for them to become fully regulated market participants.

Mr. Speaker, the world of finance is rapidly evolving, and our government understands that we need to partner with businesses if Alberta is going to stay ahead of the curve. Cutting red tape and making it easier to do business in Alberta is a crucial part of our strategy to grow the economy, to support job creation, and to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. I would encourage, therefore, all members of the Assembly to support Bill 13.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the rest of my time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Financial Innovation Act, and I want to start by saying that if the goals of this bill are to grow and diversify the economy, if they are truly to support innovation, then I think that we probably have some alignment and some agreement on where we want to move. The biggest issue with this bill, however, is that it requires a high degree of trust, trust that the regulation-making process or the regulatory sandbox, as referred to, is going to actually protect consumers, and putting these powers through regulation certainly requires consumers to have trust that the government is actually going to act in their best interests.

What we've seen for the last three years is a disregard for that, a disregard for the public money that is invested by the people of Alberta in their government to be able to make prudent financial decisions on their behalf, decisions that should be working toward economic diversification, toward creating a strong, diversified economy with jobs that people can count on to pay their mortgage. What we have seen is a significant reduction in the number of full-time jobs in this province, jobs that people can raise a family off.

The government seems to chase short-term headlines and sacrifice long-term prosperity, so while we have tremendous partners working to ensure a strong reputation nationally and internationally when it comes to emissions and responsible leadership around energy development, we have a provincial government that chooses instead to pick fights regularly with parties that are superfluous to the actual activities of the industry.

For the government to continue to put money into what they refer to as an energy war room while also gambling more than a billion dollars, at least \$1.3 billion, on a pipeline that doesn't exist based on the government's hopeful prediction that Donald Trump would win the last U.S. presidential election is completely irresponsible and demonstrates just a couple of the reasons why Albertans have lost trust in this UCP government.

Trust is the key issue here. I have to say that I don't think that there are issues with what we've been told the goals of the bill are. I think that the goals, if they are indeed around supporting more innovation and economic diversification, are things that we in the NDP have been championing for decades and wanting to make sure that we have a strong, diversified economy. But this government has shown time and time again that – the Minister of Finance, the sponsor of this bill, for example, said that diversification was a luxury that we just couldn't afford.

Well, Mr. Speaker, many would argue that we can't afford not to diversify, that we must make sure that we have robust sectors, including the energy sector, traditional energy, of course, being a big piece of that but other types of energy, including renewables,

including hydrogen. The hydrogen conference is happening right now here in Edmonton; 4,000 people downtown talking about an industry that we can be leaders in, and we know that the government didn't want us there to talk to people about what the actual vision is for our province and for the energy sector as it relates to hydrogen.

We should be working in partnership across the aisle and with industry and with investors from a variety of sectors to make sure that we can continue to be energy leaders in, of course, oil and gas but also in other spinoff energy opportunities that we have. We also need to be diversifying the economy in other areas, so significant investment in tech and in other growing sectors would be a wise investment from the people of Alberta in ensuring that we continue to have a strong and growing economy.

The fact that this bill asks this Assembly to put such a high degree of trust in cabinet to develop regulations that will deliver when, I would say, arguably, when you look at the history of Alberta, there's probably the least amount of trust in this cabinet of any government caucus that I've seen in the last at least 30 years . . .

3:30

Mr. Yao: Go back to 2015-19.

Ms Hoffman: I didn't catch that.

Mr. Yao: I said: look back to 2015 to 2019. You'll see an untrustworthy cabinet.

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair, hon. members.
Please continue.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the fact that we have, arguably, the most untrustworthy cabinet, from its own government caucus, that we've seen in at least 30 years in this province, the fact that we have a government that is creating legislation that requires them to do the bulk of the work through regulation rather than having the open, transparent process that this Assembly offers through three full readings and proper debate, publication of the actual legislation prior to its passing, the fact that the current cabinet is calling on their caucus and all members of this Assembly to trust them when this is the least trustworthy government in Canada and probably in Alberta's history I think begs a lot of questions around whether or not we should trust the government to actually follow through on what they are saying the intent of this bill is.

With all of that being in mind, Mr. Speaker, I'm inclined – because I want to be able to have faith that the government will do what they say they are going to do, and I also have faith that there will be an election. There must be an election at some point within the next year. According to the law it will be next May. We'll see if this Conservative government decides to follow the law or not, but there will be an election and there will be a new cabinet, and at that time I imagine there will be a higher degree of trust and confidence in the cabinet of the government of Alberta to deliver on the intended goals as outlined through Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

With that in mind, I am inclined at this point to support this bill in its current iteration, but I do look forward to continued discussion of the legislation, specifically the government trying to restore some trust, because it certainly has been hindered significantly by the actions of the current government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has stood up.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13, Financial Innovation Act. Certainly, as my colleagues have said, there are a lot of positive aspects to this bill, and I, too, would like to go on the record to say I'll more than likely support this bill and, you know, hope for the best. I think it's important to support innovation, but there are a lot of concerns and questions that still remain, so instead of chirping about all kinds of things, perhaps this government will actually listen to the genuine questions and concerns that we have and genuinely bring back some information that will cause us to have more confidence in this bill. I think if that was the case, that we did have more confidence in this bill, we would not continue to hammer away at the same questions.

These actually are questions. The themes of these questions we ask frequently, because this government has been unable or unwilling – I'm not sure which; maybe both – to stand up and answer the questions and provide Albertans with some sort of reassurance that they actually can be trusted and that passing this legislation will mean that, you know, they will do the things that they suggest that they will do.

In any event, there are some things. You know, the substance of the legislation: there are a number of points that I'd like to make. First of all, the power to exempt new financial products from consumer protection laws. The concern, of course, is that exemption from the consumer protection laws can be abused, and you would hope that most governments would not set out to do that; however, this government doesn't have a great track record of actually putting consumers, Albertans, first and putting their interests first, so it would be terrific to get more reassurance. We know that it's critical, that consumer protection is critical, particularly when traditional safeguards are not in place, and with these being such new and innovative pieces of legislation and products, I would suggest that that would be even more important in this case, to provide consumers with some reassurance.

The second thing for this plan I think to really work is to have a bureaucracy with the technical capacity and sophistication to understand the new and innovative ideas and to regulate them properly. Now, I wasn't at the technical briefing, Mr. Speaker, but I understand that there was a discussion around this. That's not to say that it's a bad thing, that every ministry or every organization has every skill and ability that is required to go forward into the future. That's not a bad thing. It's actually a great thing to identify when there are weaknesses or holes and new skills that maybe you should recruit for, you know, to give Albertans some reassurance that perhaps the technical capacity or experience isn't there. "What are the steps this government will take?" instead of "Just trust us; we've got this": I think it would go a long way to reassure Albertans.

You know, I'm sure members know this, that Albertans just do not have a lot of faith in this government. And when you don't have trust, you have fear and you have an unwillingness to go forward and really listen to anything. We saw that repeatedly with COVID, Mr. Speaker. As we continued to see wave after wave, we saw the trust in government just – it was diminished. The government may have been saying really useful things, really positive things, but a lot of Albertans were just tuned out because they felt that they could not trust what was being said. So that is second.

Third – I think my colleague did mention this earlier – is that, you know, Albertans and Canadians in general rightly have a great deal of trust in their financial institutions. I think we're all fairly confident that what we deposit or what we invest with our financial institutions: that things won't change too much, that they won't instantly go bankrupt, and that we have some security. I think additional measures and transparency are indeed required to ensure that risks are never passed on to Albertans and consumers.

Finally, there is a legitimate concern with public disclosure. Government is telling the public that any company with a certificate and operating within this sandbox or expanded sandbox will be listed on a government website. That's pretty much it: on a government website. Well, I mean, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but there are a few government websites that I frequently check, and sometimes, for no reason at all, information just goes – it's just gone, and there's no reason, there's no rhyme as to why it's gone or changed. So I think that Albertans need more than: check the government website. For one, most Albertans aren't sort of as tuned in as we are to what is happening. They aren't checking for updates, they aren't getting all the press releases, and they aren't going back daily to see what's up, so I think it would be really good to have some clear information. You know, just going on to the government website doesn't really say much at all. It doesn't give any kind of reassurance at all.

Let me give you a quick example that happened recently. For the entire time that I have, you know, been the opposition critic for Community and Social Services, one of the things that I do fairly regularly is check in with open data. There are a few things that I check. A couple of them are wait-lists. There are two, actually, fairly large programs that combined are worth close to \$2 billion. I would suggest that's pretty significant. Both of these programs, thankfully, used to publish information about their waiting lists. Now, it's a little bit tricky because most people just looking at it wouldn't understand that it's a waiting list because they don't call it a waiting list. They call it in service or in planning or, you know, waiting for a caseworker, whatever, but it's actually a wait-list. There are different tiers of the wait-list.

I was checking it, and then it was gone. It was just gone. I asked the minister, you know: what's up with the family support for children with disabilities wait-list? Last time I checked, there were about 4,000 children/families in there waiting for service. That means that perhaps they were in planning, perhaps they were waiting to be assigned a caseworker, but they were still waiting for services. And the minister said: yeah, there's no longer a wait-list. Poof. Gone. My example, my story is just to illustrate that to tell someone, anyone, "Just trust us; check the website" really is not good enough, not good enough at all.

3:40

There were a couple of other questions, I think, to raise in debate. Hopefully, at some point somebody will stand up and provide some information or some answers. One of the questions that I thought was really important is: how will consumers know when they are using a new product or service or technology that is operating within this sandbox and therefore is regulated at a much lower level, as I mentioned? Is the government prepared to consider some type of warning label so that consumers actually know what they're getting into? You know, like my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud, on numerous occasions I listen to different experts, different podcasts about these products to try to understand: what are the benefits? What are the opposite of the benefits? What are the dangers? What are the risks? Trying to understand it – and obviously things are changing so rapidly that it is actually quite difficult to follow. I think in order to get Albertans as excited about using these products as I'm assuming the government would like, why not provide some more information for Albertans?

Going back to some of the earlier comments, as I said, this is, obviously, a piece of legislation that, if done correctly and it's the right time for it, could actually go a long way to support innovation and to continue to grow and diversify the economy. I think that, regardless of what side of the House we sit on, we all have the same goal in that area. I think that when the economy is strong and

flourishing, it's good for everybody. I would hope that, you know, our comments here – we do want to support this legislation, but it would be really terrific to get additional information.

Now, I really would like to say that the thing that troubles me the most is that – basically, my biggest concern with this legislation is that we're being asked to just trust this government. This piece of legislation gives enormous abilities to the minister, and this government has just an awful, awful track record in this department, the Finance minister in particular. As a part of the Public Accounts Committee I could go on sort of for a very long time on what, you know, some of the issues are. There are so many times that this government has said, "Trust us; no, we're not doing it for a bad reason; we're doing it to help Albertans and make life better" when we know that is incorrect. We bring evidence. We show them the information that is accurate, and still – and still – they refuse to see what's right in front of them until sometimes they're called out by the Auditor General.

Let me give you an example. In 2020, I believe it was, the Treasury Board and Finance – well, Community and Social Services; I blame them squarely, but both ministries, let's say – decided that they were going to change payment dates for people that receive income support and AISH. Traditionally people receive these payments a few days ahead of the first of the month. Now, it's a little bit chaotic and sometimes a little bit tough to tell when that would be because it was always really different. I'll admit that it wasn't a uniform date. It was always a little bit different, particularly in December. It was quite a bit before Christmas, so that would leave a longer period of time into January before people got their payment. Without very much notice at all – I don't think it could've been more than maybe a month and a half at the time; actually, people found out on social media – they were told that their payment dates were going to change. "It's for your own good," says the government. "It's for your own good. We're doing this because we care about you."

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Hear, hear.

Ms Renaud: That's not true. That is incorrect. The Member for Calgary-Klein thinks it's a good idea that they changed the payment dates and actually believes, according to his heckle, that they did change the payment dates to help Albertans, when we know it is not true.

We know that people struggled. They didn't get their payments until the first of the month. People couldn't pay their rent on time. They could not buy their bus passes to be able to ride the bus on the 1st. So many examples all over the place we saw instantly when those payment dates were changed. Now, it was so bad that we wrote a letter to the Auditor General, and we asked them to look at this. The problem was that the UCP was trying to make their bottom line look better than it actually was by putting some expense – actually, over \$150 million worth of expense – into the next year. They actually booked 11 months of 12 months for expense for income support and AISH. That is wrong. You're not allowed to do that, so there had to be a correction. There was actually a special auditor's report. So for the Member for Calgary-Klein to say, "Hear, hear" when I talk about the payment date changes, either he's just, like, tuned out or has no idea what he's talking about. You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't get it.

That is just one teeny, tiny example of why Albertans don't trust this government. So when the Finance minister ... [interjection] Sorry?

Mr. Luan: Can I have a chance to intervene?

Ms Renaud: Intervene? No. Thank you.

The other thing. You know, just this morning, actually, another good example of the lack of trust is that the government told Albertans to trust them about auto insurance: just trust us. We were asking questions: "Where is that report from the superintendent of insurance? Why after 107 years are we not seeing this report being released on time?" "Oh, just trust us. No problem. Don't even worry about it." Well, it turns out that during a pandemic, when Albertans were struggling – they were struggling, Mr. Speaker. They were struggling to pay their premiums. They weren't driving their cars like they were.

We knew – I mean, we didn't know for sure at the time, but we could anticipate that profits were likely going to be higher because there were fewer accidents, fewer cars on the road. I can remember during that first wave going to St. Albert and my office and actually taking a picture of the streets. I stood there. There were no vehicles at all, whatsoever. So it didn't take much for us to put it together to think there are likely going to be fewer payouts because there are fewer people driving for fewer hours. It kind of made sense.

So we didn't see that report. "Where is the report? What are you hiding?" It turns out that what was being hidden from Albertans was a huge amount of profit. The profit margin was huge during this pandemic.

Mr. Luan: Not true.

Ms Renaud: You know, they can chirp, whatever, and just say that it's not true. It's factual. It's in the report. It's actually factual. If the member would like to continue to be Trumpy and allege alternate facts, that's fine. Albertans know the truth. The truth is in the report, Mr. Speaker. The report was very clear.

So that is a second example. I mean, I could go on for the next week about the ongoing examples of why this government can't be trusted.

Now, we appreciate this piece of legislation that wants to go in a new place. What we're saying is that this government needs to be very clear and stand up and talk about what consumer protections will be in place and what you are going to do ...

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Wonderful. Thank you. Very hard to follow that. I think I can speak for everyone on this side when I say that I'm absolutely shocked that, again, no one from the UCP is willing to stand, but they are willing to continue to beak at us nonstop, including Calgary-Klein, Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Pancholi: The associate minister.

Member Irwin: The associate minister. Anyways, the list goes on.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are currently debating the bill. I would look to the hon. member to please direct her comments towards the bill and the debate at hand.

Thank you very much.

Member Irwin: Wonderful. Yes. Absolutely. I am very happy to speak quite briefly to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I just, you know, need to get it on the record that it is quite surprising that we're not hearing from any of the government members other than heckles.

You know, I won't speak long, as they continue to heckle, but I did want to just quickly touch on a couple of points around Bill 13. My colleagues have done a fantastic job, particularly my colleague

who just spoke. It's always hard to follow the Member for St. Albert, because she did an excellent job of unpacking some of the broader concerns around trust in this government.

I've done some reading on this, and I must admit I am certainly not an expert in this area, in the fintech, financial technology, sector, but I always want to learn. When I heard about a sandbox, I thought: "That's fun. Let's go play in the sandbox." But, in fact, it's a regulatory sandbox. A regulatory sandbox is a safe space in which companies can test innovative products or services without immediately meeting all regulatory requirements. Wow. There's a lot there although I do find it interesting that this government is supportive of safe spaces in some regards, just not in schools.

3:50

I want to just highlight that, you know, we've said, my colleagues have said that we are on the record in support, broadly, of this bill. Obviously, I was not a part of it when we were in government, but I was proud to see the work that the NDP government did when it comes to supporting the fintech sector and the tech sector broadly. I think about some of the investments that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he was minister, made to really expand those sectors and to attract talent to our province.

I find it hypocritical, you know, to hear the government speak and in reading their media releases on this, speaking about how this will help to entice people, fintech companies, to move to Alberta – more competition, lower costs, all these buzzwords – yet this is the same government that wasn't willing to support my colleague's private member's bill on creating a venture capital fund that would do something similar, obviously not in the same sector per se but would also have a focus on innovating and attracting investment and getting folks to move to our province. It was quite, quite disheartening to hear.

I know my colleague – I just want to get it on the record on his behalf – did a whole lot of consulting with folks on this bill. I also know that he spoke – and he shared this in the Chamber the other day; that was yesterday, in fact; time is confusing; that was just yesterday; it feels like we haven't left – in the debate on concurrence and explained that he's actually spoken to a number of UCP MLAs about this bill and had a lot of support, but when we came to the Chamber, unfortunately they were unwilling to support it.

Again, while we are broadly, generally supportive of Bill 13, I find it rich that this government isn't willing to support bills that come from our side of the House. You know, we've talked a lot about the fact that a private member's bill is a privilege, yet we've seen consistently from this government a refusal to support any bill that comes from the NDP. That one on tech: shot down. Another one, on antiracism, from my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre: shot down. Again, I need to get that on the record.

I won't speak too much more on the concerns on Bill 13 because I know that many of my colleagues have. I just want to summarize my remarks by noting again that our concerns here are around trust; you know, trusting this government that they can protect consumers – right? – that they can protect privacy when it comes to some of the specifics around Bill 13. As we've outlined, as my colleagues have outlined in a far more eloquent way than I can, this is a government that has a track record of a lack of trust.

We'd like to hear – I haven't had an opportunity to hear from government members just around some of the ways in which they are going to guarantee consumer protections, how they're going to guarantee consumer safety. You know, as noted, we absolutely respect that this is an innovative approach, and as noted, it's one that has happened in jurisdictions globally, but we've not seen – I believe it was the Member for Grande Prairie who pointed out, too,

that this would make Alberta the first provincial jurisdiction to play in the regulatory sandbox, so to speak. We just want some assurance from that side of the House that consumers and Albertans will be protected.

With that, I will end my remarks. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question, noting that the opportunity to close debate has been waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 12 Trustee Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak today to Bill 12, which is a new Trustee Act. I would like to say that generally we are supportive of this. I am, obviously, familiar with the Trustee Act and the trustee system. In, I'm going to say, 2017 or 2018 this department was moved from – what was it at the time? – Community and Social Services into Justice, so there was actually quite a lot going on at that time. It probably needed a new act.

We had recommendations, I think, from the Uniform Law Conference that ultimately moved over to the Alberta Law Reform Institute. Both of these organizations, incidentally, Mr. Chair, deserve a lot of praise for the amazing work they do. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada makes recommendations in terms of, essentially, standardizing laws across Canada. A lot of these are laws which are applicable in each jurisdiction, and obviously it can be deeply confusing to people who move from one area to another and the law changes for no obvious reason, just for sort of historical context factors. You know, it was done that way in that particular province and always has been that way.

So the Uniform Law Conference makes a lot of recommendations that make laws better, that ensure sort of proportionality and fairness, that deal with laws that have for whatever reason not struck the correct balance, or, you know, society itself is evolving at a considerable rate. Sometimes those changes – for instance, technological changes – can have an impact on the way the law operates, and the Uniform Law Conference of Canada makes recommendations in terms of ensuring that the laws keep pace but also in terms of ensuring that the laws are uniform, as the name would imply, across Canada.

I had the opportunity to work with them on some recommendations they made around criminal justice systems that were discussed at federal-provincial-territorial meetings, which is sort of where the federal Justice minister and the provincial Justice ministers get together and talk. There's kind of a joint jurisdiction. The federal government has the Criminal Code, and the provinces have administration of justice, so if everybody doesn't work together, things don't work exceptionally well.

Yeah, there were a lot of changes that needed to be made. I think that the importance of making those changes and the speed at which those changes needed to be made were brought to bear by the Jordan decision at one point, but I didn't want it to go by without acknowledging the incredible work that they do. Now, they made recommendations, and those recommendations were sort of considered by the ministry and by the Alberta Law Reform Institute in the Alberta context in terms of how they could be implemented here, and ALRI made recommendations with respect to this act as well.

I would also like to take a moment to talk about the fantastic work that the Alberta Law Reform Institute does and to do a thing that we don't see often in this place and say that I am really glad to see that the Minister of Justice – I don't think it was the current one. I think it was the Minister of Justice who is now the minister of labour. But the grant to ALRI was restored. When this government came into office, they cut the grant to ALRI, and the grant to ALRI was restored in the last Justice budget, and I was really glad to see that because the Alberta Law Reform Institute does really, really great work. You heard it here first. There is one instance in which you see a member of the NDP opposition actually saying that the government managed to get something right. I was glad to see that grant restored. I am glad to see that ALRI can go forward and continue to do the work that they do, and I'm glad to see the government sort of moving forward to recommend implementation on that.

4:00

Now, that being said, I do have a couple of questions that I'm hoping can be answered. One of them isn't directly about the act itself. One of the projects that was under way, shall we say, when the government change occurred was a project to get a new computer system in. That system isn't actually funded directly through the government. It's sort of funded through a mechanism the trustee's office has itself in terms of collecting money to ensure that the trustee's office can continue to run. That computer system had had – there had been an RFP process that didn't quite work out, so the system hadn't gone in yet.

I feel like in the first budget we saw out of this government, I didn't see that computer system in there. Even though it isn't government public funds that are necessarily going in – it's funds that are gotten through the office of the trustee that go to fund that – it does sort of flow through the government books because of consolidated budgeting.

I'd be interested to know if that project had gone ahead and how it went and whether that's been implemented. That was a really, in my view, important piece of this, the technology, ensuring modern technology and proper security. When we're talking about the office of the public guardian and trustee, they have information about people, people's private information. That information is sensitive. Yeah. I'd be interested to know how that went.

I'd also be interested to know how this squares with recommendations that came out of the office of the Auditor General. I actually don't say this to be partisan or to be difficult for the government. I'm aware, again – this office came to me with some recommendations from the Auditor General already that had not been addressed, and these are challenging issues. They really are. I don't for a second minimize the sort of difficulties in terms of addressing the recommendations.

That being said, I think the Auditor General is right. I think the recommendations are correct and that they do need to be addressed and that it is worth moving forward on this, so I am seeing a report from March 22, 2022, that is published on the Auditor General's website, that indicates that some of those have not been addressed yet.

Now, admittedly, it is a recommendation. The recommendation is to improve and follow policies and procedures. This recommendation is being repeated at this time.

We recommend that the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee:

- review and assess whether its policies are appropriate, and procedures are adequate to mitigate the risk that client assets could be mismanaged
- improve [the] processes for ensuring compliance with policies and procedures.

I think it goes without saying that everyone in this room is likely familiar with the office of the public guardian and trustee, but they deal with very sensitive matters for very vulnerable clients. It is, obviously, extremely important. Now, I'm not saying that that means it's easy. Something can be important and also be difficult, and this is an issue which, in my experience, is quite complicated and quite difficult. I suspect I may be throwing the minister a softball here because I suspect that the implementation of this act is part of responding to these recommendations.

Generally the way it works is that you've got an act, you've got regulations, and then you've got policies. If your policies aren't working, it could be the policies themselves, or it could be either of the two levels above that. If your policies aren't working, it could be the policies. It could also be the regulations. It could also be the legislation.

It may be the case that this is, in fact, an answer to that question, this act itself, but I would love to hear the minister or someone from the government address that and explain how this addresses this recommendation from the office of the Auditor General and sort of what subsequent actions will be taken. I assume there will be development of regulation, but I'd be interested to know sort of where those are in the process. That is one of the questions I have about this.

I also have a question around some of the definitions in the act. One of the recommendations – sorry, I've got a lot of windows open here – from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, specifically recommendation 11:

The new [trustee] Act should provide that a “represented adult” means: a represented adult under the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act; an incapacitated person under the Public Trustee Act; or any person for whom an enduring power of attorney or personal directive is in effect.

That definition is not in this act, and I would be interested to know why that is. In light of the substance of the act, in light of the material that is covered, it seems like “represented adult” would be something you would want to define.

I am curious, I would say, as to why that isn't in here. In fact, “represented adult” is not defined at all. The majority of the definitions here are in section 1, so unless it's defined, and it may be the case – sometimes this happens, that it's defined elsewhere in the act, but not that I have found. So I would like to know why it's not defined – I think, at first flush, it ought to be defined – and specifically why it isn't defined in this way. My understanding of the history of this matter is that the consultation that was done sort of leading up to this particular report was done jointly by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. I assume they had input into these recommendations, into what questions were asked, into how this was dealt with. I'd be really interested to know why that is the case.

I would also be interested to know, and again, I'm hoping – it's a committee, so everyone can kind of jump up as they see fit in response to whatever. I would like to know if there are any other recommendations in here that weren't implemented, and I would be interested to know potentially why that is, because I

think, again, that ALRI does really good work. I mean, that isn't to say that governments have never, for good and solid reasons, deviated from the recommendations. I'm not by any means suggesting that this is the end of it. I just think that it raises an interesting question of why it is that such a sort of critical and central term to the subject matter before us, to the act itself, would not be defined in the act. I would love to know that.

In addition, the government has kind of brought this forward as: this will free up some court time. I don't question that, actually, at all. I suspect that that's probably true. I think it would be interesting to know how much court time they think that would free up, if there's some sort of estimate on that. It's been kind of my experience that when you move things out of the court, other matters come in. I mean, God, it's been probably 20 years that the backlogs have been building in the court system at this point. It is a difficult issue, but I'd like to know how much of a contribution we expect this to be.

4:10

There are, obviously, initiatives. Again, this is one of those interesting areas where there are a lot of bipartisan initiatives, right? We started the e-courts project. We brought in criminal e-file. You know, that was fairly far down the chute, and this government continued that. They continued sort of moving forward with that. Now, obviously, even if you're filing things electronically, like, the document itself still has to align with the letter of the law, so you're still going to need a court clerk to look it over, whether it's coming in electronically or otherwise, but, I mean, those things do sort of move things along. They bring things up.

I can remember instances – I think that anyone who has ever practised law has encountered these instances – where the file didn't wind up in the right courtroom, so presumably rather than having paper files running around through the elevators and coming in and out from the doors behind buildings, having things electronically available in the courtroom, that you just have to access, would probably resolve a lot of those issues and make things easier, because if something wound up in the wrong courtroom, it did tend to take a while to resolve.

I think, you know, again, this is an issue that I don't think is particularly partisan; it's an issue that I think is important to Albertans moving forward. With that, I think I will just say that those are the questions I have. I hope we receive answers. Just to sort of sum up, the things I asked about were: whether, in fact, that new technology computer system has been successfully implemented, as I think that's an important part of this; whether or not this act and the regulations and policy that will follow will, in the minister's estimation, address the concerns of the Auditor General, which are still outstanding, and some recommendations which were repeated just last month, because I think that that is important as well; what the minister thinks the time frame is on that; and how much we expect this to help in terms of the court backlog. Oh, and – see, it's a good thing that I've summed up; even I forgot the last question. Also, why it is that it doesn't include a definition of a represented adult and, specifically, why it doesn't include the definition in recommendation 11 of the Alberta Law Reform Institute report.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat and thank you for this opportunity. Oh, I think we'll be probably supporting this bill. I should maybe mention that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A pleasure to rise in committee on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. Always a pleasure to follow

after my colleague the former Minister of Justice to talk about the Trustee Act. It's a bit daunting to do that, and I'm sure that those who are following this debate closely will remember my very riveting comments at second reading on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. But I do think it's important to reiterate at the committee stage here, where we do have a bit more informality and can get a little bit more into the nitty-gritty, that generally speaking, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View so very aptly concluded her comments by saying, we are likely to support this bill. It actually seems to be, you know, a much-needed modernization and transformation of what really was very old codification of very old English legislation around trustees, long overdue, I think, for modernization.

It appears – this is the work that I'm still working through, because it's not a small piece of legislation and it is a brand new act, that work of comparing what's in Bill 12 to what, predominantly, I think, the proposed bill is based on, which is the recommendations coming out of the Alberta Law Reform Institute and their recommendations which were developed. There are 90 of them. I think that, actually, the last time I spoke at second reading, I kind of gave an overview about seven or eight of the recommendations, but there are 90 recommendations in that report around changes that could be made and should be implemented for trustee legislation in Alberta.

Now, not all of those recommendations but a large majority of them are based on work that had been done by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada in 2012. Obviously, this issue of modernizing trustee legislation is not unique to Alberta, so at that conference they laid out sort of draft legislation that could be used by any jurisdiction to kind of implement some basic principles, most of which have been developed through common law and were well understood by those who practise in this area of law and those who might have a trust to, you know, really standardize what those provisions would look like. Of course, the Alberta Law Reform Institute took that and applied it to the more specific Alberta circumstances and developed these 90 recommendations.

Now, as I understand it, the bill that's before us, Bill 12, the Trustee Act, incorporates roughly 80 out of those 90 recommendations. This is what I understand. Again, going back and comparing them, the recommendations to each provision of the act: I will confess that I have not done that in detail. But what I do note right off the top: just looking at it and understanding that even when it's been introduced by ministers on the other side or even by members on behalf of ministers, as what happened in second reading, it does appear that a number of the key recommendations have been incorporated into the bill. You know, I think it's important to note which those are.

Perhaps for those following along who are very riveted by this discussion of the Trustee Act, I mean, again, a trust is essentially, basically, an individual or a settlor who assigns a trust and says that somebody else will be responsible for managing their property and assets to the benefit of a certain other individual, named the beneficiary. You know, we are kind of familiar with that concept. The reason why it's called a trust is that there is a lot of trust within that relationship. Somebody is bestowing upon another person the ability to make those decisions about their property, but those decisions have to be made in a certain way. Sometimes the settlor might actually be very specific about what those conditions may be, but then the law is also specific about, in some respects, how that can be used and how that must be exercised.

Those recommendations – I note, for example, that probably one of the key issues, sort the guiding principle behind trustee legislation and the way it has been implemented to date, is, of course, that there is the prudent investor rule, which is basically that, you know, the person who is managing the trust must do so to the standard of a prudent investor. So they have some due diligence that they're required to meet. I think that clearly was the way we've been treating trusts within this province

for many years, for decades and maybe over a century, actually, but now it's clear in the legislation that that prudent investor rule will continue to apply to trusts, which is important.

One of the pieces that I note – well, I can't seem to tell whether or not, actually, in the bill it is clearly defined. It does still set out the sort of standard of care, which is, you know, the expertise level that must be met by trustees. It says that a trustee must exercise ordinary care and diligence when dealing with trust property, so there are expectations around reading the documents, having a good familiarity with them, seeking more information where you need it, basically, exercising that relationship with due care and diligence.

However, I believe that under the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations they actually recommended a two-tier standard of care so that the average trustee – which could be, honestly, any person, right? It depends on the wishes of somebody. It could be that an average person without any specialized expertise whatsoever would be expected to exercise that ordinary diligence and care. However, if the trustee is a professional, perhaps a professional financial manager, maybe has unique skills, those professional trustees must actually exercise a higher degree of skill. So it's two-tiered. It's basically saying: well, who you are determines what your expectations are in terms of managing this trust. I'm not sure that I see that reflected in Bill 12.

I think that goes back to a question that I asked at second reading of this bill. I have not yet heard a response about if the government members or the ministers could set out which of those 90 recommendations were not accepted, the 90 recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and why they weren't accepted. As well, I believe there were a number of comments where those recommendations were varied. An appreciation of sort of which of those specific recommendations were accepted, which were varied, which were not accepted, and perhaps the why would be informative.

4:20

I see there are a number of other pieces in here that, again, were part of the recommendations; for example, that where there's more than one trustee appointed, they can make decisions by a majority, that unanimous approval by action does not require to involve the trustees. I think that's, you know, simplicity in being able to move forward in a timely way on issues that require unanimous consent from all trustees.

You know, I see that the bill has provisions around appointing temporary trustees, about how to use and apply extrinsic evidence to determine what the settlor's intent was. The settlor, again, is a person who sort of created the trust or appointed the trust. Oftentimes there may be debate about, "Well, what was their intent?" especially if they set some conditions as to how the trust must be exercised. So how to determine what the settlor's intent was, especially if the settlor is no longer around and able to speak to that: I understand that the bill does that.

Now, of course, we know that overall the intent of this bill is to codify and simplify and modernize trustee legislation, but also a key objective is to minimize the amount of time that trusts are being dealt with, negotiated, you know, mediated in the court system, essentially, to free up time in the court system. Of course, that is an objective that in all circumstances we would support. The idea of if matters can be resolved outside of the court system: that's a good principle to begin with. It increases access to justice. People being able to resolve their disputes without incurring significant costs and resources: always a good thing.

However, you know, I do want to note – I think it is worth noting, because it is something that, certainly when we're talking about freeing up the court system, is a very pressing issue in Alberta right now. I would love to hear some concrete actions being taken by this

government around the issue of the almost 3,000 cases that are at risk of being thrown out for undue time under the Jordan ruling in Alberta right now. We know that there are almost 3,000 cases that are at risk, and of those 3,000 cases 1,200 of them are for serious violent offences that may be thrown out of the court system, thrown out altogether – the charges may be thrown out – because of the undue delay in them being heard in the court system.

Now, I say that we know that there are 3,000; however, it should be pointed out that apparently the current Justice minister did not know that. He actually went on the record and said that he believed that there were no cases that were currently subject to the Jordan ruling, which turned out, with a quick reference check by many of the many lawyers who work in this field, to be untrue and incorrect. There's actually, as I mentioned, almost 3,000 cases. It's a pretty critical thing for our Justice minister to have a good handle on the current caseloads and those at risk of being thrown out as a result of undue delay. I certainly hope that the Justice minister has done his homework and will actually be addressing this concern.

Now, a key way to address that, Mr. Chair, of course, is the challenge of not having enough prosecutors. We have certainly – well, I recall, not so fondly perhaps, that very early on in this government's term there was a lot of bombastic chest beating about all the prosecutors they were hiring. I believe the then Minister of Justice, who's known for speaking at a high volume, was very emphatic and enthusiastic, talking about all the prosecutors they were going to be hiring. It turns out that that has not taken place. In fact, this is why we're facing the situation, again, of almost 3,000 cases of charges – criminal charges, Provincial Court charges, and charges of potentially violent offences – that may be thrown out.

You know, I think we have to again look at the fact that there is a – the current government is not acting as if they've been the ones who've been in power for the last three years. They're still wanting to point fingers to the past, but they are now responsible for the state of things in this province, particularly when it comes to an overexerted and overstretched justice system and court system. In many other respects – the strain on our public health care system, the undermining of our public education system, you know, all of those pieces, Mr. Chair – it's actually now this government's responsibility. They have been in power for three years although it feels like they spent most of that time in fighting with each other.

I appreciate that this act will come forward and may do some of the work to sort of alleviate some pressure on the court system. A lot more work needs to be done, Mr. Chair. I do certainly hope that the current government caucus members can take their attention away from the soap opera drama that is their current political lives and dedicate some, just a fraction, of that attention to the pressing needs of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act, in committee. I'm not sure if others in the House have noted yet, but I am the first male speaker on this side of the House in the opposition to rise this afternoon, following an unbroken chain of very learned women who have been talking about issues in this House. It's a very difficult place to be because the calibre of debate that's been carried so far this afternoon by my previous speaking colleagues, all of whom have been learned women, is something that I seek to rise to at least achieve close to their level of eloquence.

I must note that it was a pleasure over the last couple of hours or so to audit the eloquence that has been uttered by all the previous speakers from our side of the House, all of them being most learned women. I wanted that to be recorded because it was very special, and I was honoured to be in the audience listening to their eloquence and their arguments, and I hope to add something of value to their responses and their input on this debate this afternoon regarding the Trustee Act in committee.

Now, Mr. Chair, all of us have in some way or another been exposed to elements of the Trustee Act in our lives as individuals and families or involved in business or in our careers, but we don't take enough time to realize how important trustee relationships are to our everyday life and the operation of business and government, in particular, and also how we transact ourselves in terms of the phases of our life, whether it be birth, death, marriages. All of these involve trust, and especially as we age, there are trust relationships which take place to give powers to individuals to look after the affairs, either business or health, of others. So the evolution of our trust legislation is equally important, and I know it has been some time since the Trustee Act was amended in large measure. In fact, we have a new act before us, and I'm glad to finally see a new framework for trust.

In my business past, as you will be aware, in the real estate industry my life dealt with trusts every day. Whether as an agent or simply when I managed a real estate office as a sales manager, we were constantly involved with trust situations and administering trusts and ensuring that trusts were handled properly. When, in fact, something went south, something failed, a business transaction failed, it was a result, in almost every case, of a breach of a trust, where somebody had made a promise and never followed through or didn't follow the rules regarding that promise. I think, Mr. Chair, that kind of demonstrates how important the relationships are which are governed by the Trustee Act.

Now, this new framework is a process that was very robust, and much of it follows the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations, which are being implemented as a result of consultations with them. However, there are not elements of this bill that address many, many pieces of the justice system that are still actually in need of great attention. We've seen it in health care and education and now in the justice.

4:30

I don't know if the trust that's involved in the Trustee Act is something that Albertans have with this particular government. There are examples of lack of trust that the provincial government has engendered in the population in most of our pieces of legislation that we've seen go through this House in the last three years or so, and I think it's something that is an unfortunate development. We see breach of trust as something that the government claims not to be doing, but when in fact we look at the legislation being presented before the House in many cases, it actually does one thing and tries to say another.

More to the point on the background of the legislation before us right now, Mr. Chair, is that in my role in the real estate business before entering government as a member of this Legislature, I know that there was a need to replace the existing Trustee Act with the new act. I know that one of the positions that I shuddered at being put into as a real estate office manager was trying to adjudicate between opposing adversarial parties – for example, a buyer and a seller – when both were claiming the monies in trust, their deposit monies in a real estate transaction, when a transaction had failed, both claiming that they were rightfully owed that deposit.

That is a very, very difficult position to be in, when you have extremely upset people very, very clearly demanding that they

should get the money. As a real estate manager, in the earlier part of my career you had to really decide who got the money, and of course that put the manager at risk of perhaps finding themselves the subject of a lawsuit. As the regulations progressed, the real estate managers were able to pay the monies of a disputed deposit into trust, and of course the courts then decided. That's an onerous and costly and time-consuming process, and in the end it leaves many people not feeling that they had a satisfactory resolution because of the cost and the time involved.

I know that there have been amendments to the Trustee Act over time, but this is the first time that it's been comprehensively reviewed. It's largely based on an 1893 English statute that really has fallen out of step with modern practices and issues, notwithstanding some of the developments, such as those I mentioned in the real estate industry, where it has been amended and allowed deposits, for example, to be paid into trusts when there was a dispute between parties.

Now, it does clarify the duties of trustees, the piece of legislation before us, the Trustee Act. It keeps the prudent investor rule that existed in the old act.

However, it does have some new provisions. It establishes a process for trustees to resign or to be removed. I'm sure for any of us who have had the opportunity to read a will, if you've been an executor or you've been given the authority as a trustee to look after somebody's estate or their health or their matters in the event of illness or dementia, the process for somebody to resign or to be removed is a necessary element, and it can relieve particularly family members of a lot of undue stress, which is inherent in that process because you've got some very emotional issues involved quite often, whether it's with a loved one whose care you've been assigned or been entrusted to look after. It doesn't have to be family, Mr. Chair. It could be, for example, in a condominium situation where you're involved as a trustee. You need to be able to have provisions that allow somebody to resign effectively or to be removed if indeed they are ineffective in that position.

I know that this bill has made an effort to look at the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations and has in fact implemented a majority of them. There are, I think, 80; 80 out of 90 recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute have been accepted and adopted and implemented into this legislation.

Now, the government is arguing that this new framework will free up court time. It's supposed to add more clarity and hence reduce instances where beneficiaries, for example, and trustees have to go to court. That's a good goal, for sure, but we don't know for sure if that's in fact going to happen. So we'll be watching for that and making sure that indeed it actually in practice reaches its stated purpose.

Now, one of the examples, Mr. Chair, of a newer type of trust is trusts for persons with disabilities. They're trusts that maintain inheritance or significant financial gifts, for example, while receiving AISH, something that our government passed legislation to make possible in 2018. Prior to this there were no parameters which governed or made possible for an individual on AISH to receive an inheritance or a financial gift without having his AISH funds or her AISH funds clawed back.

I was involved in one instance prior to becoming a member of the Legislature, so previous to the 2018 legislative changes that our NDP government made to make this possible. I was involved in one situation with an individual who did receive an inheritance. It took a long battle by very dedicated social workers, who were working, for the most part, pro bono, to insist that this individual's inheritance from parents, designed to allow the person to live with dignity while they were still receiving the AISH benefits and, in fact, designed to allow the person to buy a small apartment condominium with that inheritance and, in so doing, would cost the government less. His housing cost went down as

a result of having a small mortgage payment versus higher rental payments. It was a very difficult argument to be successful at winning.

Ultimately, after close to a year, Mr. Chair – and all credit to the individual social worker who was working on her own time to make this happen and tenaciously insisted that this was the just thing to do, that it was the right thing to happen before the legislative changes in 2018, that we brought forward, allowed it to happen. This individual still lives in his apartment condominium, a very small one. It was, you know, affordable at the time. It made that person's quality of life so much better than it otherwise would have been. So that's why it is important to renew the types of trusts that are available to individuals, for example, with disabilities.

This new act, hopefully, will allow the incorporation of new situations that happen to arise more easily than the previous act allowed and won't necessitate the, you know, year-long effort of a social worker in a particular case to implement special circumstances to allow somebody to benefit from a bequest or an inheritance that would otherwise be simply clawed back from their AISH payments. That relationship was one that always impressed me, Mr. Chair, and I'm so glad that in 2018 we were able to bring in legislation that allowed an AISH recipient to receive an inheritance or a significant financial gift without having the AISH benefits clawed back.

4:40

While there definitely are laudable goals in the Trustee Act, there are many things in the justice system that remain untouched and not noticed or not dealt with by the current government. I recently had a conversation with an individual friend of mine I've known for many years who just retired after 38 years as a criminal Crown prosecutor with the federal justice system. I'm looking forward to conversations with him soon and hope to even have a discussion about the Trustee Act and how it may have affected his role as a federal prosecutor in Alberta, if he indeed had still been employed in that role, but also get some better feedback on what the bill might entail for others that he would have had under his tutelage in the justice system.

Further to that, on April 6 of this year the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association accused the UCP government of chronic underfunding, which they alleged has caused a crisis in the justice system. Mr. Chair, this is not news. This is not new. Unfortunately, across the country, in jurisdiction after jurisdiction the justice system has seemed to be the department least able to defend itself as far as demanding proper funding from Treasury Board and Finance and Finance ministers across the country, and it begs the question as to why. Why indeed do we see our justice system underfunded? Well, look no further than who the clients are that are served by the justice system, especially in the criminal justice system. You find, of course, that they are, generally speaking, people with low means and little voice, and that's the reason we find that the underfunding has been a lengthy and long-term and chronic problem right across the country and particularly in Alberta.

Now, it's gotten to such a point, Mr. Chair, that the association highlighted that there are significant vacancies for Crown prosecutors, and they even threatened to strike. Now, that's a severe move for Crown prosecutors to threaten to take, and it's strong evidence of a malady that's deep and very, very serious within our criminal justice system, when we have our Crown Attorneys' Association threatening to strike to get their point across but, more to the point, to actually ensure that they are properly funded so that they can function properly.

The government chimes all the time about wanting to have justice and eliminate the revolving door of the justice system and get rid of the recidivism that seems to be taking place, yet one of the things that causes the justice system to fail, Mr. Chair, is that the funding of the criminal justice system and the Crown prosecutors doesn't allow for a timely prosecution of justice. It means that there are too

few Crown prosecutors and too few public defenders to look after the huge need that is there, that individuals involved in that system really have a right to expect.

I know that when I volunteered as a court intake unit officer with the Solicitor General's department years ago – and this shows how lengthy and long term the underfunding has been; we're talking in the '80s, Mr. Chair – you would have a duty counsel rifling through a very thick pile of files to quickly try to determine whether or not he could successfully ask for bail for a client that he may have just met moments before, but he had probably 15 or 20 people like that to deal with that morning.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to address this bill for my second time. The first time was at second reading. I really appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and his review of many parts of this bill but particularly the one aspect that I think is called the Henson trust, that part of this bill.

I, of course, was here in 2018, when amendments were made to the previous bill with regard to being able to allow the situation to unfold the way he spoke of it. I was so pleased to hear of the intervention of social workers for that young person to allow the young person to be able to keep the monies that were bequeathed in a will to them and not suffer the injustice of being cut off an important income support program, which obviously was needed for that young person to survive.

I was here, as I said, when that amendment to the previous bill was introduced, and I didn't know all the background – I knew some of it; I didn't know all the background – that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was able to recount just now. It gives me as a social worker great pride to know that members of the professional occupation that I'm a member of were instrumental in getting after that change, that was necessary not only for that individual, obviously, but for others in that same situation that would follow.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The other thing that was recounted by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and indeed my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View – and I'm not sure if there are others on our side that have addressed this, in support, I might add – is that it is a very comprehensive piece of legislation. Very glad to see that brought to this House. Instead of acting in a piecemeal fashion to address amendments that make sense coming forward, as we did with the previous bill, we're able to see a comprehensive set of legislation particulars brought before us and deal with those here.

I know, for instance, that one thing that was mentioned when the bill was introduced at second by the Calgary-Cross MLA – I heard him talk a lot about the modernization of this act in today's situation, the need to modernize it with respect to the new business potential that could be undertaken under this act. One of the areas that I've been able to research in my time here and spoke about at second reading was real estate investment trusts. I mentioned to members who were here at the time that I represent an area that has a significant number of older buildings that are purchased by REITs, various REITs, whether they're domiciled in Alberta or indeed across the country in Toronto. The activity in that regard has caused some concern for the people I represent in Calgary-Buffalo, particularly with respect to the affordability of their housing going into the future.

4:50

I was asking questions at second reading, in particular, around real estate investment trusts and their impact with this new Trustee Act or

how they would be impacted. Would they be better off? Would there be some borders put on some of their activities to benefit the great number of renters that there are in Calgary-Buffalo and indeed in Alberta? One of the criticisms that has come from advocacy groups with regard to REITs is that they operate with a lot of government support, whether they are taxed at a lower rate than other corporations, whether they can access Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation monies at a lower rate than other businesses can borrow monies. It's all within the view that, you know, housing is important, and if REITs are going to invest in housing, build housing, that's a good thing. But there are risks. There needs to be a balance with regard to the ability of REITs to access preferred fiscal situations. The balance, in the view of many, is that there needs to be a responsibility REITs have not to increase rents at an unsustainable rate for, particularly, people with lower incomes.

Those were a number of questions that I directed towards the sponsor at second reading. I have yet to understand answers to any of those questions, but I think they're critical for the perspective that my constituents have.

I, of course, listened with interest to know some of the background with regard to the previous Trustee Act and the need to replace it with one that's more modern. I think colleagues who have spent time in the legal profession have done a good job of kind of ascertaining that the number of stakeholders that worked on this act have great reputes and that they have made significant recommendations that should be implemented. Indeed, I am standing to agree that I think they should be implemented as well.

I do want to, in the few minutes I have, just say thank you to the former MLA for Calgary-Currie for being a capable advocate and sponsor with regard to the changes to the previous act, that have made life better for people who are on fixed incomes, particularly those who are on AISH.

I'll sit down and see my colleague rise and address this now. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: I see the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act. I want to begin by saying that I think that this is an important topic, one that did come up in door-knocking in prior elections. Originally, when I thought about who might have trustees, I was thinking about seniors or people with significant disabilities. But it was a little girl – she was probably 10 at the time. Her mom was talking to me about her having a trusteeship because her dad had passed away when she was an infant and left her part of his estate. He and the mom weren't a duo, but his daughter deserved an opportunity to benefit from his life's work and his life savings, and his earnings were put in trust to her.

They definitely highlighted some of the frustration they had in being able to access her trust, her assets, to be able to do basic things like go for dental care, buy back-to-school clothes, and a number of other things. Their frustration wasn't with the staff. The staff who work to serve these folks who have assets in trust work incredibly hard, often have too many people on their caseload, and are doing their best with the resources that they have. I want to thank that little girl and her mom for taking the time to talk to me about some of the opportunities for improvement in terms of trusteeship and the way assets are governed for those in need.

I do know, personally, of a few people who have also experienced, mostly through wills or through other types of asset sharing from folks who love them, the need to have somebody help steward their resources in trust. I'm glad that we are considering this bill today. It's nice when you have an opportunity to rise as an opposition member

and speak generally in support of a government bill, and that's where I will begin my remarks today.

I have to say that the rules around temporary trustees, for example, are, I think, prudent and things that we need to make sure we have in place as well as enabling trustees to make majority decisions and rules around reporting of trustees to beneficiaries and the establishment process for trustees to resign or be removed. Obviously, folks wouldn't enter into those decisions lightly, but making sure that everyone knows what the process is and what the steps are I think is important.

Just to back up a little bit, there are essentially three key characteristics of trusts: certainty of intention, certainty of subject matter, and certainty of the objects or the assets that we're referring to. The old Trustee Act mainly dealt with trusts established under wills, like the one that the little girl in my riding, of course, was experiencing. But there are other examples of trusts: charitable trusts, trusts benefiting people with disabilities, as was mentioned, or businesses as well. Making sure that we have updated legislation to reflect the fact that sometimes family dynamics are different, that sometimes relationships and why people might choose to bestow assets onto another individual are complicated, and making sure we have a modernized piece of legislation to help address that I think is important.

I do want to reflect a little bit on remarks from the former Minister of Justice on sort of how we got to some of this discussion today. It's my understanding that the Alberta Law Reform Institute created a report in about 2017, I think it was, and a discussion paper with 23 modified recommendations of the original 28. I believe that some of the recommendations are guiding this legislation. I would love to have an opportunity for the Minister of Justice to respond to those in greater detail to clarify for us if all of the modified recommendations are actually being implemented in this piece of legislation, if there are any that have been omitted and, for those that have been, the rationale as to why those amended recommendations aren't necessarily moving forward in this bill. I think that that would be important for us to have as we consider how to move forward with this legislation.

I also want to say that while I am hopeful that this piece of legislation is going to meet the desired intent of modernizing the way that trusts are stewarded and the types of transparency as it relates to trusts, there is a lack of trust with this government and certainly with the Justice ministry. Just to sort of reflect on some of the decisions that have been made in the tenure of the current government, one of the big ones, of course, is that the government is continuing to flirt with the idea of creating a provincial police force. This is probably one of the most unpopular proposals that the current Premier has floated, maybe second to wanting to take people's pensions and do better with them under his leadership than those with the actual pensions themselves feel they are currently being stewarded. That was probably the biggest rejection I've seen in the last few years, people not trusting this government with their retirement savings.

5:00

But another very big one, that I know members of this Assembly went out to do consultations on in various communities around the province, was around the idea of a provincial police force rather than other relationships we have with the RCMP or with municipal policing. I would say that I'm relieved that that hasn't proceeded at this point, but the fact that that's still something under consideration is highly problematic.

The current government also made the decision to charge a nonrefundable fee of up to \$150 for those who wanted to appeal traffic tickets. Maybe for some people in this room a \$150 fee might not be burdensome, but for a lot of folks that would be a significant barrier to

justice and being able to argue one's time before the courts and to be able to defend themselves. Fortunately, the current Justice minister has decided to throw the former Justice minister under the bus and reverse that decision. That's a good thing for ordinary Albertans, that they won't be subject to that \$150 fee to be able to have some justice when it comes to traffic violations or concerns.

Then, of course, I want to highlight – the changes to the victims of crime compensation fund, I think, are mean. I think that for a government that speaks a lot about law and order, to treat victims and the compensation that they have previously been entitled to, the money that those victims are entitled to, as the government's own slush fund is incredibly disrespectful to survivors and to folks that deserve to have an opportunity to see some retribution for horrific crimes often perpetrated against them.

There is not a high degree of trust when it comes to justice and the current government. That's what gives me a bit of a lump in my throat when I say that I'm planning on speaking in support and voting in support of a government justice bill. But the bill itself, I think, is probably fine. It's the intent of the current government and those who are entrusted to actually execute the law and deliver for the people of Alberta that I still have hesitations about, but generally at this point I will say that I am speaking in support of this bill.

I move that we adjourn.

The Acting Chair: No.

Ms Hoffman: No? I'm just going to sit down, then.

Ms Gray: We're not adjourned.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, sorry. My apologies.

An Hon. Member: No. You're great.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I'll cede the remainder of my time to somebody else, who can decide what we're going to do next. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 12?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on Bill 12, the Trustee Act.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. deputy whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 12.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 12.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

Mr. Eggen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment April 20: Mr. Feehan]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and on the referral amendment, I believe, to pause and refer this to committee. This is actually my first opportunity to speak to this particular piece of legislation. In just a quick review of *Hansard* on this debate I think I'm fairly confident in saying that my colleagues have raised a number of excellent questions and pointed out a number of deficiencies in this legislation in terms of explanation from government about what the purpose is of something or perhaps to explain in a little further detail about the direction that they'll take around regulations. I have not seen the government respond in a way I think that's satisfactory, so again I will support a referral to committee.

You know, once again, this is another piece of legislation that is all about: trust us; we'll get things sorted out in the regulation. But there is actually an inherent danger to that, and I would like to start off by giving all of the members in this House just an example of what I mean by that. In the piece of legislation, if you look on page 67, that is where the government is very clearly repealing legislation with this new piece of legislation. They've repealed the Long Term Care Information Act, the Nursing Homes Act, Resident and Family Councils Act, and then Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

The one piece that I'm going to focus on is actually the Resident and Family Councils Act. You can find the replacement on page 34. It starts on 34 and goes to 35. Basically, what this is is the government telling us, you know, what the legislation that's being repealed will be replaced with. Now, on first glance, it doesn't look like it's all that much different, but it actually is. I think it's really important to draw members' attention to what those differences are, and then all members can reconcile with themselves: are you satisfied with this? Does this work for you? Because I think it's taking us in a questionable direction.

In the first part it talks about, you know, obviously:

A resident of a continuing care... or supportive living accommodation, a resident's legal representative or [an] individual considered to be a... resident's family...

It goes on.

... may initiate the establishment of a resident and family council for the residents of the continuing care home or supportive living accommodation.

It goes on to talk about the resident being able to identify relatives, friends, guardians, caregivers to be considered members of the family. No problem here.

It goes on to talk about:

Where there is no resident and family council in place . . . [the] continuing care home or supportive living accommodation . . . [or the] operator shall post a notice in a prominent place . . .

Talking about, you know, the establishment of this committee. And then that's pretty much it. Now, government will say: "Well, yeah. Don't worry about it. It's in the regulations." But I would like to draw members' attention to the piece of legislation that is being repealed and the information or the legislation pieces that are actually being lost. I think really important pieces are being lost, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if other members of this House have had an opportunity to attend a resident council meeting, but I have. I actually was invited by a number of residents of Chateau Mission Court in St. Albert, right on the beautiful Sturgeon River, and it was interesting. That's operated by Homeland Housing, and it's an organization that does wonderful work. But I went to the resident council meeting and – as you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, it was a very unique agenda – talked about the kinds of fish that were served on certain days, some people not liking the fish sticks and preferring more fillet and, you know, some of those things. But those things are important to residents: where the flower beds were going to be, and then there was a new swing that was purchased, and would that be in the front or the back? I mean, these are important discussions for people that call Chateau Mission Court home.

But, you know, that's really not what I want to talk about. What I really want to focus on was that there was a lot of work by the organization and by the residents to get them to that place, because the legislation that was brought in under the New Democrats between 2015 and 2019 gave some teeth to this.

I'd like to draw your attention – if any members are interested in the legislation, one of the sections is called establishment of a resident and family council. It actually in the legislation gives direction to the operators to communicate the importance of these councils, to literally tell them about posting and give them timelines about, you know, if this isn't followed through, let's say – let's say there doesn't appear to be interest or people don't want to get involved. It encourages the operators or explains to them how to get people involved, because there's an incredible value to people, especially when they're in continuing care, whether that be in a nursing home or supportive living accommodation.

5:10

Now, I'd like to explain to members that supportive living accommodations aren't just for, let's say, seniors that are living in a lodge or something like that. This could be a group of four people with disabilities that are living together in a condominium or living together in a house and are sharing supports. Those also apply here. Those resident councils – we actually call them just resident meetings – are very important to prevent problems and actually encourage and support quality of life for people that live there. But, again, without legislation I believe the operators – and I'm certainly not pointing fingers and saying that operators wouldn't want to do this – are so overwhelmed with the day-to-day work that this may not be a priority if it is not legislated, which is the precise reason that this legislation was done.

Let me tell you that it was a really great day for people that are in continuing care to actually have a legislative voice either for them as a resident or their family members, friends, or guardians. Actually makes a big difference. This legislation talks about: if there isn't one in place or within six months – you know, coming to

"every 6 months thereafter until a resident and family council is established." That's key, and that is missing in this new piece of legislation that has been introduced by the UCP. It actually tells people, like, if it's not there – you know, they're not saying, "Impose it right now," but they're encouraging it. Actually, this legislation went through and talked about how to do that.

The other thing that it does is that it legislates some assistance. As you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, to have – and I'm going back. Maybe I'll give you an example of where I worked. There were some homes where there were up to four people that lived together that had developmental disabilities, that shared expenses and shared staff. We did this before this legislation came in, but what we would have is that they would have – they're called a roommates' meeting. But they had an agenda. The staff were required to help facilitate that meeting, not by running the meeting, not by contributing to the meeting but by helping them take minutes, for example, helping them keep a record of their decisions and what they wanted to talk about. But because we were able to support that work, it got done on a monthly basis.

I can tell you that to have people – I mean, it's hard enough sometimes living with people that you're related to. You don't always get along in terms of the menu or housekeeping duties. It is exceedingly difficult for people that are unrelated or don't have a long history with each other, in many cases, to get along. To get along is important for quality of life. So something like a council is not just preventative, but it encourages relationships and all of those things.

I understand that the new piece of legislation does talk about this particular piece of legislation that was repealed. It does replace it with something, but it's less than. It's less. The standard is lower, so the chances of it happening are less, and then the benefits are less. So my question is – I can understand wanting to consolidate a number of pieces of very complex legislation that touch on very complex issues. I can totally understand that. But it's really important that we don't lose the really good things that are in other pieces of legislation and the really good things that contribute to the overall well-being of Albertans. This is not partisan in any way. I would be saying these very same things if the legislation around the family – I'm losing it here.

Ms Hoffman: Resident and family councils.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Resident and family councils.

I would be saying that very same thing if another government had introduced it because I think we can all admit that we've all probably been into some form of continuing care, whether it's a small group home for people with developmental disabilities or it's a lodge or a nursing home or perhaps it's more assisted living of some kind. I think that we can all admit that there needs to be some work done. People aren't always satisfied and happy there. It can be a really difficult time of life not just for the person that's living there but their family and friends. And to have something like this, a mechanism to try to make things better specifically for the people that live there, not the people that work there, not the operators but the people that live there, to have a specific piece of legislation dedicated to their well-being and their future was a really good thing.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Yes. Thank you to the former Health minister.

I'm very, very disappointed, actually – there are a number of other things I'm disappointed about, but I wanted to give this thorough example for the House to understand that when you vote no to sending this to committee to do a more thorough review of

this legislation, to make sure we don't miss good things, that's what you're voting for. And it's not just that. There are, actually, a number of pieces of legislation that are being repealed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One of the other pieces of legislation that is being repealed is the supportive living – SLALA is what I always call it. It's not called that. It's called the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Now, I can think back to, you know, when I worked in the sector with people with disabilities, to when this legislation came in. Then there were amendments made, and then there were safety standards that were introduced, inspections that were introduced. Let me tell you that it was difficult.

There are, actually, accommodation standards and licensing. This is a process for, let's say, a group home in this case. So it's 4-plus. They fall under this particular piece of legislation. It was very methodical licensing and very methodical inspection. Now, at first, when I saw the inspection checklist, I was a little bit overwhelmed and, really, to be honest, questioning some of the things that were being done. But as we did it for a few years – and things have evolved since then. You can get, like, a multiple-year licence with little mini check-ins every year. But when I think back to these, these were actually so preventative in so many ways.

What is worrisome to me, Mr. Speaker, is that by repealing the SLALA legislation, by repealing this particular piece of legislation and then not thoroughly addressing some of the issues that I think were outlined in the old piece of legislation around licensing and inspections, all of this is left up to regulation. Once again, we arrive back at the place where it's: just trust us; we'll get it sorted out in the regulation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, sadly, Albertans don't have a lot of faith in this government, and rightly so. They have seen time and time again where, you know, "just trust us" has not really worked out. We have seen that this is a very secretive government, I would suggest the most secretive in Canada. Transparency seems to be sort of their kryptonite. We ask questions; we don't get answers. I'm on the Public Accounts Committee, so every week when we're sitting, we have an opportunity to ask questions about different ministries. More often than not we just get, "Yeah; I can't answer that question; I'm not the right person" or "Yeah; I'm new here" or "No; you're going to have to ask someone else."

It is just so much a lack of transparency. When I see a piece of legislation like Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, I think we can all agree in this place that it is incredibly important that we get this right. This is the well-being of so many Albertans that is at stake, because, really, we rely on this legislation. For the operators: we need to know what they're doing; we need to know what the standards are. By repealing such large pieces of legislation but then making the changes so vague and leaving so much up to regulation, Albertans are asking. Really, this government just doesn't have a track record where we can say: "You know what? We trust them because they've demonstrated to us that they've gotten it right before."

Some of the other pieces that I was a little bit concerned to not see addressed when there are clearly so many problems were around staff ratios, around more clear, decisive language, around fees that can be charged. Let me just say – you know, I am running out of time, but I know my colleagues have talked about this at length. The fact that we do not have an independent seniors' advocate is incredibly troublesome. It is incredibly troublesome. I mean, with what we've just come out of – well, we're still going through COVID-19 – how much we learned, especially during that first year and then again in the second year, and we're starting to see some

things happen right now. People that are reliant on continuing care truly are at risk.

I would urge all members of this place to vote to send this piece of legislation to committee to have a better look and to see: are there things that we're missing, and can we make this better?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1 to Bill 11, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address the referral amendment. We are, of course, all going through a time of thinking about the impacts COVID has had on the residents of long-term care facilities and continuing care and the regrettable situation that unfolded across the country, not only this country but others, where those kinds of institutions are in place for the care of primarily elderly people. We know that the National Institute on Ageing has said that 1,677 residents of continuing care have died from COVID-19 in Alberta as of April 12, 2022. That alone, I think, should be reason enough to send this to a committee to look further into this and to allow Albertans the opportunity to witness discussion amongst legislators and to understand the views of professionals in this area, experts in this area with regard to not only this bill but the impact that COVID has had on Albertans in continuing care situations.

Alberta is not unique, as I said. We, of course, in the early waves saw the unfolding of tragedy go on in the province of Quebec – and I think it was repeated, to a degree, here in Alberta as well – to the extent where military personnel were called in to help in nursing homes and continuing care facilities and were shocked by what they witnessed in terms of, particularly, the lack of care residents in those facilities experienced.

No one who has elderly relatives wishes for them to be in a situation like that. In fact, it's probably universal to wish that our relations who need continuing care, who need any type of organized care, either coming into their home or them going into a facility, would have the very, very best opportunities to experience a high quality of life in those facilities. But, regrettably, that's not what happened in many situations, both here in Alberta and other parts of the country, when COVID overwhelmed the abilities of those facilities to provide appropriate care, appropriate, high quality of life care.

That's why I agree with my colleague from Edmonton . . .

Ms Renaud: St. Albert.

Member Ceci: Oh. Yeah. Not even Edmonton. Sorry. St. Albert. You practise that all the time, Mr. Speaker.

Member Irwin: He's new here.

Member Ceci: I'm relatively new here.

My colleague from St. Albert talked eloquently about the advocacy that she has provided for residents in long-term care situations and the understanding she has of where that care has changed over time. Not only those residents but the family members of residents have a great stake in wanting to see this act the very best it can be for today's present-day Albertans but also for those in the future.

I believe that no action should be taken here on this bill until we fully understand more about where Albertans are with regard to the care of their loved ones in continuing care facilities and long-term care, commonly called nursing homes, as well as the care provided to people in their homes.

It's with regard to the last area of care, I guess, or sphere of care, that I'm starting to get more and more of an understanding of some of the challenges of relatives and extended family. You know, people want to stay in their homes, Mr. Speaker, and when they lose the ability to fully care for themselves and family is sometimes overwhelmed as a result of trying to provide that care for their loved ones, then they rely on the government and local agencies to supplement what they can't do themselves. What I think we need to do is hear more from recipients, and that's what a referral to committee would allow us.

People talk about wanting more home care for a wider variety of needs in their own homes. We know, of course, that the ability to have that available to Albertans would save Alberta a great deal of money through budget monies of health services or other programs that generally are tapped now to provide care to Albertans. It's not unlike, you know, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, that kind of thing. So if we can make that happen.

I know that the promises from the government more than a year ago talked about the desire to increase home care to Albertans, and who can disagree with that, Mr. Speaker? But it hasn't happened, and we need to understand why it hasn't happened and focus attention on that issue. We also know that the UCP talked about how the number of hours of care that residents would receive in long-term care situations should be higher than they are now, today. I can't think of anything sadder, more maddening than to know that there are residents in long-term care who are waiting long periods of time for the bell they push to be answered or for the care that should be delivered to them on a regular basis to be delivered. That, again, is something else, I think, the UCP promised to fix. It hasn't been done, and we need to know why.

Of course, what COVID, across the country as well as here in Alberta, has shown us is that the numbers of staff working in long-term care facilities or continuing care facilities has been inadequate and that the protocols that the chief medical officer of health talked about early on, when the wave of COVID deaths was taking place, was that for the interests and the health of residents, not only residents but the people that work in those facilities, there should be limited transmission, that working in fewer places to make ends meet for the employees was a good thing for the residents and the employees. The government worked, as this government did and others across the country through the federal government, to top up wages of employees in those situations so that they could count on one place of work as opposed to knitting together two or three places of work for a full-time salary. That's again something that the UCP talked about wanting or promised that should happen, that there should be an increase in the proportion of full-time staff available to residents in long-term care situations.

5:30

I'm not aware that any of those three things that I've talked about have been done to date, which is another reason why a referral to the Families and Communities Committee would be a helpful thing for Albertans to understand the actions of the government with regard to the seriousness of this situation.

I can't go much further without talking about how disappointing it is to see Bill 11 kind of put off until the future significant regulations that will really make or break this bill. The fact that we can't see those, what is before or being contemplated in regulation at this point in time, is essentially a trust-us-and-we'll-take-care-of-things move. There's too big a risk, I think, not only to the long-term efficacy of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and the fact that we don't know if it'll have the proper agency to address what is important to Albertans who are requiring continuing care, but the risk is too big an ask for – in addition to the residents and Albertans who love those residents who are family, it's too big a risk for

workers in those long-term and continuing care facilities across the province.

Asking for "just trust us; we'll get it right" hasn't worked out very well with regard to this government on previous legislation they've brought forward. It shouldn't be asked of Albertans who have to spend their lives, what's left of their lives, in continuing care settings. We need the government to be not only transparent and up front, but we need a fulsome debate with full understanding of what regulatory power the government believes it needs with regard to this Continuing Care Act. The number of – I guess a way to put this is that the government doesn't have the greatest track record with being proactive around the needs of long-term care residents in that early on in the pandemic, as I mentioned, not only in this province but in other provinces, the significant brunt of deaths occurred with residents of continuing care. That's another reason not to allow the government to say: trust us; we'll get it right.

You know, there's great stake Albertans have in this, that people in long-term care facilities have in this. Without their opportunity to understand where government is going, there's no guarantee anything different will occur in subsequent pandemics or subsequent significant impacts that threaten the lives of people in these situations. We know that the facility-based continuing care review had numerous recommendations about how to improve and increase the amount of home care provided, to improve working conditions, and to increase full-time staff, but this bill is silent on any of those things. There are consultations that have been done that have not been made public, which is another reason why . . . [Mr. Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Speaker: On amendment REF1 are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 11's referral to Families and Communities, to take a pause on this piece of legislation to take a deep dive into many of the components of it, which I think deserve greater scrutiny. I hope to make a compelling argument as to why by focusing on one significant element of the legislation that I happen to have some familiarity with from my past as a nursing orderly trainee. I will get into that momentarily.

I wanted to, first, frame the discussion that we have in a slightly different way than other speakers have so far, and that is to really get at the nub of what we're speaking about, Mr. Speaker. That has to do with the fact that what we're talking about, and everybody's mentioned it, is care. People in need of care are who we are talking about. That definition of care is a very wide-ranging thing. It can be something that describes the services that are received by somebody in long-term care, a nursing home otherwise known, or somebody who's in a situation of designated supportive living or in home care, for that matter. But that care is something that we gloss over when we talk about that word. We should really think about what it means. What is happening in that relationship between the caregiver and the individual receiving that care? It can mean some very intimate things. That defines why it's so important that the individuals providing that care are involved in a system which recognizes what they're doing.

For example, you can have a situation in a long-term care facility or designated supportive living which begins early morning, when the person gets up, or a person may be an overnight caregiver, and they're making sure that the individual doesn't have difficulties overnight, whether it be breathing or falling or any number of respiratory issues or medications that are on a drip. It could be IV situations. Generally speaking, what you end up having is an individual who, say, during

their daily care will respond to the resident, go to their room in the morning, rouse them, get them up.

This is, you know, part of the daily activity that I was involved in. You do a proper face wash. Sometimes if the individual is not ambulatory, if they're bedridden, then you have to do a wash of the individual's face and perineal care while they're in bed and get them prepared to at least, hopefully, sit up to take some form of breakfast. That also involves using, quite often, a foam sponge to clean the mouth and get the hygiene of the mouth properly looked after. Then, of course, there's some type of a breakfast that would take place. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, the individuals, if they're in severe straits, will be those that will bite on a spoon. I've had that, where a person was a grinder, and they would actually take the spoon right out of your hand if you weren't careful. You learn these nuances after looking after somebody over a period of time.

That's why it's so important, no matter the situation, Mr. Speaker, whether you're looking after somebody in an institution, in a long-term care facility, or in their home, to have continuity of care with the same individuals involved. Familiarity is developed over time. You get to know that individual, their nuances, their conditions, their needs, their wants. You get to know them as a person. And that individual becomes familiar and comfortable with the caregiver over time. That is a really important element of what we're talking about that may be getting lost in the nuances of just talking about the different styles or, you know, designated supportive living or home care.

5:40

The main goal, Mr. Speaker, should never be lost. The main goal is benefiting the individuals receiving care, to improve their quality of life, their daily life on a moment-to-moment basis so that they're not sitting on a commode for hours on end because the individual doesn't realize what their bowel movement habits are. Something as simple and basic as that is realistically what we are talking about when we talk about care, those daily commitments to understanding how that person gets through each day and what their particular conditions are.

What happens quite often, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a revolving door of part-time people, whether it be in institutions or even in a home-care situation, where Alberta Health Services does provide home care – that's the option that's in place – and you don't end up with the same people looking after the clients on a regular basis, and it's very, very upsetting to that individual because you're dealing with very intimate care, basically just as you would with a child, the bodily fluids.

There is a daily workspace of anybody who's looking after somebody in continuing care, whether it be at home or in an institution. The dignity of that individual is something that must remain intact if you're going to look after their overall health, and it is something that is very, very fragile. When you are relying upon somebody else to look after your daily needs, your physical needs, you depend upon them. That is something we shouldn't ever lose sight of.

The reason I'd like to see this bill referred to Families and Communities is so that we can talk more about the intimacy of that care relationship, Mr. Speaker. It seems as though the bill itself may have had its priorities in reverse when it seems to herald a savings of \$452 million as a result of shifting residents from long-term care into home care, which is a laudable goal because most of us, I would venture to say almost all of us, would prefer to live at home even when we are in need of care.

I think it's great that the government is looking to shift more people into a home-care situation, where they can receive services there. But what exactly that means is something that we've got to look a little bit more closely at, Mr. Speaker, because when indeed somebody is in an institution, they may or may not have the same

individuals looking after them regularly. We do have a situation where part-time help is a problem. We rely upon part-time employees too much, because it's cheaper to have them hired, and they don't get the benefits that a full-time employee has.

When it comes to a home-care situation, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans don't realize that you will have an option to have services brought in by AHS employees, who would be public servants, and, once again – no fault of theirs, but there's a difficulty with maintaining continuity of the same individual coming on, you know, a daily and a weekly basis to provide those services, or you can have the option of having a self-managed care system.

When the government talks about a savings of \$452 million as a result of shifting people from institution-based care to home care, my suspicion is, Mr. Speaker, that that \$452 million savings is coming as a result of privatizing the service. In other words, rather than having a public servant in an institution or through AHS coming to the house, we're looking at encouraging the privatized contracts to happen with individuals who would come to provide that care. The savings is going to be happening because you end up having people operating at a much lower rate of pay to be contracted by individual families to come to the home to provide these services under a self-managed care contract.

Under this contract, Mr. Speaker, whether it's AHS or a self-managed care contract, there's an assessment that's done to determine what level of services the individual would be eligible for, and then, as a result, the family, if it is a self-managed care contract, would receive a monthly amount. From that, they would have to pay the caregivers of their choice to come in and provide the services.

But the difficulty lies, Mr. Speaker, in that the savings that they are claiming to get from having this devolution of services to home care isn't something that necessarily should be the source of money used to provide more hours of long-term care and increasing the hours of direct care in other supportive living situations. If indeed there's more money required in those situations, it should be funded. But to say that we need to direct those savings, that we need to generate those savings on the backs of the individuals who will be providing the care to those who are needing home care is not just.

The savings of \$452 million, I postulate, Mr. Speaker, are going to be coming from the lower wages and benefits that are being earned by individuals who are providing services under self-managed care contracts, and that is not the way to seek extra funding to shift over to another area of home care. The savings that we know are going to be coming out of the pockets of already not really highly paid workers is something that we should be considering carefully in committee when we look at Bill 11 should this referral motion be successful. I take nothing away from the individuals who are contracted to provide home care to families who are under self-managed care contracts, but I think the system should be set up to properly reward those individuals in the same way that they would have been had they been working in an institution providing the same care that these individuals who are now going to perhaps be looking at living at home receiving care would be receiving.

Whether or not that person is under a self-managed care contract or whether they're working through AHS, they should be receiving, I think, a guarantee of a relatively similar amount of money for providing the same amount of care. That, I think, would then diminish the so-called savings that the government is claiming to have, the \$452 million, and force the government to properly fund out of general revenue the monies that are required by long-term care or designated supportive living.

We're not talking, Mr. Speaker, about clearing the streets or shovelling snow or the roadway systems; we're talking about daily human interactions and daily care for people that we love. In many, many cases they're the elderly; they're our parents and our grandparents. Also, there are people with long-term care conditions, and it could be even as young as children, people who have been, unfortunately, victims of vehicle accidents or other types of tragedies, where they need long-term care.

Unfortunately, too, there are many young adults who are in long-term care, seniors' types of accommodations, who cannot otherwise be accommodated in Alberta because the facilities don't exist. That's the tragedy that needs to be addressed, and that's something that we could do with Bill 11 if it is referred to the Families and Communities Committee to take a look at, the issue of young individuals who are, in some cases, on an ongoing basis going to university to upgrade their education and coming back to an institution which is largely designed for the elderly, with no social life and no interaction with their peer organization or their peer age group because of the fact that the facilities for that age group of persons requiring long-term care just don't exist. As far as a policy to implement the changes to long-term care, that's one thing that really should be addressed, and I hope to see that in committee on Bill 11.

5:50

The Speaker: On amendment REF1, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to join in debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, here at second reading and to speak to the referral that Bill 11 be sent to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, where it can have more analysis and discussion.

I have to start by thanking the hon. colleagues who have spoken to Bill 11 so far today. I know that there's been debate at second reading across multiple days as this bill has been considered. I just want to reflect that in listening to colleagues who have brought forward perspectives from their previous employment, work – the Member for St. Albert, who has worked within aspects of the system, and listening to my colleague speaking just now about his history of having family within the continuing care system and the experience that they've lived – bringing those aspects into the debate, I think, has raised the level of debate on Bill 11.

I certainly, personally, very much appreciate hearing their perspectives, because having a strong and healthy continuing care system is incredibly, incredibly important to all Albertans given the number of Albertans who rely on these services. Alberta right now has more than 33,000 supportive living spaces, more than 15,000 long-term care spaces, and there are already 127,000 Albertans receiving home care each year, so we know that continuing care impacts the lives of many, many Albertans. On top of that, we know from the reviews that have taken place, specifically the facility-based continuing care review, which I'd like to speak a little bit more about, that the number of Albertans who are going to require the support of the continuing care system is growing, so making sure that we are getting this right is incredibly important.

Now, within Bill 11 we see a number of things happening, including multiple acts being replaced with a single streamlined piece of legislation for continuing care. The Member for St. Albert raised a number of concerns that I'd like to take a moment just to echo, including that in the consolidation of other pieces of legislation into this single Continuing Care Act, which is being

done to improve transparency and accountability – it makes sense, especially when you're dealing with legislation as old as 1985, regulations similarly as old, and a system that has grown up with inconsistencies, to try and bring that together.

But the point the Member for St. Albert made, that I think is incredibly important, is that within the pieces of legislation that are being combined into the Continuing Care Act, there were varying levels of care or standards. In the Continuing Care Act before us, which is replacing the Nursing Homes Act, the Long Term Care Information Act, the Resident and Family Councils Act, and the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, the member pointed out some very specific areas where we may be losing positive standards, positive minimum standards, because of that consolidation.

That is one of the many issues that I think a referral to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities would allow us to take a moment to take a closer look at. Certainly, having the Continuing Care Act be there to support Albertans and to support a strong and improving system, particularly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, where we've seen we are getting close to 1,700 residents of the continuing care system having passed from COVID-19 – and we saw in so many ways where the continuing care system had weak spots, had challenges.

Now, in bringing forward Bill 11 to address gaps, to try and improve the system, my understanding, through reviewing some of the *Hansard* from what the minister moving this bill has said and my understanding of the government's progress, is that this is part of the overall review of the continuing care system, which has included some reviews that have led up to this. I mentioned that I wanted to talk briefly about the facility-based continuing care review, of which we have a final report that was released on May 31, 2021, so 11 months ago, approximately. That review included a great deal of consultation and a final report that included 42 recommendations to transform and modernize Alberta's facility-based continuing care system.

Now, I raise this report because the government has been engaged in important work to evaluate and, ideally, reform and improve the continuing care system, but when we look at Bill 11, very few of those 42 recommendations have been implemented in this piece of legislation, and there are significant stress points and areas of concern within our continuing care system that Bill 11 fails to consider. Having the Standing Committee on Families and Communities be able to review Bill 11 and find out more I think would be really important. Now, the final report is out. Certainly, one of the requests I would have for the government would be perhaps more detailed information about the input and the feedback that went into that review.

I see that we only have a few more minutes before the afternoon session will be, unfortunately, ending, so I will spend my final few minutes speaking about one aspect of the continuing care system that I'm concerned is being deferred to regulations. A great deal of the work in Bill 11 is being deferred to regulations, and from the FBCC review what does not appear to be covered through Bill 11, although I'd certainly be happy to be corrected, are those issues that will help support workers in this sector, workers who often are working part-time or contract-based work, workers who in many cases are underpaid, workers who are mainly women, workers who are dealing with incredibly high levels of staff burnout as well as incredibly high demands on their time and on their work.

Certainly, the FBCC review flagged a number of challenges, including labour supply and staff shortages, that exist today. As already mentioned in my remarks, with the increasing percentage of Albertans who are requiring support from a continuing care

centre, we need to have a very strong system in place to try and address that. When during the COVID-19 pandemic the single-site staffing was put into place, certainly it was something many people were aware of but not everyone. It became a higher level of awareness of how many of these workers were working in multiple facilities because they could only, in some cases, get part-time hours in multiple places and then of the impact of a pandemic and the public health impacts of that. Also, having these workers, working in precarious positions, not able to get full-time hours and benefits, I think, speaks to the need for the sector to have a real workforce strategy.

This is something that has been acknowledged in other provinces as well. Ontario, in particular, has committed huge amounts of money – I believe it was \$1.9 billion annually – to hire more workers, to bring the benefits for those workers more in line with what you would expect, to make sure that there was increased funding.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time allotted for debate in this afternoon's session has elapsed, and the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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