



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 27, 2022

Day 25

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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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
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Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
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Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
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United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
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Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Members, we have some very, very special guests from our brothers and sisters in the flatlands of Saskatchewan. Members are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. Hon. Bronwyn Eyre, Minister of Energy and Resources, is accompanied by chief of staff Carter Zazula and Deputy Minister of Energy and Resources Susanna Laaksonen-Craig. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the galleries today are two constituents of the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Please welcome Shannon Sereda and her son Jax Sereda. Also joining us in the gallery today is Blair McCormick, executive director of Calgary Fetal Alcohol Network. He is a constituent and guest of the Member for Calgary-Bow, the Minister of Advanced Education. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a statement to make.

Holocaust Remembrance Day

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and recognize Yom ha-Shoah, also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yom ha-Shoah is Israel's day of commemoration for the over 6 million Jews that perished during the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis. The Holocaust, also known as Shoah in Hebrew, is arguably the darkest chapter in human history and something that we all have the moral duty to remember, as difficult as it may be.

While Yom ha-Shoah is a time for sombre remembrance, it is also a time of recognition of the strength and the will of the Jewish people. The Holocaust took from the Jewish people much life. Under Nazi rule the Jewish resistance included everything from taking up arms against the Nazis to smuggling food to prisoners and helping prisoners escape the death camps. The primary goal of the Holocaust was to eradicate Jews from existence, but this proved to be an impossible task, thanks in part to the work of the Jewish resistance.

It is not uncommon to hear stories about hate-motivated violence being targeted at Jewish people today in Alberta and across Canada. We as legislators and leaders must show zero tolerance against anybody showing discrimination or anti-Semitism against Jews or any other groups and work together to find solutions. I am proud that our government has taken action to fight hatred against Jewish people and others by providing grants to help synagogues and other religious facilities purchase security equipment and training to prevent hate-based attacks. I am encouraged by the work of Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council, which is advising the government on how best to address the issue of racism and promote tolerance and inclusion.

It is all our responsibility to ensure that the evils that occurred during Nazi Germany never happen again and that the stories of those who were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in the Holocaust can never be forgotten. Yom ha-Shoah is not a holiday. It is a time to rededicate ourselves to the hard work of eradicating hatred, discrimination, and anti-Semitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

Hydrogen Strategy

Ms Ganley: Investors across the globe were watching to see what plans this UCP government has to grow our hydrogen sector. All they got was a reannouncement of a hydrogen centre for excellence, a \$50 million investment, but no real plan to grow the sector. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity could not say how many jobs will be created or point to any emissions targets they were working towards. The centre doesn't even have a physical centre to work out of. The hydrogen sector is growing fast, attracting millions in investment while this government continues to drag its feet.

Over 17 months ago we released a comprehensive hydrogen strategy that would have set Alberta up for success. Our proposal would get Albertans to work immediately with well-paying, secure jobs in numerous pilot projects and spur construction of hydrogen infrastructure. The current government's plan doesn't have a plan to export Alberta-made hydrogen any time soon. Its target for export is 2040, which is simply too late. Getting our hydrogen to foreign markets early is crucial to securing market share and establishing ourselves as an energy powerhouse beyond oil and gas. Our strategy would begin to export hydrogen well before then. We would do this by working with industry, Indigenous communities, and federal partners to construct needed infrastructure for export.

Creating an ambitious plan to grow the hydrogen sector is not easy. We know because we did it. I want to encourage all Albertans to head to albertasfuture.ca and let us know what they think of our action plan that will help to grow the hydrogen sector. I'd encourage the government members to read it as well. They might actually learn something that could help them to create good jobs for Albertans and attract billions in new investment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has a statement to make.

2022 Chevrolet Good Deeds Cup Champions

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand here today to recognize a city in my constituency, Lloydminster, and the 2022 Chevrolet good deeds champions, the U13 female Lloydminster Blazers. This is a great deal for my constituency as it is the first time a female hockey team has won as well as the first time a city in the prairies has won the Good Deeds Cup. This wonderful event has gone on for the past six years, and in that time they have challenged over 10,000 hockey players across Canada to go out and do good deeds in their communities. These hockey teams have made a huge impact, with over 1,000 good deeds completed and \$550,000 donated to charities across Canada.

This season Chevrolet shifted the focus of this event to make hockey and arenas more inclusive to people from all backgrounds and abilities. The Lloydminster Blazers' focus was ensuring that their arena was built to be accessible to everyone in the community. Part of the reason they won was contributed to the event they ran, the tri-para event, to raise awareness on the importance of building an accessible and inclusive arena.

In addition to them winning the championship, Chevrolet donated \$100,000 to the Blazers to be put towards Inclusion Lloydminster, which is a nonprofit organization. A member of Lloydminster, Ross Ulmer, owner of Ulmer Chevrolet, has graciously matched this donation, giving the U13 Blazers a total of \$200,000 towards Inclusion Lloydminster and the new arena. This donation will be directed towards making the soon-to-be-built 2,500-seat arena in Lloydminster more accessible and inclusive.

I'm proud to stand here today to congratulate my community and the U13 Blazers on not only this incredible championship but the initiative they are taking to improve accessibility and inclusion in Lloydminster.

Seniors' Supports

Ms Sigurdson: In my role as MLA and critic for seniors and in my own life I'm fortunate to be able to spend time with seniors in this province. They're a font of wisdom, a depth of understanding, and a source of many laughs and joy-filled moments. Seniors built this province and deserve to age in dignity.

Sadly, folks across the aisle don't seem to share the deep respect I have for elders, and I worry that under the UCP they are being left behind. The cost of living is going up, inflation is increasing, yet this government is neglecting seniors' concerns. The cost of utilities: up. Groceries: up. Insurance: up. The seniors' benefit: well, though it's more important than ever before, seniors' benefits are not up. This is shameful. These are not the only places that seniors have felt the pain of choices made by the UCP. We have seen cuts to special needs assistance, cuts to grants, cuts to housing support. It's death by a thousand cuts, Mr. Speaker, but the UCP don't care about the impacts of their thoughtless policies. They terminated the Seniors Advocate, a role which improved lives during our NDP government. The advocate stands up for the interest of seniors and provides support to them.

Now, to add to all of this, the UCP's continuing care bill leaves consequential amendments to regulations, meaning seniors won't actually know what impacts the legislation may have on their lives. Over 1,600 residents died in continuing care during the pandemic, and the UCP does not understand the situation's urgency. Seniors just can't trust the UCP. They make big promises, but at the end of the day a promise is worth nothing if you don't deliver.

The NDP will deliver, Mr. Speaker. We will stand with seniors. We will ensure benefits are indexed. We will put forward meaningful changes. We will reinstate the office of the Seniors Advocate. We will put actions behind our words. You can trust us to follow through.

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

1:40

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again our government must clean up another mess left to us by the NDP, left for Albertans. The NDP failed to address long-term issues within our system, and now everyday Albertans are paying for their mistakes. The NDP's disastrous mismanagement of the electricity system lost approximately \$1.3 billion in ratepayer money, which now must be paid back by Alberta ratepayers until 2030. What a shame that our children must pay the price for such terrible policies enacted by the NDP. Thank goodness Albertans fired them in the last election. On this side of the House we stand with Albertans.

Now, with the support of the NDP, the federal Liberals are doubling down on their Alberta-punishing carbon tax, which will only drive up the price of living and drive down the quality of life for all Albertans. The Alberta NDP thought that they had a long-

term solution for energy prices, but their short-term, narrow-sighted, Band-Aid fix to energy through the means of a rate cap has now created a \$108 million bill that Albertans still have to pay.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we do not believe in borrowing from future generations to pay this month's electricity bill. That is why this government has created a long-term, stable plan to level the price of electricity so all Albertans can keep their lights on. We will be supporting a competitive market that provides consumers with choice and strengthens the electricity system. Other plans to assist Albertans will include fixed-price contracts to equalize payment plans and floating regulated rates.

Our plans are already working. We have seen more than \$5 billion in investment announced for generation projects since 2019, including more than \$2 billion for renewable energy projects. The proof is in the pudding. This government has created long-term plans to keep energy costs down while still investing in green energy projects.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government House Leader

Ms Hoffman: For those of us lucky enough to be elected by Albertans, to be able to come to this place and advocate for the people we represent and for the issues facing this province is one of the top privileges of our lives. Our caucus is full of people who came to this place with a respect for democracy and for the Legislature, that has served Albertans for over 115 years. I wish I could say the same was true for everyone across the aisle. Promising to work hard and stay humble, we have seen a government motivated solely by self-interest.

There is no clearer example of this than the person the Premier chooses to be his voice in this House. The Government House Leader was forced to apologize after his vulgar remarks and for saying that he would change the rules of this place because he was annoyed, the Government House Leader who won't answer simple questions about UCP policy without baseless smears, trying to silence those who disagree with him. He refused to apologize to this Assembly for taking part in a boozy, white tablecloth dinner on the sky palace patio in violation of the rules that he demanded others follow during the pandemic. He fired a single mother who came to him reporting sexual harassment, and when caught trespassing by a landowner, he threatened to shoot her.

Albertans deserve better from the leadership of this government, from a Premier that they can trust, and from his right-hand man, who they clearly can't respect. The Premier promised that he and his team would work hard and that they would stay humble. Albertans see through this, Mr. Speaker, and they want a government who will work with them, not bully and threaten those who disagree with them. We need a better Government House Leader in this Legislature.

Better yet, we need a better government. Alberta's NDP is here, and we are ready to serve Albertans by making their lives more affordable, creating good-paying, stable jobs, strengthening public health care and education, and restoring Albertans' trust in their government.

Thank you.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Trudeau disagrees with how Alberta is dealing with the opioid epidemic, and our major cities are asking for hard drugs to be decriminalized. Fortunately, Alberta is doing her due diligence with our Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply, and we've heard expert opinions from folks that understand the science, folks like the director-general of the Portuguese Ministry

of Health responsible for addictive behaviours and dependencies, the face of Portugal's drug policy reform unit.

We've heard from the director of a local detox centre with pre- and posttreatment programming up in Fort McMurray. We heard from clinical psychologists, comprehensive family physicians, psychiatrists specializing in addiction, and professors from schools like Yale, Harvard, and Stanford, people who are subject matter experts in things like addictions, mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse, people with qualifications in fields like medicine, forensic psychiatry, addiction neurobiology, addiction recovery, and rehabilitation. We heard from a comprehensive family physician focusing on complications from injection drug use and a professor teaching Indigenous cultural safety. We had the only bipartisan drug policy adviser to three U.S. presidents and a policy adviser to other nations like Australia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom.

Invitations were sent out to folks that participate in safe supply programs in provinces like B.C., but unfortunately none were willing to participate. I'm guessing it's because they had no evidence to support their claims.

Fortunately, this government is guiding the mental health and addictions system to be recovery oriented based on studies and science. We've created 8,000 new treatment recovery spaces and eliminated all the user fees. We're developing five new therapeutic communities, created licensing and accreditation standards for other facilities. We're developing drug treatment courts, and we've increased funding for law enforcement and are allowing police to provide on-demand treatment.

We know that consumption sites and decriminalizing drugs do not make communities safer. Setting up an environment to allow individuals to recover from drug addiction does. Behind every addiction is a human being worthy of a healthy life filled with dignity and purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Alberta at Work Initiative

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past two years our government has been working hard, putting in place policies to bring us through difficult times and put our province onto the path of economic recovery. I am pleased to say that Alberta's economic recovery is now in full swing. Because of our government's leadership, jobs lost during the pandemic have returned, but there's still much more to do.

A recent chamber of commerce survey confirmed that half of Alberta businesses are still facing staff shortages. These businesses have indicated that they aren't getting enough applications or the applicants lack the skill set necessary for the position. Skills matter, Mr. Speaker. A skilled workforce is at the very heart of competitiveness and prosperity, and outstanding careers are built on skills. Our government recognizes the importance of access to employment supports so that Albertans can develop the necessary skills to fulfill these roles.

To address this need, our government recently announced \$600 million over three years for the Alberta at work program to address labour market needs. The money will be invested in a series of programs to support training and to remove employment barriers due to race, ethnicity, age, gender, and abilities. Under this program \$87 million will go to support STEM and trades training, \$295 million will go to create training options in high-demand fields, \$100 million will go to training for work and the Canada-Alberta job grant to support the unemployed and employers, and \$23 million will go to help low-income students join high-demand

programs. This builds on the work that we've already done to enhance and support skilled trades apprenticeship training to ensure that thousands of young Albertans have access to postsecondary education and hands-on training needed to help meet our future labour market needs.

These announcements will ensure that Alberta's workforce is better positioned to meet current and future economic needs. Because of our government's leadership, Alberta's economy is back, and the future looks so bright.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

New Schools in Camrose and Premier's Visit

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During constituency week the Premier visited Camrose for a tour of the newly opened Chester Ronning school and the sod-turning for the new school planned for the Elk Island school board. The last time the Premier was with us, we participated in the sod-turning event for the Chester Ronning school. I was delighted to share in the beginning moments of the school and the finished results with him. It was very fitting and well timed that the Premier's visit coincided with this important time for the students and staff.

The one item that everyone commented about was the windows. The previous school was built in a round shape in brick and originally had no windows at all. The environment was not conducive to student learning, and windows were added. The biggest request for the new school – you guessed it – was windows. And there are many windows, big windows, that allow a sky view, and coloured glass to enhance the design. The school turned out absolutely beautifully.

Additionally, there were several RAP students who participated in the construction of the building. My hope is that we'll be able to share it with their children, who will hopefully attend the school that their parents helped build. I am so pleased at how well it has turned out and how beautiful it is and was glad to bring the Premier through to speak with the Battle River school trustees, staff, and students.

After our visits to the new school site for Elk Island Catholic school and the tour of Chester Ronning school, we ended the day off with a visit to Hart House Wine & Tapa. This gastropub is locally owned and operated, with great food, and is an area favourite. I can't wait to show the Premier around to more locally owned businesses in the Camrose constituency in the future. I also welcome all my colleagues to come and check out the great locations that the Camrose constituency has to offer. Come and visit.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to Oral Question Period, I would like to make a brief statement. The statement is not with respect to the fact that the Deputy Government House Leader had a conversation with me here at the dais. Those two events are separate.

I would like to remind members that while members' statements have the widest latitude of freedom of speech here inside the Assembly, I do want members to think carefully about the words that they use in those statements and how they may impact other members of the Assembly and in particular when making what may be considered to be accusations about what members of the Assembly do, have done, or may do.

Oral Question Period

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

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans deserve access to a doctor in their communities. Sadly, this Premier ripped up the doctors' contract and then led a prolonged fight with physicians throughout a global pandemic. Today a new report shows that the number of doctors and PCNs across the province who are accepting new patients has dropped by half under just two years of this government's leadership. Why doesn't the Premier rise and apologize to the tens of thousands of Albertans who can't see a family doctor right now because of this UCP government's incompetence?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there are significantly more doctors working for Albertans today than under the NDP. In fact, there's been an increase of 99 physicians billing in Alberta over the first quarter of this year over last year. There are an additional 1,800 nurses more than under the NDP and, in addition, an increase by 230 in the number of paramedics working at Alberta Health Services versus this time last year. This is a reflection of our historic investments in health care, a \$2 billion baseline increase in the budget for Alberta Health.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier continues to cherry-pick the stats and then tell us that there is nothing to see here, but yesterday, or two days ago, Albertans did have something to see. They saw a lineup of 14 ambulances outside the Red Deer hospital. Sources tell us that this is because they've lost nurses, hospitalists, radiologists, anaesthetists, urologists, general surgeons, and good old-fashioned ER docs. The lingering hostility from this Premier's refusal to negotiate a respectful contract is creating parking lot emergency medicine. When can Albertans expect this Premier to step up, sign a proper contract, and stop the bleeding?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, we did negotiate a respectful contract with tens of thousands of Alberta nurses. After they went through four years of no increases under the NDP, this government has provided significant and meaningful increases in compensation in an agreement that was endorsed by 86 per cent of Alberta nurses. It's true that there's been a significant increase in the number of emergency visits in Red Deer, partly because of the rise in COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization plus staff absences due to illness. It's not the first time. Certainly, under the NDP we saw a stress on emergency wards at various times . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: With all that so-called pressure, this Premier's Health budget plans to cut \$800 million compared to what they spent last year. It's like talking to a brick wall, only thicker. Meanwhile new stats show more doctors are leaving, ambulances lined up outside the ERs, AHS telling women they can't deliver babies – north, south, east, west – in Alberta, and whole cities without access to a family doctor, Mr. Speaker. Instead of taking any responsibility, the Premier puts on a blindfold to go along with the earplugs. What will it take for this Premier to open his eyes and do something to fix the mess he's made?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader just uttered an absolute bald-faced falsehood when she claimed that we cut the Health budget by \$800 million. In 2020 the budget was \$21.378 billion, and in the budget just adopted for the fiscal year ahead, it's \$22 billion. There was a \$900 million increase in the baseline budget last year, a \$600 million increase in the baseline budget this year in addition to nearly \$3 billion of COVID contingency funding for the

health care system to the highest levels in Alberta history, the second most expensive . . .

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, he's reading the budget wrong, but different conversation, different time.

Personal Income Tax Deindexation

Ms Notley: Alberta families are under immense pressure from the rising cost of living. Inflation is at a 30-year high, and Albertans are paying more for food, clothing, and everything else. As columnist Rob Breakenridge correctly pointed out yesterday, the Premier's tax on inflation will now take a billion dollars out of the pockets of families at a time when they can least afford it. This regressive tax grab has to end. To the Premier. We've asked this before. Why won't he act today to reverse his unfair and ever-growing tax on Alberta families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there's no wrong way of citing the budget numbers. They're just simply numbers. I know the NDP is not good with numbers, which is why they ran up record deficits while raising taxes and wrecking our economy. The Health budget was \$20.285 billion. That's the baseline budget in the budget that she voted against. She voted against the \$600 million increase, \$22.018 billion. That's a \$600 million . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: You know, when it comes to helping Albertans, it's all about delay with these guys. On Monday they voted against a deadline for delivering their rebates to Albertans, and meanwhile the Finance minister is musing about maybe getting rid of this mean-spirited tax some time next year. That is too late. A recent survey shows that Albertans are the most financially stressed in Canada. Over half are worried about managing their debt. Albertans shouldn't have to wait for an election year for the Premier to undo his broken promise. Why won't they reverse his unfair tax now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is a tax-cutting government. This is the government that eliminated the largest tax increase in Alberta history, the NDP's carbon tax grab, that is costing Albertans, the average family, \$600 a year. But the NDP is not satisfied with that. They want to collaborate with their ally Justin Trudeau to increase that by fourfold.

Speaking of Justin Trudeau, Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP sign their coalition agreement with him without demanding an increase in the Canada health transfer for provinces like Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, the Premier knows that Albertans actually get 90 per cent of that one back, and interestingly that rebate shows up on time.

Meanwhile this Premier is hiking insurance premiums, raising tuition, jacking up school fees, raising property taxes, and abandoning Albertans while their utility bills go through the roof. Mr. Speaker, families will lose \$500 per year because of this Premier's regressive tax on inflation. Now, the Premier claimed on Facebook that he's keeping an open mind, so let's test it. If we did his work for him and drafted a bill to scrap his tax, would he support it, and why not?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we said all along that partial deindexation of the code was a temporary measure to help us address the massive structural deficit left behind by the NDP, which was threatening the

province's fiscal future. Thanks to the fiscal discipline of this government, discipline constantly attacked by the NDP, we have presented the first balanced budget in 14 years. We're leading the country in economic growth and in job creation. Yes, as I've said in this place before, that liberates us to give options for tax relief, broader tax relief, for Albertans, starting with the elimination of the fuel tax.

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

Ms Notley: They gave \$4 billion or more to profitable corporations and took a billion dollars out of the pockets of families.

Provincial Elections

Ms Notley: Albertans have had it with this UCP government – the incompetence, the infighting, the indifference to the public – and this week they're opening the newspaper and seeing speculation of an early election. It seems, quote, unquote, Conservative strategists are lining up some options for the Premier should his leadership vote result be less than stellar. Now, Alberta has a fixed election date, one these guys put in, that has the vote on May 29, 2023. Simple question: will he respect it? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the NDP leader is eager for an election. She'll have to wait, though, because it'll be in May 2023 per our commitment to hold a legislated election date.

With respect to the corporate income tax, Mr. Speaker, the NDP raised it. They raised it by 20 per cent, and revenues went down for four years. This government brought in the job-creation tax cut, and now revenues are skyrocketing. Why? Because this economy has taken off. Albertans are getting back to work, and the recovery plan is working.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, his claim that they'll respect the May date is encouraging, but that's not the same tune the Premier sings behind closed doors. Inside UCP caucus meetings the Premier threatens to call an early election just to intimidate his own members into staying silent. His definition of being too tolerant of dissent is to wield democratic processes like a weapon for his own self-preservation at the expense of Alberta democracy. Does the Premier not realize that Alberta's democratic system should never ever be used as his own personal caucus management tool?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I've never said any such thing. That is complete rubbish. I've pointed out publicly that in our Westminster parliamentary democracy if a government loses confidence, there is an election. This government is not going to lose confidence. This government is going to continue to drive Alberta forward into a period of renewed prosperity, leading Canada in economic growth, in job creation, in diversification, in tax reduction, and, yes, we're achieving what we said we would do: creating jobs, growing the economy, getting pipelines built, and building a stronger Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, not a day goes by that Albertans don't come up to me and say that they cannot wait for the next election. While I tend to agree, the lawyer in me has a rather strong preference for following the law. However, Albertans are well aware that this Premier will do whatever he can to skew the rules in his favour. His track record on democracy is one of secrecy, scandal, and suspicion, so I ask him this: will he stand and declare that any Premier who breaks or tries a last-minute rewrite of election law is not worthy of re-election?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pathetic to see how desperate the NDP has become, that they're spinning these conspiracy theories. This government was elected on a commitment for democratic reform, which is why we brought in the recall law, the citizen initiative referendum law, the Senate elections. It's also why we brought in a specific date for the next election, so that the Premier can't play games like she did. That has been passed into law. This government will respect that law, and I'll tell you that the most important thing is that Albertans will have a chance to choose between going back to the economic disaster of the NDP or forward into an era of prosperity.

Insurance Premium Tax Revenue

Ms Phillips: Albertans pay a tax to this government on their insurance policies. As premiums rise, so does the insurance tax revenue the government collects. Budget 2022 projects that insurance premiums and UCP insurance tax revenues are set to soar. After population and inflation are accounted for, this government's own documents show that car insurance premiums will rise by nearly \$900 million over the next three years. Just how cozy is the Premier's relationship with big insurance lobbyists that he is willing to campaign on taking another \$900 million out of Albertans' pockets?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition's math and the poor use of data is atrocious. They're taking two different data sets, conflating the two, and drawing a conclusion that is nowhere near the truth. Here's the truth: seven automobile insurance marketing companies have offered and requested reductions in automobile insurance premiums. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition has had an opportunity to ask a question. If she'd like to do so, she's welcome to but not while the minister is answering the question.

Mr. Toews: Seven insurance companies have applied to the rate board for reductions, Mr. Speaker. On average automobile insurance premiums are going down according to the rate board. That's the fact.

Ms Phillips: Spin. All we hear is spin, but Albertans never hear the UCP talk about protecting consumers. Not once. Never. Page 205 of the UCP budget shows that since they were elected and over the next three years, they will take hundreds of millions more out of people's pockets in insurance taxes. Why is that revenue gushing in? Because insurance premiums are skyrocketing. If premiums are stabilizing, as we just heard the government claim, why is the revenue that you collect, that you take from people, skyrocketing?

Mr. Toews: I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker: because the economy is rolling, because we positioned this economy to disproportionately attract investment, create jobs, and create wealth. That's reflected in this budget document. It's reflected in every revenue line of this budget.

Ms Phillips: More spin, more half-truths or quarter-truths, perhaps no truth at all.

Since this minister was elected, the taxes he takes from us have gone up 56 per cent, and he's only been elected three years. After population and inflation growth this government is projected to take \$900 million out of Albertans' pockets in car insurance premiums over the next three years. Why does his own budget show his car insurance premium taxes

going through the roof? How can he campaign on even higher premiums? Why not just protect consumers?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the fast-and-loose use of data is atrocious by the members opposite. Here are the facts. On average, according to the rate board, the majority of insurance companies are applying for – hear it – a rate reduction. Here's the other fact: our economy is starting to roll. The budget reflects it. Every revenue line in this budget reflects it. It reflects increased investment attraction, job creation, increased wealth creation, fiscal capacity, and a balanced budget. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Tourism Strategy

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years Alberta's tourism industry faced soaring viral case numbers, the disappearance of visitation, high unemployment rates, and now, just as things are widely reopening, crippling labour shortages. Alberta's Rocky Mountains serve as the face of our province on the international stage, and supporting their industry through recovery and into future growth is paramount. Some suggest that mountain parks may recover far in advance of other destinations, which is great news for us, but, broadly speaking, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell us how the sector is doing today, as we approach the busy and important summer season?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Obviously, the tourism industry over the last two years has been decimated by the COVID pandemic. We're working with them hand in hand right now to get them back to prepandemic levels by 2024. That's why we've provided Travel Alberta with over \$60 million over the next three years of additional funding to make sure that we can bring back those visitors to Alberta. We're focusing on routes, we're focusing on marketing, and also making sure that it is a world-class experience from corner to corner here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm glad to hear that recovery is well under way. There's still so much work to be done. Our mountain towns are preparing for prepandemic levels of visitation already this summer, but we know that these numbers will not equate to prepandemic levels of revenue if the visitors are primarily domestic. Given that Travel Alberta data suggests that international visitors spend far more than domestic visitors every day, this demonstrates the importance of attracting them back and diversifying our tourism economy to offer them high-revenue experiences. To the same minister: what can be done by this government to facilitate this important work?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to re-establish flights around the world. That's why our project bootstrap work, in collaboration with Travel Alberta, is doing just that. They're investing in the advance work necessary to create the demand to re-establish routes. They're doing that with airlines. As well, we're working on a whole range of strategies, enhancing Indigenous tourism opportunities here. People want to experience Indigenous

culture when they come to Alberta as well as food-to-table experiences. I'm a city guy, but there are all these farm experiences out there. People want to be there for that. They want that experience. Alberta has it for them.

Ms Rosin: Well, thank you again, Minister. Given the importance of Alberta's tourism sector to the overall economic recovery of our province and given that 99 per cent of businesses in our tourism industry are small and medium sized, owned and operated by hard-working Alberta entrepreneurs, to the same minister: on behalf of the business community in Banff-Kananaskis, members of which were recently recognized as Alberta's number one mid-sized chamber of commerce, how will our government carry out this strategy to guarantee the growth and success of Alberta's tourism sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the member knows that Banff is the busiest national park in the entire country. On top of that, we have the second-busiest and the ninth-busiest parks in Jasper and Waterton. On top of that, we've got Drumheller. We've got the Peace Country. We've got your constituency of Olds, Mr. Speaker. We have so many opportunities to share the wonderful landscape and the culture of Alberta with the world. We're also seeing right now the beginning of events coming back to Alberta. Just right now there are 2,000 people at the hydrogen conference, delegations from around the world. That's the plan. We're going to get tourism back here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has a question.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Emergency Services

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday Albertans spotted 14 ambulances lined up outside the Red Deer hospital carrying patients in need of care left waiting to access the emergency room, emergency patients left to be cared for in the parking lot. Imagine the stress and anxiety they and the paramedics caring for them felt. Parking lot medicine is not acceptable, but it's happening as a direct result of the chaos in public health care caused by this government. Will the Minister of Health stand in this House and apologize to these patients and the people of Red Deer for failing them on their right to access quality health care when and where they need it?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for this important question. As we've spoken to many times in the House, the emergency system is seeing a high number of patients across Alberta. The Red Deer regional hospital centre has experienced a surge in demand in recent days due to high volumes of seriously ill patients, a rise in COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization, and staff absences. On Monday the hospital activated overcapacity protocols to help address patient flow, including transferring existing in-patients who could safely have their care needs met at continuing care facilities or at home, discharging patients to community settings where it's safe to do so. We are aware of the challenges that the system is facing, and I'd be pleased to speak more about our approach to actually address EMS in particular. We are expanding capacity across the entire system, including EMS, and in our hospital system.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that these pressures created by hospital beds that are closed, by the way, across central Alberta have added to this crisis and that that is on this government and given that while people are suffering in Red Deer parking lots, unable to get the care they need, and these 14 ambulances wait in line, they were prevented from being able to respond to other calls and given that this province is trying to claim its new EMS strategy will deliver better results for communities – they aren't seeing it – will the minister explain how this government let us get to this point in the first place and what he will do today to ensure we never have a line of ambulances trapped, providing care in a parking lot outside the Red Deer hospital, ever again?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows and we've spoken to in this Chamber numerous times, there has been an increase in call volume since last August, a 30 per cent increase, for EMS, and our government is taking action. A number of months ago we announced a 10-point plan to be able to address dispatch issues as well as resources. In Budget 2022 we put \$64 million into our EMS system to add additional resources, and that includes another 12-hour shift per day for ambulances in Red Deer. In addition, we appointed an advisory committee to look at issues across the entire system, and I'm looking forward to their report . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that all of these investments, all of these plans are the government trying to fix the system they broke and pushed to the limits and given that this government undermined doctors, ridiculed nurses, has moved to cut wages across the sector and did so during a global pandemic, and are now moving to mass privatization while hospitals are still at the breaking point and given that the answers we're getting today are just not acceptable – the people of Red Deer deserve to be heard – and given that they're represented by a cabinet minister, the Minister of Education, will she stand and apologize for her failure to advocate for her constituents at the cabinet table to prevent these kinds of crises for the people of Red Deer?

Mr. Copping: As I've said before many times in this House, we are investing in our capacity system, in health care across the system, Mr. Speaker. That includes \$1.8 billion to expand the Red Deer hospital. We are focused on improving it. As I've indicated in this House before, this is not a new issue, that the hon. member across the way mentioned in regard to the unfortunate issue of people leaving emergency departments at the U of A hospital yesterday.* Well, under the previous government it wasn't 10 per cent, which was this most recent quarter. It was even higher; it was 12 per cent of people leaving. I say that not because the previous government didn't . . .

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

Wildfire Fighting Contracts

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know about the threat that wildfire poses to our communities. Everyone remembers the devastation that was inflicted by the Slave Lake, Wood Buffalo, and Paddle Prairie wildfires. It's been reported that while firefighters are normally on contract until the end of September, this government has made the decision to end those contracts at least a month earlier. History shows we have fires in September. Can the minister of agriculture and forestry tell this House why this government is removing firefighters right now, when all the

evidence points out that we'll need them more than ever to keep our communities safe?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just start by saying, you know, that nothing is more important or more of a priority for this department than the safety of Albertans, the safety of Albertan communities, protection of their property, and that's why it's a little hard to hear. I know where this question came from. It came from – I know you'll be shocked – a misleading press release from the AUPE.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Horner: I know. I wish it wasn't that way. The facts are these, Mr. Speaker. We flex up our staffing. We flex up our equipment, because – big shocker – there's snow on the ground a lot in the winter. I can get into that offline, about snow . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that I actually have copies of those contracts and they compare to last year versus this year and given that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has reported that we should expect to see more extreme weather in the future, including wildfires, and given that I have heard that this government is ending wildfire contracts a month earlier and has even cut the budget for wildfire fighting by 8 to 12 per cent, putting communities at risk, can the minister look to the camera and explain to those communities impacted by wildfires and those that are fearful of the future wildfires how he plans on saving their communities that are at risk?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there isn't a budget reduction, as that member well knows. We went through it in great detail in estimates. We have a stable budget after a very manageable fire season last year, where we not only protected Alberta and Albertans, but we were leaned on by Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, states, Mexico. We are doing things in this province in a way that we're looked to by our neighbouring provinces to help ensure the protection of all Canadians.

Ms Sweet: Well, again, given, Mr. Speaker, that the last wildfire we had was actually September 11 in Waterton and that we don't have staff that are hired until the end of September and given that short-staffing wildfire fighting forces will put lives, communities, and the economy at risk and given that while science tells us that we could face more wildfires in the future and that this government is leaving Alberta less prepared and given that two months into the wildfire season the UCP have left the workforce 60 workers short along with positions that are going to end early, can the minister explain: when will the wildfire forces be up and ready to go and trained . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, our last wildfire was not in September; we've had 123 wildfires since January 1. We continue to put out the wildfires outside of the legislated fire season. There are currently 12 wildfires in the province. Nine are under control. Three are being held. There were three fires that burned all winter. We continue to do our job, put out the fires. We flex up in the appropriate season. It's efficient for the province, the taxpayer, and it's safe. [interjections]

*See page 980, right column, paragraph 6

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Economic Recovery and Growth

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again Albertans have proven that they are resilient and up for any task, any challenge. The first three months of 2022 have shown that Alberta's economy is not only recovering, but the full truth is that it's rolling. Could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House how many additional jobs we have seen created in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. He is right; Alberta's economy is rolling. Since the beginning of last year we've had over 150,000 jobs. That bears repeating: 150,000-plus jobs since the beginning of last year. Right now Alberta's economy is more diversified than ever. [interjections] The NDP don't like that. They're chirping right now, but you know what? Our unemployment rate is lower than December 2018. Who was in office in December 2018? The NDP.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that is great news and given that our economy continues to grow and given that new companies are coming to invest right here in Alberta and further given that these investments are in addition to the absolutely amazing, great local businesses that are already thriving here and around our province, to the same minister: could you tell us a bit about the industry sector's diversification that we are currently seeing throughout this province?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, when we started the recovery plan over two years ago, we knew at that point in time that Alberta needed to diversify, and it is happening faster than we ever could have forecasted. The film and television industry literally doubled. Right now across Alberta the largest TV series in Canadian history, HBO's *The Last of Us*, is happening. Our tech sector is absolutely booming. The first-quarter numbers that came out: over \$200 million of venture capital in the first three months. Contrast that to 2017. Who was in office then? Oh, yeah. The NDP. Thirty-seven million dollars in an entire year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this growth hasn't happened by accident and given that there are so many other reasons to be optimistic about Alberta's economic future and given that our government has stayed committed to supporting economic growth in this province, could the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction tell us about how the government is reducing red tape to help these companies thrive here in Alberta?
2:20

Ms Fir: Well, thank you to the member for the question. Alberta's government committed to cutting red tape by a third, and with over 25 per cent cut so far, we are well on our way to becoming the freest and fastest moving jurisdiction in North America. Earlier this week we introduced Bill 21, which will help Alberta businesses by supporting mobile businesses by enabling intermunicipal business licences and streamlining processes, saving co-operatives over \$36,000 a year. In addition, previously we had brought in common-sense approaches and changes such as enabling the creation of

entertainment districts, streamlining grant applications for producers and food manufacturers, and so much more.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Dang: Over and over my constituents and I have called on this government to get the new south Edmonton hospital back on track. As we all know, it's been over 30 years since a new hospital was built in Edmonton, and the population has only continued to grow. During a time when Albertans have been struggling with so much, including the health care system almost collapsing due to the UCP's mishandling of the pandemic, and while we see the government boasting about its balanced budget, my question to the Minister of Infrastructure is simple. How can he justify the delay with no anticipated open date of the new south Edmonton hospital when it is such an important piece of public health care?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, a large project like the Edmonton hospital has to go through multiple sets of planning, design, procurement, and construction. I updated this particular member a few times already in this House and outside the House that we are going through those steps. Right now on the site the underground utilities are being set. That work is going on well except last year. Because of the ground freeze, there was a slight delay, but the work is tracking on time.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister originally said that it was going to be a five-year delay and then in estimates this year announced that it would be an indefinite delay for this project and given that this minister also previously stated that the government was considering using projects such as P3 approaches for this hospital and given that this has disastrously failed in other jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan and given that the government of Alberta and this minister in particular have a poor track record with P3 schools as well, can the minister commit that he will learn from these mistakes and not impose this detrimental approach and put the safety and well-being of our public health care system at risk?

Mr. Panda: I was looking up in the gallery. Even the minister from Saskatchewan couldn't believe about P3 failures there, so I don't know what the member is talking about.

We haven't decided this is going through a P3 procurement method yet, because we haven't reached that stage, Mr. Speaker, yet. We decide based on the best value for the taxpayers of Alberta and how we can utilize the private finance to build this facility on time, on budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the lessons this minister seems to be learning from Saskatchewan is how the Battlefords hospital's roof actually collapsed and closed all health care in that region for over a year and given that Albertans' health care system continues to be in danger due to this government's risky policies and given that the government of Alberta's projects website does not provide any information regarding the schedule of the south Edmonton hospital, can the constituents and Albertans that live in Edmonton expect and receive from this minister a clear date on when we can see a hospital opening?

Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, there are projects across Alberta happening. The infrastructure investment is unprecedented, including in that

particular member's own riding. The minister and I yesterday were there blessing the school site together with the Catholic faith community. I don't know what risks the member is talking about unless he hacked something and found some risk. I would ask him to share those risks with me, and I'll try to eliminate them.

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: This morning the city of Calgary announced the first round of funding to support empty office conversions as part of their plan to drive down the vacancy rate and revitalize the downtown. Noticeably absent from any of this was the UCP. All they could muster for downtown Calgary in their last budget was \$4 million, an amount the CEO of the Calgary Chamber called, quote, absolutely inadequate. Meanwhile downtown Calgary continues to struggle. Why is this government refusing to lift a finger to support an area that has long served as a fundamental part of Alberta's economy and has generated tremendous wealth for the people of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've just received the downtown working group's recommendations, and we'll be making that public here in the next little while.

But thank God the NDP have not been in office for the last three years, Mr. Speaker. The reason why I say that is that this government has been laser focused on attracting investment and creating jobs, 150,000 jobs since the beginning of last year. Now, under the NDP licence plates from across the country disappeared. But all of a sudden people are moving again to Alberta. We will not apologize for our economic track record. It's amazing.

Member Ceci: Given that Quebec, Ontario, B.C., Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have lower unemployment rates than Alberta and given that Calgary's downtown vacancy rate still sits at 33 per cent according to CBRE, the highest level in the country – in fact, the number of head offices under the UCP has fallen – and given that Calgary still has the highest unemployment rate of any major Canadian city and given that we've already put forward our own plan to bring new energy to downtown, meanwhile this government sits on the sidelines and attacks everyone else's plan, is their only wish that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, sometimes they toss you a beach ball, and I absolutely lob it. It's time for an NDP legacy tour for the worst Finance minister in Alberta's history. This government has balanced the budget. At the same time, we have talked in Alberta for decades and decades about diversification. Right now: the film industry, doubled; the tech sector, booming; logistics people are leaving B.C. They're coming to Alberta for logistics because of a business environment. The past Finance minister did not understand business. We do. That's creating jobs.

Member Ceci: Given that the UCP have contributed nothing to Calgary's revitalization plan downtown and given that we've released our own plan to support downtown Calgary, that includes direct support for the city as well as a focus on economic diversification, and given that just last night our caucus held a consultation on ways to further refine and improve our proposals and given that this Finance minister said that economic diversification is a luxury he can't afford and he

won't put money towards and that it's not his job to help the largest city in our province, that continues to struggle, is this government refusing to put a single idea on the table? We want to see them.

Mr. McIver: Oh, Mr. Speaker, we're acting on many ideas. I'll remind the hon. member of the Calgary rivers CRL, which will provide \$55 million a year for 40 years into downtown Calgary. That's \$2 billion, on top of the \$5 billion in this year's budget: Arts Commons, \$200 million; the Repsol centre, \$20 million; the Calgary Stampede Sam centre, \$5 million; the SAIT John Ware, \$41 million. We are busy helping Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Obstetric Services in Whitecourt

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three weeks ago I stood here and asked about my constituents' options in response to a shortage of physicians with surgical skills in the Whitecourt health care centre. At that time the AHS north zone had told my constituents that the hospital would temporarily be unable to offer C-sections until April 13. But on April 8 Alberta Health Services announced that they were temporarily pausing all obstetrical services at the Whitecourt health care centre for a month. To the Minister of Health. My constituents are frustrated. They want to know what is going on and what is causing these physician shortages.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for representing his constituents. This situation is concerning. Families deserve to know that they can safely receive health care services wherever they are in our province. There are two physicians providing obstetric services in Whitecourt; however, a personal leave of absence and on-call unavailability mean the clinic can't operate at normal levels right now. I want to ensure that AHS plans to resume services in Whitecourt by May 8. Prenatal patients in Whitecourt will continue to receive care from their family physicians. We'll solve this problem over . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that obstetrics is a high-risk surgical practice that requires a team of experts with specialized skills and given that there are many doctors with international medical credentials wanting to move to Alberta to provide health care, can the same minister explain how we can swiftly evaluate international medical graduates so my constituents can receive the same level of care as any other Albertan?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obstetrics, like all specializations, is a highly skilled, highly specialized field of medicine. As a result, AHS works with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to ensure that every doctor applying to work in Alberta meets the same standards of practice. International medical graduates, or IMGs, must pass an assessment to certify that they meet the same minimum standard for any doctor trained in Canada. IMGs are valuable members of our communities. Recruiting and assessing more so that we can serve Albertans to the highest level of care: we are looking to recruit more, and we will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, again, Minister. Given that for months now I've been unable to explain to my constituents why Whitecourt is lacking services and given that we need a plan to fix these shortages so that my constituents do not need to be transported to a city over two hours away for medical treatment, once again to the Minister of Health: how and when will this recurring issue be fixed permanently?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. As the member knows, there are 13 physicians practising in Whitecourt, seven of whom have hospital privileges. A lack of obstetrics-trained doctors in Whitecourt meant that AHS would temporarily divert expectant mothers to the nearby Edson health care facility or another location of their choice. Edson has well-established information and transfer processes with Whitecourt. We're committed to providing services for rural Albertans. We're spending \$90 million to recruit and retain rural doctors in Budget 2022, and we'll continue to focus to actually get doctors into rural Alberta.

Victims of Crime Program

Mr. Sabir: As the pandemic was starting, the UCP introduced a bill designed to reduce the supports available to victims of crime by dismantling the victims of crime fund. Since that time they have changed the supports available, and this has resulted in victims either having to pay out of pocket for recovery from their trauma or not having access to supports at all. Simple question: will the Minister of Justice commit to reversing these harmful changes that are retraumatizing victims?

Mr. Shandro: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. What did happen is that the fund included other focuses as well, including focuses on public safety. We continue to provide funding to victims who require it. We have now received a report from two MLAs who have helped us with advice and recommendations regarding how victims' services funding can be provided and making sure that as much funding can be provided to victims and supports can be provided to victims in the community as possible. We're looking forward to moving forward with that report and being able to make sure that victims get the funding and the services they need.

Mr. Sabir: Given that victims of crime deserve to have access to the supports that they need to fully heal and given that leaving victims with the only option available to them, to sue the perpetrator through the court system, further traumatizes victims and given that the justice statutes bill currently before the Legislature solidifies this government's agenda to leave victims out in the cold, can the minister name any one person from one organization that supports the changes they made to this program or tells them that the reductions are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we've continued to work with our victims' services organizations throughout the province and continue to work with all the great engagement work that was done by the MLAs who helped provide those recommendations so that we can move forward in '22 to be able to work forward in working to improve the services provided to those victims, making sure that the services continue to be sustainable and available to those victims so that we can continue

to improve the entire system throughout the province for those victims.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the victims of crime fund has been raided to make up for the reckless cuts that this government made to the Justice department's budget and given that we know that survivors of crime, like Emma Wilson, have made it loud and clear that lack of supports is hindering healing and recovery and given that this government still refuses to release the report of the working group on support for victims of crime, what is this minister hiding? When can we expect to see the report? How much longer do survivors have to wait?

Mr. Shandro: Well, fairly soon, as I said, Mr. Speaker. In the meantime the interim victims' assistance program is available to support victims in ways that the previous program didn't. A couple of examples for the hon. member: helping victims with out-of-pocket expenses resulting from violent crime; giving victims of serious violent crime, including those who are victims of sexual assault and families of homicide victims, quick access to counselling; and then, as well, reimbursing victims and witnesses for the expenses that are related to attending court and for support reasons.

Condominium Owner Dispute Resolution Processes Health Card System Modernization

Mr. Carson: I was looking forward to finally seeing new condominium legislation in Alberta so that condo owners would finally have a tribunal process to settle disputes. This is a process that the NDP engaged on and something that the UCP claimed they would support. But with the new legislation completely ignoring it and while powers are being given to condo corporations to fine owners without due process, why is there no tribunal process in the bill, and when will the Minister of Service Alberta introduce one, or is this just another broken promise?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has looked at options for dispute resolution for condominium owners, boards, and corporations, and we know that there is, in fact, value in a system that is an alternative to the courts. At this time we're not pursuing a condominium tribunal. However, again, as we know that there is value in this type of system, it's something that we're open to looking at in the future.

Mr. Carson: Given that without a tribunal if an owner opposes fees set on them, they will be forced to go to the courts and given that the UCP have made significant cuts to the justice system and, as a result, cases are moving slowly, condo disputes should be handled in a tribunal, not the courts. I'm concerned that this legislation will cause condo owners to be assumed guilty until they are proven innocent. Given that without a tribunal there is no due process, how does the Minister of Service Alberta justify condo owners being able to receive new fines without providing an easy way to challenge them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, while this is something that does have merit, it's not something that we're looking at at this time. In the meantime we do encourage condominium owners, boards, and corporations to use existing resources in addition to the courts such as alternative resolution services for mediating disputes.

Mr. Carson: Given that the Minister of Service Alberta finally admitted that he will not deliver on updating health cards from paper to plastic, it is clear that this is a trend of broken promises as he has also failed to deliver on creating tribunal processes for condo owners. But given that the minister has been working overtime to support the Premier on his leadership review and, in fact, is also weighing in on the federal Conservative leadership race, too, why is the Minister of Service Alberta so focused on partisan survival while failing to do his job and deliver on the promises he made to Albertans?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I know, in fact, that the Minister of Service Alberta would just be happy to have finally gotten a question from the members opposite, so thank you very much for that. We know that Albertans want more convenience with their government-issued documents. We've been working closely with the Ministry of Health to explore options to give Albertans the option to add their personal health number onto their driver's licence or ID card. The Ministry of Health has of course been focused on protecting Albertans throughout the pandemic, but we remain focused on making life better for Albertans and continuing to consider options to reduce red tape and modernize our services for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Alberta Health Services and Health System Capacity

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen very important changes to Alberta Health Services in the last month. AHS employees and Albertans with friends or family members in health care have been calling for the removal of senior management for years. For years Albertans have been frustrated, upset, and disappointed with long wait times, lack of access to physicians, and issues with EMS availability, just to name a few, but new management could mean more problems. To the Minister of Health: what is being done to build a better AHS system for employees and everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for this important question. Albertans elected our government on an aggressive platform of renewal and transformation in health care, and we are keeping that promise. We promise to provide every Albertan who needs scheduled surgery within clinically appropriate wait times and are committed to similar improvements in MRI and CT scans, and we are making progress. These much-needed improvements will foster a better environment for patients and for staff as pressures ease throughout the system. We're also moving forward with the most significant renewal and modernization in continuing care and investing in capacity in our overall health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that these changes to senior management will take time when it comes to choosing the right individuals for the role and given that the previous financial mismanagement and an unhealthy culture within AHS has been expressed by front-line workers, once again to the Minister of Health: with the restructuring of a \$23 billion company responsible for over 100,000 employees, will Albertans see a rebuilt AHS system with better financial management, better attitude, and a better culture and a healthy environment for front-line workers?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member. Alberta's front-line health care workers are the backbone of our health care system. I'd like to take a moment to once again thank them for all their tremendous work, particularly through the challenging times of COVID-19. Front-line services and quality patient care are at the forefront of what we're trying to achieve. Whether that's adding surgical capacity through chartered surgical facilities outside AHS, including 35,000 recently announced publicly funded cataract and noncataract surgeries this year, or addressing EMS pressures through AHS's 10-point plan and through our advisory committee, we are investing in capacity.

Mr. Reid: Given that employees of AHS have endured and pushed through the problems and struggles of the pandemic for the last two years and given that they did so with limited health care capacity inside our hospitals and limited ICU units and given that so many nurses and doctors spoke up surrounding the issues when it came to capacity during the pandemic, again to the same minister: why was AHS unable to deliver the proper capacity levels needed during surging waves of COVID-19?

Mr. Copping: Thank you again to the hon. member. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's health care workers battled through extraordinary circumstances in the past two years, and again I want to say thank you. AHS did respond with capacity to meet the needs of each wave that we've experienced through COVID, but it came at a cost, in certain waves, in regard to postponed surgeries. That's why we're investing \$100 million each year over the next three years to increase and sustain 50 additional ICU beds, to bring ICU capacity in line with other provinces. Again, Budget '22 is committed to increased capacity across our entire system; \$600 million this year, the next year, and the year after that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are living in unparalleled times, colleagues. The short-sighted, quick-fix solutions implemented by the NDP before Albertans fired them have caused a utility price emergency. Constituents in my riding of Sherwood Park are fearing that gas and electricity prices will become unmanageable and unaffordable in the near future. Albertans need relief now. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: can you tell my constituents and Albertans when they can expect natural gas rebates to begin? [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are getting a little fired up right now. But you know what? I can understand why. When they were in office, they were more focused on hiring people to come into your house to screw in a light bulb than they were focused on the economy. Right now Alberta is booming. We have over 150,000 jobs since the beginning of last year. We're also providing relief at the pumps, with electricity, and with natural gas. On top of that, there are jobs here in this province. That's a good sign. People are moving to our province because they believe in its future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the energy rebate program will kick in next winter to ensure European-style price hikes do not become a reality in Alberta and given that the price of energy is unstable and unpredictable in current times and given that the citizens of Alberta live in various housing situations, to the minister: can he tell Albertans what living quarters will be eligible for the natural gas rebate?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're working on implementing the natural gas rebate at the fastest possible instance. On top of that, the member raises a very good point about energy security, something the members opposite know absolutely nothing about. The second-most powerful politician in the U.S., Senator Manchin, came to Alberta to work with our government to make sure that we have energy security across North America. The last thing we want is a European-style energy spike that the NDP want to bring to Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that this government has created new and innovative legislation to help Albertans heat their homes through difficult economic times and given that the NDP-Liberal carbon tax will have extremely detrimental effects on Albertans' wallets and given that Albertans also face high prices for other utilities to run their households, can the minister tell Albertans how this government plans to assist with costs regarding electricity in these uncertain times?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're helping people at the pumps, we're helping people with electricity, and we're helping them with their natural gas bills. [interjections] The NDP are chirping right now. Where were they to oppose the carbon tax? Absolutely nowhere. They were arm in arm. They wanted it to go higher. We won't let that happen. We're going to continue to fight for Albertans every single day to make sure they have affordable power, an amazing way of life, and low taxes with a balanced budget in Alberta.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Highwood. This bill was referred to the committee on March 31, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 205 proceed, and I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 205.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a motion for concurrence, that is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18. This is an opportunity, if anyone would like to speak to the motion for concurrence, to please rise. I see the hon. member has risen. That debate will take place on the next available Monday.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 23, Professional Governance Act, sponsored by the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

The Speaker: Are there other notices? Do you have a notice of motion or a tabling?

Ms Phillips: No. Another report.

The Speaker: Oh. Correction. Hon. members, I believe that the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader is just about to propose a unanimous consent request to return to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees as, unfortunately, the Speaker passed over the chair of the PAC committee. I wondered if he might be willing to make a unanimous consent request to return.

Mr. Schow: Most certainly, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask unanimous consent from the Assembly to return to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, with apologies.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just simply rise as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I wish to table on behalf of the committee the appropriate number of copies of the 2021 annual report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and to assure the public that a copy of this report will also be available on the Legislative Assembly website shortly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, members.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development on behalf of the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity to move first reading of Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022.

This legislation will allow for much-needed modernization of our electricity grid, ensuring it can meet the needs of consumers for years to come while maintaining energy affordability.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West also has a tabling.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a couple of items that I have made reference to in debate over the last week or so. One is a letter to the Education minister from the Lethbridge

school division board of trustees indicating a couple of concerns, one with the requirements for assessment and reporting for learning loss funding and the other with some fairly sharp concerns about the implementation of the new draft curriculum.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Phillips: I have one other, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Phillips: I have also the quarterly update of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta on physician resources in Alberta, indicating a net loss of 13 doctors in Lethbridge alone and a number of other places losing physicians in a net way.

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 hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Advanced Education, supplemental responses to questions raised by Mr. Eggen, hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, March 16, 2022, Ministry of Advanced Education 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 15

Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 26: Mrs. Frey]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise. I will keep my remarks brief as I know we have much to get on the record today and a few bills that we need to discuss. I haven't yet, but I did want to get on the record for second reading of Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Now, I have to say, you know, that it's been a common theme today to have to comment on the fact that we've seen time and time again from this government multiple opportunities to present legislation that would really dramatically improve the lives of Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just today I've already had the chance to speak to multiple bills, just this morning, upon reflection, Bill 11, which is the Continuing Care Act, and – gosh, what else did I speak about this morning? – Bill 16, on insurance. You know, those were opportunities for the government to really listen to Albertans and come back to their constituents and be able to say: "You know what? We are listening." And in the case of insurance, as an example: "Here's something, really, where you'll see an impact in your pocketbook, a positive impact for once, because we know many of you are struggling with higher and higher, skyrocketing auto insurance premiums." They didn't, right? Instead, they chose to just do a little bit of housekeeping. Same thing with bills 11, 12, others. The list goes on.

I frame my comments in response to Bill 15 in a similar way just because I hear nonstop from my constituents, not just teachers. I know many folks in this Chamber are probably tired of me talking about my time as a teacher and working in education. The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is shaking his head, meaning he probably would like to hear more of my tales from teaching, and I'd be happy to share those. But, you know, truly, I do pride myself in being very open to folks reaching out to me from across this province. I hear from a lot of teachers. I hear from a lot of parents.

In fact, I even hear from some students. You know, the former social studies teacher in me is always quite keen when students are engaged. After all, a key pillar of our, in fact, current social studies curriculum, that was developed under the Progressive Conservatives, one that received international attention for how visionary it was and one that I was proud to implement in the classroom as a teacher and also work a little bit on, a curriculum developed through a rigorous process, including countless stakeholders, including piloting in classrooms across the province and not just in one school division in northern Alberta that was willing to take it on, like we see with the proposed UCP curriculum – my point in saying all that about the current social studies curriculum, that I was proud to teach, is that a key pillar of that is active, engaged citizenship. So it sure is nice to be able to hear from students who are engaged in the process.

I say all this because of, you know, the issues that I hear from folks associated with schools, which is a whole lot of us. In fact, probably nearly everybody in this room has a connection to schools, right? Well, you all do, in fact, because you all have schools in your constituencies. But you also have family members who attend schools, who work at schools. You were all students at one point. What do we hear from those – I'll call them stakeholders, which is such a governmenty term – impacted by education? They talk about things like how COVID has impacted learning, learning loss.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke quite eloquently on Bill 15. Gosh, it might have been yesterday. It might have been the day prior. It might have been two years ago. I don't know. Time is confusing. But the point is that she talked a little bit about that, too, about just, you know, the real fears from teachers and from education workers, EAs as an example, and parents about the impacts of COVID on learning.

We hear about the ongoing disrespect shown towards teachers and education staff over the last two-plus years – right? – with no more stark an example than the laying off of 20,000-plus education workers on a Saturday via Twitter from this Education minister. What a slap on the face that was, being told that they weren't needed, that their work wasn't valuable when these were education workers, particularly education assistants, who were doing so much, going above and beyond to support students in their transition to online learning. I had an EA reach out to me right after that happened. Was it May 2021? Again, time is confusing. My apologies. But I remember an EA reaching out to me and just saying, like: I'm not complaining, because this is my job, but I've literally been working nonstop; I've been connecting with students at home.

I'm hearing from, you know, folks in my riding, where we've got some incredible schools that support kids in what we might call the inner city, in my Boyle Street neighbourhood, St. Teresa of Calcutta school, an amazing school that does so much to support kids. But so many of them are newcomers, and many of them live below the poverty line and don't have Internet at home, as an example, right? Having education staff who are trying to help and trying to pivot, particularly when kids don't have the resources to learn effectively online at home: that's something we're hearing.

We are hearing from teachers and school staff and parents about the fact that: "Listen, we've got rising enrolment yet a thousand fewer teachers in classrooms. We've got a government that's

refusing to truly fund enrolment growth despite the spin that you'll hear from them. We've got a government that's refusing to invest in schools, refusing to listen to one of their largest school boards, the Edmonton public school board, that asked in their capital plan: hey, Delton school needs an update; it needs a modernization; it needs a new school, in fact." Delton school, I know, happens to be in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, so I'm a little sensitive to this one because that Education minister chose not to fund it, chose not to listen to the Albertans that she is purported to represent, right?

I could go on, my point being that it's really hard to trust this government on education when issue after issue – of course, you all know me, my love of curriculum. Working in curriculum for about eight years under consecutive PC ministers and then the NDP Education minister, you know, I saw how well and how thought-out curriculum was developed, taking an evidence-based approach, yet we've seen that this government has bungled that.

3:00

With this bill, Bill 15, rather than respect our teachers and ensure they have the resources that they need to help students thrive in a safe and caring environment, you know, they took away the supports that are needed. They're forging ahead with that curriculum; they're pausing on building schools. So no wonder. No wonder that when I and my NDP colleagues and perhaps UCP MLAs as well – I can't speak for them, but I know we talk a lot about what we hear from our constituents on this side. When we're out knocking on doors, when we're flipping through our e-mail inboxes, listening to our voice mails, checking our social media, no wonder that education is a top issue. It absolutely is, and it will continue to be.

Bill 15 does nothing to address the big issues in education that we are hearing about. You know, if our constituents don't trust this government on that whole list of education issues that I just mentioned, it's no wonder that they also don't trust this government when it comes to the professional conduct process and what we have outlined in Bill 15, a process where that minister alone can set the standards for professional conduct and she can change them essentially on a whim, unilaterally. That minister is asking Albertans, is asking my constituents who care deeply about education, is asking teachers, is asking parents, is asking students to just trust her. How could we possibly trust a minister who is asking Albertans to allow her to be both the judge and the jury?

Instead of listening to Albertans and making tangible suggestions for a piece of legislation that could support teachers and education stakeholders across this province, this government is forging ahead with Bill 15. With that, I know we'll have much more to say on Bill 15 in committee, and I'm looking forward to that conversation. I hope that we'll get an opportunity to hear more from the minister and as well from UCP MLAs, who I'm certain should have lots to say on this. I can't imagine – well, I know this for a fact. I've knocked on many of their – not many; I won't exaggerate. I've knocked on some of their ridings, and certainly education is a top issue. Curriculum comes up a whole lot on the doors, right? I must admit that I don't think – I'm trying to just rack my brain here – I've heard from constituents or from folks that I've met within other ridings across this province concerns about the professional conduct process, right?

With that, I will conclude my remarks, but I urge this government to think deeply about what its priorities are when it comes to education, because what we see here are certainly not those of Albertans. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Just Taber-Warner, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Just Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank the Minister of Education for bringing this bill forward. Let me start by saying that I have the utmost respect for teachers and the work that they do. In fact, my father is a retired teacher. He taught all of his life, my mother taught for about 10 years for kindergarten, and in fact I taught for two years as well. The first thing that I started with is teaching.

Teachers have a unique passion and skill set that enables them to mould young minds and to make sure they have the skills and competencies for future success. This government knows that the vast majority of teachers in this province are professionals who value the safety of the students in their care. In fact, Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that. I have many friends who are teachers. I have no doubt that teachers, 99.9 per cent of the teachers out there, are doing it for the right reasons. They have to wear multiple hats. It's a very difficult job to be a teacher. I know. I did it for two years. The bill that we're talking about here is not to address those good teachers that we have in this province. We have great teachers. It's to address the ones that are falling through the cracks. This is why I am so in favour of this bill.

The Alberta Teachers' Association would like you to believe that this bill is an attack on all of those good teachers I just talked about, the teaching profession, and Alberta's education system as a whole, in fact. They have already spent millions of dollars, Madam Speaker, on media campaigns to create fear amongst Albertans and teachers alike. I have heard these people come to my office and talk to me about these concerns. When I ask them: "Where did you get this information from? Have you actually read through the bill? Have you actually chatted with the minister or the minister's office?" They say: "No. We got it from the ATA." That disinformation that's going out there is concerning.

Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is nothing more than a tactic being used by the ATA. We've seen this happen multiple times. I saw this when they were concerned about the fund that manages their retirement fund, moving it under AIMCo. For months I had teachers coming to me, both teachers who were currently teaching and teachers who were also retired, saying, "How dare your government do this?" And I said to them: "Listen, the numbers are quite clear. The fund manager that they were using before versus the fund manager of AIMCo: those numbers show that the teachers will do better under AIMCo."

They had a very difficult time believing me, even though they knew me, because of what the ATA was telling them through multiple, multiple e-mails and pamphlets that they were sending out to these teachers. Madam Speaker, I always said to them: "Listen, I get your concerns. If it was my retirement, I would also be concerned. But the numbers, the reasons why: all of these things are going to be a benefit to you." Hindsight is 20/20 vision. If you look backwards, you can see, you know, where you were right or wrong. Fast-forward to today. We find out that AIMCo has outperformed the fund manager that they had before. Well, it's interesting, because if you talk to teachers today, they'll say: "You know what? You were right, and the ATA was wrong."

In this situation, Madam Speaker, I think that the ATA is also getting it wrong. I think that they are not taking a look at the information that we are presenting, and they have dug in and very passionately, I might add. I'm also hearing from other teachers saying, "How dare you do this?" I have to go back to those teachers

and say the same thing I said with the changing of the fund manager: “You know what? Hindsight is 20/20 vision. Let us work through this, and we hope that at the end of the day and we believe that at the end of the day that it will be more responsive to teachers, to students, to parents, and that the system will be better and more accountable.” It’s only the bad teachers who should worry as they will be losing a level of protection their union has previously provided. This is simply a good policy.

Let’s look at the reforms contained in this bill. The current teacher discipline structure in place is a dual-system model that has been in place for 85 years. Under the current model the ATA is responsible for overseeing complaints made against its active members, and the Alberta Education registrar is responsible for overseeing complaints made against non-ATA teachers and teacher leaders. The current system allows the ATA union to be in charge of overseeing the disciplinary process for its members.

Madam Speaker, we know that unions are designed to protect and advocate for their members in exchange for the payment of union dues. There’s nothing wrong with that. That is the natural process of what unions should do. I think we can see the conflict of interest here, however, and that is a problem. We know that there are instances when inappropriate conduct with a student has led to an offending teacher being removed from the school and simply being put in a new one.

3:10

I’ve heard lots of the members opposite stand up and talk about: give us evidence; give us the reasons why you’re bringing forward this bill. Madam Speaker, you only have to have one case for this bill to be important. Only one case would make it valid. For the hon. members to discount that: I find that absolutely deplorable. These are children. I have five children – they’re all older now – and I’ve got four grandchildren. I think that it’s absolutely incumbent upon each of us as lawmakers in this Legislature to make sure that we are protecting not just all of them but even the one that might get away. If we can provide a system, a robust accountability system to help even that one, then this bill is worth doing. I’ve actually heard that kind of argument being given by the members opposite multiple times, where they will talk about the one, the importance of the one, the individual. I think that in this situation I don’t hear that argument from them. I find that odd.

Now, we’ve seen also some evidence from a number of cases that the ATA does not understand their duty to report inappropriate conduct to the police in instances of serious harm or a threat to student safety. This is not discipline. This does not protect our children. The only people this does protect are those who are the bad actors. It is clear to see that the current system of teacher discipline is out of date and reforms are long overdue.

So let’s talk about Bill 15 and what it will do in terms of reforming the teacher discipline process. Madam Speaker, Bill 15 will create a single system for addressing complaints under a newly created Alberta teacher profession commission. This commission will be headed by a commissioner and will oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints for all teachers and teacher leaders equally. Under this system the registrar of Alberta Education will be responsible for the intake of all complaints. These complaints will then be forwarded to the Alberta teaching profession commissioner, who will have the authority to address and investigate each complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action.

This bill will increase accountability and transparency by expanding the online teacher registry, by making publicly available information on hearing and appeal dates; hearing, appeal, and minister’s decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional

conduct or unprofessional incompetence; any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner; and dates of hearings and appeals. These changes will ensure that the entire teaching profession is protected by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders under one reformed disciplinary process and will put the best interests of students, their families, teachers, and the public at the centre of the teacher discipline process as well. This bill will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions and regulated professions by eliminating the conflict of interest where a union could advocate for its members while also overseeing disciplinary matters.

Madam Speaker, I think all members of this House would agree that children should be safe in their schools and that parents should not have to worry about their children falling victim to inappropriate conduct by the educators they have entrusted with the well-being of the children. I want to remind the members that when we announced this, there was someone from my riding that came forward, the Snows. Mr. and Mrs. Snow came forward and talked about how difficult it was for them. Their daughter was in an inappropriate situation with a teacher. That took five years to be able to work through the processes. During that time that teacher was still able to be involved with kids. That was a very difficult situation for the Snows, knowing that this teacher, who was very inappropriate with their daughter, was still able to perform as a teacher.

I know of another situation, Madam Speaker, where a teacher had molested a child, and that teacher did not lose their certificate to teach. That teacher, actually, was just moved off to another school. In another situation a teacher that had misappropriated funds was actually stripped of their teacher’s certificate. Now, misappropriating funds is wrong, and there needs to be some action taken on that. But there was inconsistency on why someone who misappropriated funds would lose their teaching certificate and someone who molested a person would not lose their certificate. That is something that I think this bill will be able to address to start talking about those inconsistencies and work through some of those things so that we have a system that is fair, accountable, and addresses these issues without bias.

Our government wants to ensure that students are safe at school, and this legislation will provide a fully transparent process to ensure that bad teachers are disciplined appropriately. This bill has a common-sense approach to teacher discipline that will enhance the accountability and transparency of the teaching profession and will better protect students and give parents peace of mind. I will be proudly voting in favour of this bill, and I would encourage all members of the House to do so as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 15?

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

The Chair: There are currently no amendments on the floor. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise this afternoon and expand on some of my comments that I started with

in second reading. Of course, one of the first things I had noticed about this bill was the amount of abilities that this bill is going to be granting the minister, something again, as I've said before, that members of the government bench and members of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature, shall we say, were not very accepting of when they saw that from the NDP government. It's always entertaining, actually, to see that all of a sudden now the shoe is on the other foot and it seems like a good thing to do. That was one of the first kind of flags I saw.

What it essentially comes down to is that, you know, the minister and ultimately the government is looking to not only this Assembly but Albertans to just simply trust them. As we know, that seems to be in very, very short supply from Albertans about the government. I think one of the comments I said earlier was: why trust a Premier, why trust a government when they can't even manage to disclose a donor list? A simple promise that the Premier made during the leadership race, when the UCP was coming together, and hasn't managed to deliver on that in three years. Yet here we are on something much larger, like Bill 13, asking everybody to just simply trust them.

You know, it's not simply just as much as a donor list. When we start to look at some of the other things that are on that list, it starts to cause a lot of concern around that. Like, for instance, with the big corporate tax giveaway that the government made, it was just simply: well, look, we'll give them this tax break, and they'll start creating all kinds of jobs. Of course, data has shown over the decades that that has never really transpired. But we were still going to go down that path again, and right out of the gate 55,000 jobs were lost. Again, looking back, all we heard was, "Trust us; this is going to work," and then doubled, even tripled down to accelerate that a little bit.

3:20

My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was just talking about the curriculum, the amount of rejection that we've seen from educators and from Albertans with all of the problems that are there: again, really starting to test Albertans' trust of the government. You know, we heard promises of: we're going to fix the insurance system, the big mess that the previous government made of that. Yet again I have constituents coming to me with increases, 10 per cent, 30 per cent on average, some higher than that. If that's your version of fixing, please stop because my constituents can't afford it.

You know, a \$1.3 billion bet on Donald Trump: like, that can really shake an individual's trust in their government, to make such a reckless choice. Thirty million dollars a year and the best that we can come up with is two copied logos and chasing after Bigfoot. I have to wonder if maybe Ogoogo is next on the hit list.

I think, as I mentioned in my comments in second reading around Bill 13, one of the first things we see is the power to exempt products from consumer protection laws. There are certainly some concerns about how this potentially could be abused. Of course, I said that there are probably a few missing shingles off the roof of my house. Certainly, when my wife feels that she has not gotten what she was promised, whether it comes to a financial service or a product – I can just imagine that she's not alone in that belief, which is why people are very, very adamant when it comes to consumer protections around, say, for instance, financial services, which is what Bill 13 is proposing to bring in. We haven't really heard how this government plans to guarantee some of those things. You know, we can certainly start to go down the whole debate road of: well, that's coming in regulations. That doesn't give comfort to Albertans very much when they're being taken for a ride potentially. It would have been nice to see some of that work.

One of the other things that kind of came up was potentially the bureaucracy, not having the technical capacity or sophistication to potentially regulate some of this appropriately. So one of my first questions, you know, that comes to mind around that kind of topic is: is the government willing to fund the ability to create that? When I see the ability for them to potentially, I guess, contract that out, that would kind of lead me to believe that that's probably not the case. When I think about some of the times that the government has appointed people and such – I hate to say it – there have been very, very partisan appointments around there. Again, if you're going to be criticizing others for potentially doing that, to then turn around and do the exact same thing is a little bit hypocritical.

When I'm thinking about the government of Alberta contracting out, how are they going to be sourcing this, who are they going to be choosing, and are they going to potentially show up on a UCP donor list? I can't help but ask those kinds of questions. And, of course, now that we're in Committee of the Whole, hopefully, we'll get an opportunity to hear some of those answers.

When you are potentially looking at exempting certain things, it begs the question of: well, what are you prepared to exempt, and what aren't you prepared to exempt? It would be very, very interesting to hear from the government side what the plan is around that. What's on the table? What's not on the table? You know, get that kind of stuff on the record.

Certainly, when there are any kinds of challenges to regulations or legislation, part of some of that discovery is going back to the debates that occur in this House. If you want to make it abundantly clear – I've always said, Madam Chair, that when we're creating legislation, it's not for us. We know what's going on. We know potentially – well, sometimes we know what's going on, at least on the opposition side. What's the intention? Put it on the record so then there's no doubt. If there is an honest ability to want to create good legislation, you should have absolutely no problems putting things on the record that people can go back and read – no big deal – so that 20 years from now, when none of us are available here and we can't answer questions and we can't explain what the process was, they can simply read this and know exactly what's going on. That's the simplest way to solve this.

How are we going to be educating Albertans around this? You know, are we going to post something online for them to read, assuming they can navigate some of the times to be able to find those things? It's unfortunate I have to bring this up, Madam Chair, but is it going to be a case of: well, we're just going to do it now; we'll wait to see what happens; then we'll try to maybe fix it, and maybe then we'll try to educate people more on it. It's kind of a little bit of a backwards type of approach, but we have seen that so far through the 30th Legislature. Again, all it takes is one time for it to happen, and it starts to beg the question: well, what else is going to be happening with that?

Like, I'm not opposed to Bill 13, but I think there are some very legitimate questions that we have, that Albertans ultimately have. You know, a lot of times that's what forms some of our debate in this House, trying to get their questions answered that they bring to us. Hopefully, through the course here of Committee of the Whole we'll get some answers to those, like I said, specifically: what is the government planning to potentially exempt, or is there anything that they just absolutely will not grant an exemption to? I think that kind of information needs to be put out there on the record for all Albertans to be able to see so that they kind of know what they're dealing with.

And then any other riskier services or technologies that they'll be able to educate Albertans with – so I think I'll leave my comments at that point. I'm certainly looking forward to hearing more. There's

a good chance I may pop up again to have some other things to say based on what the debate is, but I appreciate the chance to expand on some of my comments.

The Chair: Any members to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. If passed, Bill 13 will create a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies. Regulatory sandboxes offer businesses temporary relief from certain legislative and regulatory requirements, enabling them to test innovative products and services and to expand their offerings to consumers. This particular regulatory sandbox would apply to the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, the Consumer Protection Act, the Financial Consumers Act, and the Personal Information Protection Act.

Technologies and innovations tested could include application programming interface services, soft tokens, or biometric authentication. A regulatory sandbox is another step forward in diversifying our economy and attracting investment, fostering innovation while at the same time reducing red tape. Alberta is putting itself on the map as a destination of choice for fintech and financial services companies.

3:30

Applicants for exemptions would need to meet a number of criteria and may be subject to a number of terms, conditions, and restrictions which the government would determine on a collaborative, case-by-case basis. For example, applicants would be required to maintain a physical presence in Alberta. They would have to offer financial products or services and provide a viable business plan, including details for testing their financial products along with a plan to exit the regulatory sandbox. Applicants would need to explain why each eligible product or service should be considered new and original or, at a minimum, why their offering is a material improvement or adaptation from an existing product or service. Exemptions would be denied for products and services that are already available in Alberta. Protections and oversight will ensure Albertans and consumers are protected, and all legislative exemptions would be disclosed publicly, to the point of the previous member.

The government has formed a working group to review applications comprised of officials from Treasury Board and Finance; Jobs, Economy and Innovation; and Service Alberta. In addition, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner would also be consulted on any requests related to the Personal Information Protection Act, and their approval would be necessary for any exemptions.

The regulatory sandbox created by Bill 13 will be the first of its kind in Canada serving the finance and fintech sector. This legislation is one of the many ways our government is making Alberta the destination of choice for technology and innovation, and I encourage the members opposite and my colleagues to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. It's a pleasure to follow the Member for Calgary-South East and talk a little bit about this bill before us, Financial Innovation Act. I was listening carefully because of some of the information that the member was providing this House was very innovative: soft tokens, and there were two other things that

he mentioned that I quickly tried to write down. But I guess I got hung up on soft tokens and thinking about that and the fact that what's before us is quite new. As we heard just a second ago, the regulatory sandbox will be established to allow for fintech products and services to work in the space, work in Alberta, and provide those new offerings to Albertans.

I've been reviewing some of the comments made both by the Minister of Finance and the critic for Finance and other MLAs on both sides speaking to this issue, and I've kind of narrowed down some things that I want to discuss about the Financial Innovation Act. I'll put them in this order. I'd like to talk about four things, the first being that this is new, and we as a government need to act in a responsible, reasonable way so that Albertans can be protected from the offerings that will come forward. In that regard there's going to be some judgments from various ministers' departments on those offerings and whether companies fit into this space.

I just wonder. My colleagues here have put forward the question about wondering if we have the adequate expertise. Do we have all the horses needed to be able to make sure we get there in terms of assessments of the products that are going to come forward or services or ideas that will be coming forward with business plans? While I was the Minister of Finance and TBF, I got to know some of the people in that ministry, and they're stellar, but I wonder if there's been work to build up their skill sets around this kind of offering of analysis of business cases. I think it's been talked about that the government may have to contract those services so that they have the necessary skill sets. That would be the first kind of concern I have.

Just with respect to that whole issue I can remember many years ago, several years ago, under previous PC governments, that there was a desire to approve new kinds of financial vehicles for Albertans, and that was payday loans. It was something that before – I think I've got the dates – 2005, perhaps 2006, wasn't available to the extent they became available after the government approved their use, their presence in this province and Albertans' ability to go and get payday loans. We know from the feedback of people who have gone to and continue to go to payday lenders that they get into a cycle of debt and dependency on getting the next loan and the next loan and the next loan. That was something that the PC government at the time felt would be a new offering, a new, innovative thing for Albertans to be able to access.

I can tell you that the work I did before I was elected in 2015 was to kind of chart and analyze the impact of payday lending on a portion of Calgary, southeast Calgary. I can't remember the number of payday lenders there were at the time, but on one strip in Calgary there were somewhere around 20 payday lenders. It could be said that there was far too much money going into the hands of cheque-cashing payday lenders and far too little staying in the hands of people who either didn't have bank accounts or had defaulted out of their bank account from overdrafts and other kinds of things that they had trouble paying off. Anyway, they got into a cycle of debt and could only get out of that debt by some of the programs that were being offered to people in the southeast part of Calgary at the time, savings programs leveraged up with monies from agencies and charitable organizations and other kinds of people who, like myself, wanted to see a healthier process of people getting cheques, going to banks, keeping their bank accounts.

You know, in the past the PC government of the day approved that service, and it was not a good service. When we came into government, in 2015, we reviewed the whole area of payday lending and curtailed, ratcheted back that whole industry to the benefit of many Albertans and Alberta, where more money was kept in the hands of people to invest in the economy, to pay for their own particular needs.

That's one area that – you know, does the government have the competency to know what's in the best interest and protect Albertans? They certainly didn't back in 2006, when that was introduced. I just wanted to put that on the record now in terms of: do we have all of the resources necessary to ensure that the products and ideas that will be offered under this act will be protective, will be in the best interest of Albertans? Many, many people will come in with limited knowledge, and they'll believe the advertising as opposed to the reality, so we need to ensure that that's there from the government competency protection end of things.

3:40

The next thing I'd like to speak to is trust generally, and I know that my colleague focused a lot on trust. This legislation gives, of course, power to the minister and various ministries to assess and analyze business plans coming forward. That potentially is a risk if that trust is mislaid and if power is abused. In that case that's a problem for Albertans, and they're the ones who are going to be holding the bag. Regulatory sandboxes have occurred, have taken place in this province already.

With regard to the Alberta Securities Commission, certainly when I was Finance minister, that commission did stellar work, and we together pushed back on the federal government at the time, who wanted to harmonize and bring under one securities commission all work. We felt that Alberta had a unique situation, circumstances that required to continue on its own in terms of an Alberta Securities Commission, and we were successful in that. I'm pleased to see that that's been continued under this government in terms of supporting the Alberta Securities Commission to the utmost so that they can continue to provide that support for our capital markets here.

I want to touch on the third thing, and that's with regard to disclosure to Albertans the ongoing work of those that are successful under this regulatory sandbox and will be offering products and ideas and services to Albertans. I think it's really incumbent that the government ensure that any company that makes it through that sandbox alerts the public that they are dealing with something novel and particularly risky. I just brought that up in relation to payday lending. Many people got into payday lending believing that they could essentially handle the situation, and there probably should have been – “more warning labels” is, I guess, a term – more disclosure not only by the companies but by government indicating that involvement in a company that you borrow money from that is a lender like that can quickly spiral out of control and lose control of the ability to not owe those lenders the thousands and thousands of dollars that sometimes their customers were into them for as a result of borrowing monies.

At this point it's not clear to me how these new products, services, or technologies will be, how the disclosures and how the warnings and how the information sharing with Albertans will occur. I think the bill talks about websites and information being shared in that regard. I just wonder if that's – I question whether that's enough, and I question whether Albertans will be savvy enough to do their homework to the extent that it needs to be done, because many didn't do their homework when they took out payday loans and believed that they could stay on top of that.

That's just an example, more an analogy than a direct connection to what's before us, but it is a learning situation. It is a learning incident that, I think, should give pause to government, to know that in the past Albertans gave way too much credence to the presence of that bricks-and-mortar building being there and believing that it was there for their best interest. For some people who were able to manage that – it never seemed to be a very large majority – that's a fine thing, but most that I knew and talked to were regretful of their involvement with payday lenders in particular.

I know that we need to stay current and stay on an innovative edge in this province, and I'm glad that we're doing that. I think we have some good examples of positive ways that we've done that, either through the Alberta Securities Commission, and some negative incidents. The risks of going down this road are clear, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try as long as we ensure that there are the significant considerations and belts and braces put in place.

With that said, Madam Chair, I'm going to take my seat.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to the Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13. I've spoken to this bill before, and I will like to add a few more comments this afternoon as the government prepares to implement what they are calling a regulatory sandbox, the first jurisdiction in the country to do so.

I think it's an effort to regulate a burgeoning sector of the economy that we see lots of examples of in Alberta. I see from the explosion of small companies that are looking to enter into the fintech sector with various products and services that it was one which merits the attention of government and regulators because, of course, consumers need the protection that the government can provide from any unscrupulous operators who might wish to bring on a financial product or service that could put them at risk. Also, Madam Chair, there's the other element as well, that the government is going to really want to have to take a close look at how Alberta jobs are protected as we see more and more financial technologies develop and evolve which potentially eliminate Alberta workers here in the province.

One example of this, Madam Chair, arose this morning as I awoke to listen to CBC Radio. It talked about a company. It was a news item about a company which is a fast-food company which is looking to eliminate the need to have order takers on-site – in other words, a human being taking your food order on-site – in their location. What will happen instead is that there has been a new technology developed where, basically, a Zoom call will be made, or it will be constantly in progress, whereby the order will be taken by somebody anywhere in the world. It'll be on-screen. It'll be a digitally operated system where that individual order from somebody who's drawing up either to the drive-in or inside the restaurant, wanting to order takeout food, will be speaking to somebody who could be on the other side of the world. It could be anywhere in the world where the wages are lower.

3:50

Now, in this case the interviewer spoke about this particular company using workers in Nicaragua, where the wage rate is about \$3.25 an hour. Now, granted, the cost of living in Nicaragua is much lower than it is here, but even on a pro-rated basis that seems like a huge discount towards – we would expect to pay somebody in Alberta a living wage to work and perform the same role. If indeed things like this, Madam Chair, successfully are rolled out by one company in a pilot project, one might potentially see this happen in the whole fast-food industry. You don't need to be a mathematician to really calculate the job losses that would happen in Alberta as a result of the implementation on a wide basis of this type of new financial technology or this new service in ordering fast food, as an example.

One of the reasons that the government not only has to look at consumer protection from the standpoint of fraud or from the standpoint of being overly risky but also from the standpoint of, “How will it affect Alberta employment?” is because many of the technologies that we see and the technology companies that are

being developed will obviously involve looking at savings and bottom-line results for the companies that they are trying to market their services or products to. In this particular case I'm sure it looks mighty appealing to many fast-food chains to look at saving themselves \$12 or more an hour on labour costs by replacing an Alberta worker with somebody who's in Nicaragua making \$3.25 an hour on a Canadian-dollar scale.

That is something that – I don't know if it's really contemplated by the minister as yet in the Financial Innovation Act, but it certainly got my attention when I was listening to the report on CBC this morning about a major fast-food chain adopting this practice on a pilot level, or a pilot scale. If indeed those kinds of savings are available, the ability to eliminate Alberta workers in favour of a remotely operated Nicaraguan worker or somebody elsewhere in the world who is working for \$3.25 an hour, that's a bit of a daunting thought.

Now, we do of course have, as a result of the pandemic, a shortage of those workers in that hospitality field, and that's largely caused by the problematic low wages that are involved in that field, but of course businesses will opt, if they can, if it's legally permitted, to go ahead and participate in something that's going to save them that type of a percentage on their labour cost by eliminating Alberta jobs and offshoring something as simple as ordering food at a fast-food restaurant.

It wasn't something that we could have contemplated a few short years ago, Madam Chair, but lo and behold, there are technologies that have been practised by us and everyone around the world during the pandemic that have gained strident use, and the public uptake of things like Zoom is pretty widespread. This particular fintech company has acknowledged that and implemented a pilot project with a major fast-food chain that could change the labour market in the fast-food industry. It's something that should be on the radar of the Alberta government if it is indeed concerned about protecting Alberta jobs.

Now, granted, offshoring labour and offshoring work to lower cost jurisdictions is not a new thing. Our utility companies do it. Banks do it. It's a fairly widespread phenomenon. Notwithstanding that, this is an expansion, and possibly a large expansion, of that offshoring and exportation of Alberta jobs that the government might want to consider looking at when it's regulating within the sandbox the new fintech companies. It's something that I wanted to bring up and know and understand if indeed it is in the purview of the government when it comes to the Financial Innovation Act and the regulations therein.

I'm not sure if indeed that's something that we may be able to hear about from the government. Let's see if indeed that is something that they have any thoughts on. That was one of the interesting pieces of the evolution of the fintech industry that I've come across very recently, and I thought it was pretty germane to bring forward this afternoon in debate. If you try to calculate just the number of workers that would be eliminated if indeed the fast-food industry adopted across the board this digitized order-taking system, you quickly come into the tens of thousands of Alberta jobs that would be lost. That's worthy of some serious consideration. If indeed we are going to be regulating these industries, we may want to take a look at what effect the adoption of that fintech strategy involved in some of these companies would have on employment. It's a concern at a time when our young people are having, really, a difficult time at significant step-up jobs, that we will be perhaps exporting a whole category of entry-level jobs out of the country. It's a serious consideration.

I'm also concerned about financial products being exempted from consumer protection. I know that the intent, I believe, is to make sure that the novel ideas that are contained in many of the new

fintech companies, whether it be a point-of-sale system or a new method of payroll or what have you – there's a vast panoply of different types of ideas and small niche opportunities that entrepreneurs have found in Alberta and are developing technologies to serve a need that they see available to them, but indeed the risk, of course, is that some of these can be abused. The consumer protections that need to be put in place are something that Albertans are rightfully concerned about because it's such a new field. It's one that I think regulators have to be careful about because it is a novel and rapidly evolving field of enterprise.

As a result of that, consumers feel that they are at risk of things that they may not be fully aware of, and as a result I think there's a special responsibility on the part of the government within this regulatory sandbox to ensure that certainly there's a wide berth given to the development of products and services, but that has to be balanced with the protection of consumers. That protection should never be sacrificed at the mercy of giving totally free rein to the new companies that have a developing technology that they wish to bring to the market.

4:00

The guiding principle should always be and the overriding principle should always be that our consumers are protected, and not only the individual members of the public, Madam Chair, when I talk about consumers. Many of these businesses, many of these new fintech companies that are being developed are business-to-business platforms. So there is a possibility that an individual business that wishes to take advantage of an opportunity to apply the technologies made available by a new fintech service or product could potentially be put at risk as a result. There are wide opportunities for potential abuse if indeed it's not properly monitored.

That's the responsibility of the provincial government when making this regulatory sandbox, that the oversight is there for businesses, large and small, that might take advantage of these new products and services and for the individual consumers who potentially would be at risk. On the individual basis, we're thinking more and more about data and privacy and loss of data and looking at personal identity being at risk. I'm not sure how well and deeply this has been contemplated in the legislation before us. In these exemptions that the minister is contemplating allowing within this sandbox is an inherent risk that there will be unscrupulous operators who would seek to operate within the smokescreen of those exemptions and take advantage of the public or businesses that they sell their products or service to.

The sector is a big employer right now, 60,000 people in the financial services sector. It's a large section of our economy. But the biggest concern, I guess, apart from the protection items, the consumer protection items inherent in this regulatory sandbox that the minister is looking to assemble with this legislation, is that the Minister of Finance is simply asking us to trust him. Once again, it's a theme that's been consistent with this government, whether it's asking us to trust them when they burned \$1.3 billion on a pipeline that didn't exist and was known to face opposition from the U.S. government. They made that bet knowing that it was – they were betting against the house, and they lost that bet. It was \$1.3 billion up in smoke. Certainly, there was no protection for Albertans there. The government made that bet knowing that it was probably going to fail.

Somebody who consistently has billions of dollars of accounting errors in his budget is not somebody whose trust we should be allowing him to have. We shouldn't be giving our trust to that individual Finance minister. Simply put, the track record of this government when asking for the trust of Albertans hasn't been good. It doesn't breed a culture of trust when we listen to what the

government is actually doing in terms of taking risks on behalf of the Alberta taxpayer. Giving away a \$4.7 billion tax break to major corporations, who, of course, took it offshore or paid back dividends: the minister, of course, asked us to trust them that that money would be invested on a trickle-down basis to Albertans, and of course that didn't happen. It was money that disappeared.

The ability to trust somebody is something that is earned, Madam Chair. Albertans in this province, clearly, are having great difficulty trusting the government. That's something we hear over and over on the doorsteps, right from one end of the province to the other.

Quite often, Madam Chair, if you're looking at a potential election that's coming up in any given jurisdiction in a western democracy, if indeed people feel that they're economically going to be better off in the future and they're hopeful, they'll sustain the government; if indeed they feel that they're fearful and that things are going to get worse, the government will potentially fall.

But those two rules or those two norms are coupled now with something that's a little bit different, and it really is a significant matter as we approach a potential election season in this province, and that is the matter of trust. It seems to be overriding anything. Like, the government has fallen into an absolute windfall with their treasury receiving billions of dollars in oil royalties as a result of geopolitical situations that exist in the world today, and, notwithstanding that, because of their own trials and tribulations leadershipwise within their own party and the turmoil and the schism that they've got going on there and because of the gambles that they've taken with Albertans' tax dollars over the course of their tenure in the last three years or so, that trust has been broken.

Because of the way that the health care system has been managed during the pandemic, because of the way that doctors have been treated, starting off with having a contract torn up, like, a bona fide, legitimate, signed contract destroyed by the government that was a party to the contract, that is something that is beyond the pale. Who does that, Madam Chair? Well, obviously, it's a government that is not concerned necessarily about the trust of this population. That was one of the first steps that went a long way to taking away a pillar of the trust that governments hope to have.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments and join debate in Committee of the Whole. I'm going to put my comments into two categories. I would like to respond to, I think, some of the thoughtful observations and comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo around both the value and perhaps some of the risks taken with a financial services regulatory sandbox.

The member was right to raise the concern around consumer protection. Consumer protection is critically important. I have to say, Madam Chair, as we were doing our policy work, as we were looking at other jurisdictions that had gone before us with this kind of a mechanism, with a financial services regulatory sandbox, that was a question I had. In fact, I posed the question to my officials, the officials that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would know well. My question was: given the fact that we have other jurisdictions that have gone before us with this type of mechanism, have there been examples of where consumers' privacy has been materially breached or where consumers have experienced loss? In other words, have there been events and instances where a product offering has gone off the rails? That is a concern of mine, and the members are right to raise it.

The answer to that, Madam Chair, was that there were no documented instances where there was a material loss by consumers or a material breach of privacy. So while that does

not absolve this government and future governments of the responsibility to take every care and precaution in protecting the privacy and the information of Albertans to ensure that Alberta consumers are fully protected, it gave me confidence to continue forward with this initiative and with this mechanism. We have identified a number of data points, in fact.

Transparency is critically important. Again, I've heard that from the members opposite, and they're right to raise it. Transparency is critically important. There are a number of terms and conditions that the minister of the day can impose on an applicant, on a project proponent, on a company, business who would want to utilize this sandbox and offer a product with certain exemptions. But there's also going to be public information that will be required. I'm just going to go through that required public information.

The government will make the following information public on a website: the name of each sandbox participant issued a certificate of acceptance; a description of the product or service each sandbox participant is offering; a list of regulatory exemptions provided to each sandbox participant; any terms, conditions, or restrictions imposed by the minister on a sandbox participant; the expiry date of any participant's certificate of acceptance; as well as any amendment, revocation, and cancellation of a certificate of acceptance.

4:10

Madam Chair, a certificate can be revoked by the minister, and that's an important feature here to head off perhaps a product offering that is rolling out in a different way than it was envisioned. So, yes, consumer protection is critically important, transparency is critically important, and certainly we've considered those two essential features, and they are included, and rightfully so, in our approach.

I do want to make just a couple of comments in response to the Member for Edmonton-McClung, because while certainly a number of his comments I think were related to the bill, I have to say that that member went off. You know, this is Committee of the Whole time. I would like to discuss the details of the bill, but I do have to respond, Madam Chair, to a couple of the comments. Firstly, the notion, the insinuation that somehow we have been ultimately producing and presenting financial statements in material error: that's simply not been the case. We've had a clean audit report in every year-end financial audit that the Auditor General has conducted on behalf of this government. That's critically important. That's critically important, as I think all members on both sides of this House would appreciate.

You know, I can talk about the function of an auditor at year-end. An auditor engages typically a client, in this case the government of Alberta and various departments, on appropriate accounting treatment on complex issues. That does occur, and that takes place. It certainly took place with our government, and it took place with the members opposite. That's a reality. But that in no way, shape, or form means that the financial statements are anything but integral. I think it's critical that Albertans understand that and know that the financial statements presented by the government of Alberta are, in fact, integral and, in fact, have received a clean audit report.

I just have to make one comment with respect to our approach to positioning the Alberta economy for disproportionate investment attraction, because the member again talked about our job-creation tax cut. The fact that we reduced corporate taxes, business taxes, by a full one-third: that was not a giveaway. The member alludes to that as a giveaway; it's not a giveaway. In fact, we're just taking less from business owners and groups – businesses, companies, and others – who invest in this province and create jobs and create wealth, from which we all benefit.

Madam Chair, again, I just have to cite the fact and recognize that the business tax rate is only one feature of many that make up a business environment, either very competitive or not as competitive, but it is an essential feature, and it's an important feature. In fact, I can cite Fortune Minerals, who are planning to build a significant processing plant, refinery just outside of Edmonton. They cited the location, the geography relative to an important rail line, and the preferential corporate tax rate. Those were the criteria that ultimately landed them in Alberta. It does matter. That's reflected, again, in the budget that we presented and passed and the fact that, again, the corporate tax rate is just one feature of many in a competitive business environment.

But as we've worked hard to position this province to be most competitive, to have the most attractive business environment possible, we are seeing investment pour in, with announcements week after week, even these days. All that is to say that by reducing corporate income taxes and by modernizing our regulatory environment, I believe we will create the conditions for increased investment attraction, greater wealth creation, expanded fiscal capacity, and higher government revenues to pay for those important programs such as health and education and supporting our most vulnerable. It was no giveaway, Madam Chair. It was simply positioning this province for growth, wealth creation, and future prosperity.

Lastly, the member talked about our fiscal management in a bit of a disparaging way and, again, threw out the fact that, you know, we have a better fiscal result simply and only because of higher energy prices. That's simply not true. We used very cautious, credible WTI projections, oil price projections, projections of \$70 in the current year, \$69 in the mid-year, and \$66.50 in the out-year. Madam Chair, again I will remind all members of this House that had we continued on the spending trajectory we inherited from the previous government, we would not be showing a balanced budget but a \$6 billion deficit. That's a fact.

Madam Chair, again, I take exception to those comments. I'm very interested in debating this bill. I'm very interested in hearing from members across the way on this bill: some of the advantages, the opportunities, the risks, and the perils. Let's focus on this bill. Let's focus on ensuring this economy is positioned not only for growth but for diversification. I believe that's a goal that we all share in this House. Let's continue to focus on that goal, and this bill, I believe, further advances the effort and the objective of economic growth and diversification.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. Yeah, actually, I'm very excited to get a chance to maybe go back and forth here with the minister a little bit. I was keying in on some of the comments of my friend from Edmonton-McClung. Back during the NDP government I got the opportunity to serve as the Alberta representative on CSG, got to attend a couple of PNWER meetings as well. I was actually invited as a panelist to one discussion around disruptive technologies. Back at that time it was right when Uber was starting to come into Alberta, essentially upsetting the entire cab industry in the province. At least speaking for Alberta, there is significant monetary investment for cab drivers with regard to licences and that.

Some of the other things that we started talking about – my friend brought up around remote cashiers. I started thinking about the self-serve tills at different stores versus actually having a cashier there. You know, the most famous one, I think, going way back in time, is when cars were built exclusively by people, and then, of course, automation and robots came in, which, unfortunately, started taking

jobs away from those individuals. Here in Alberta we have examples of driverless trucks in our energy industry. I think I heard once, for instance – I could be wrong about the company – that I believe it was Suncor that had purchased a hundred of these driverless trucks, which means that now there are a hundred people that don't have jobs in that area. I mean, innovation is going to go, new technologies will come in, and things like that.

I guess that when we're thinking about Bill 13 and financial innovation, I mean, let's think about how at one point in time everybody would go to the bank to deposit their cheque and do their business with the teller there and everything like that. Then, of course, the Internet came in, and all of a sudden we could do our banking online. We had a whole bunch of customer service representatives in the banking industry who lost their jobs. Now, ultimately there were some folks that still just would not do their banking online, and I was probably one of those holdouts for a little while, but even I eventually transitioned.

4:20

When we're talking about disruptive technologies and, you know, creating that sandbox for that innovation and testing those things, I guess the question would be: are there any kinds of provisions that this government will be looking at – and I'm not one hundred per cent sure if maybe that is addressed in Bill 13 – where the government might be, I guess, reviewing some of these new innovations or technologies that come in that on the surface sound very exciting and look like great opportunities but then, as my friend from Edmonton-McClung had said, might end up costing Albertans their jobs, like this new one of going in to order some food from somebody that's not even in the country, serving that person?

I'm wondering if, maybe by chance, the minister has any ideas on how that kind of thing could be mitigated or, you know, any plans to review some of these things so that rather than after the fact of a lot of people losing – because once they've lost their jobs, that's it. It's pretty much done. Maybe go into a little bit on any kind of plans where, if we do identify a disruptive technology – and I don't want that to sound negative. Those were just kind of some of the words that were used at the time to try to mitigate or help those folks out that might be finding themselves out of a job with a disruptive technology. I'd be interested to hear some of the comments on that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Pleased to rise and make a few comments with respect to the question posed, I think a fair question posed. You know, as we take a look back through even recent history, there's always a tension between moving forward with innovation, with new technology, with new and novel ideas and methodology. There's a tension between what's gained in that approach and who might be left behind. That's a fair question, and it's a tension that I believe needs to be evaluated. I would suggest it's a tension that I believe we need to consider, but I believe that tension should not hold us back from stepping into the future but stepping into the future in a responsible, careful way.

One requirement for an applicant to be successful to get a product into the sandbox – in other words, a product that would receive some exemptions and some special terms to be offered in a limited way to test effectively here in the province of Alberta – is that that product would need to be new or novel. In other words, it could not be a product that an existing financial institution is already offering, and it would have to demonstrate some benefit to the public. Now, that benefit may be in a new or novel product that we can't access today, or it could drive an efficiency that ultimately, in a competitive world,

in a competitive financial services industry, will drive that efficiency and cost savings to Albertans and to consumers. Again, not just any idea is going to pass the bar. The product needs to be new and novel, and it has to demonstrate the likelihood, probability of some benefit.

With respect to the tension between moving forward with innovation and technology adoption and some of the risks that that can pose to, you know, folks all of a sudden finding that they don't have a job, that maybe they don't have a career, and that maybe they have to retrain, again, I appreciate that question, and I appreciate the tension. But, Madam Chair, I believe we need to, in spite of that tension, move forward with innovation and technology adoption for a couple of reasons. Firstly, historically we can look back at industry after industry where there was transformational change, massive efficiency and productivity gains that ultimately required far fewer people to create as much or more product.

I can look at agriculture. I've got a bit of a background in agriculture. If we take a look at agriculture 75 or 100 years ago, I mean, we were an agrarian society. Certainly, you know, up to probably the 1940s we were an agriculture society in many ways. So many people worked in agriculture. Our productivity was low. We were an agriculture powerhouse in Canada, but our productivity was low. And we were not unique. That was a global phenomenon at the time. But the green revolution came along. Ultimately, bioscience moved forward very aggressively. Plant breeding was taken on, and our genetics improved drastically. Agronomy moved forward very significantly. There was a much better understanding of what plants would need, what agricultural animal production would need in order to increase production and efficiency.

Then there was the technology revolution with respect to technology employed in production practices. Again, whether that was in the production animal agriculture or whether that was in crop science, all of that combined ultimately allowed us in this country and in other developed countries to produce exponentially more agriculture products with exponentially fewer people. No doubt at the time there were concerns around: "What are all these people in rural Alberta or rural Canada going to do? How will they ever get a job? How will they ever transition?" Those would have been real concerns of the day, and I'm hearing those concerns, legitimately, today. When we take a look back at history, we see that a new economy, innovation technology, requires different skill sets, but it requires people. It requires engagement.

Right now in agriculture we have tens of thousands of people that work in high-tech agriculture fields in this province, occupations and professions that couldn't have been envisioned 50 or 60 or 70 years ago. Instead of having, you know, an army of folks working in very laborious types of work in the fields, that work is done by only a few by using technology. Now we have folks working in research and development. We have folks working with soil mapping. We have folks working in cloud-based technologies that have moved the agriculture industry forward exponentially, which, I might add, is very important as we have a growing global population. So a bit of a long answer.

I really believe, with respect to financial services, that the same will be true. If we fail to move forward, our competitors will move forward, and we will simply be left behind. We will not be able to hold back our economy for the sake of ensuring that there's no change or disruption, to use the member's term appropriately. We, I believe, will have to embrace the future, and Bill 13 is about embracing the future. Is there some risk? There's always some risk, but I believe that as a province we need to move forward. As a province, that's our legacy. That's our history. We are a province, we are a people that are prepared to step out and take risks. I believe that Bill 13 and the creation of a regulatory sandbox, the provision of exemptions when a company or business wants to offer new and

novel products, is a way to step forward into the future, not without its risk. I appreciate the member raising the concern, but I believe we should and will and must step forward to embrace the future and this technology.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I'd just also note that I appreciate the comments we've been hearing from the Finance minister and that he is actively participating in this debate and providing further information. That is certainly laudable and appreciated.

I recognize the importance and the value of looking at financial innovation. We've certainly seen opportunities arise, and if I may take a moment to tell a bit of a personal story, I've certainly seen some benefit myself. You know, a few years ago, back in 2016, I needed to make a purchase online, and for the purchase that I needed to make, the only option that that seller would accept was Bitcoin. This was something that was fairly new to me, certainly not something that I had any of, but I needed to make that purchase, so I purchased a small amount of Bitcoin so that I could do that transaction online. I was left with a small amount of Bitcoin left over, a trifling amount – it was maybe a few dollars – and I forgot about that Bitcoin. It sat there in that digital wallet for a number of years.

4:30

Just last year I received an e-mail notification that says: "Hey, by the way, it's been a while. We're going to shut down this account. You may want to just check and see if everything is okay." I said, "Well, sure." It was a little bit of jumping through hoops, took a little bit of work to go through and get in and reaccess that account, but when I did, I found out that that small amount of Bitcoin that I had left there was worth well over \$2,000. I can't claim, Madam Chair, that that was any savvy investment on my part, that I had done deep studies, say, of the likes of Mr. Pierre Poilievre, who's a big fan of these things. I can't say that I have his level of expertise when it comes to digital currency, but it turned out that having that small amount, hey, did end up yielding a considerable benefit.

Of course, I also recognize that for folks that are getting involved in these things, there is appreciable risk. Certainly, I know that, to my understanding, the value of Bitcoin has gone up and down quite a bit over the years. Certainly, there have been some who have benefited, and there have been some who have lost. Financial innovation can be very interesting, and offering new products and new opportunities for folks can be very interesting. It can potentially be beneficial. It can be very tempting for folks, but it can also come with a downside.

You know, I think about back in 2008, when we had the burst of the housing bubble in the U.S. We had a significant stock market crash, and that came about for a number of factors, a number of reasons. I mean, certainly, there were a number of people who were taking subprime mortgages who were not really in a financial position to be able to cover that. There were folks who were sort of taking advantage of the existence of these things, different investors, and approaching at times, to my understanding, some misrepresentation and taking advantage of that. Certainly, there were concerns about how some mortgage brokers were going about making those mortgages and those loans.

But, certainly, we also had folks who were trading in bundles of these subprime mortgages. That, of course, was a new product on the market, and that was something that a lot of people were getting involved in. Certainly, a number of people were making large amounts of money doing this, and they were considered to be very

smart and savvy investors at the time, but we saw how that resulted. That ended up with thousands and thousands and thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people, having to default on their mortgages, losing their homes. It led to a massive stock market crash. It led to a serious impact on our economy, to the point where Prime Minister Harper himself, one of the more conservative Prime Ministers we've had, had to actually move forward with a stimulus budget, something I can say – I think all would agree – he was very, very reluctant to have to do. But the impact was that severe not only for the U.S. economy but for Canada.

Now, I'm not suggesting that any of the products that are likely to be developed in this regulatory sandbox that's being proposed by the Minister of Finance are going to be of that kind of a scale. That is certainly a more extreme example, but it is a cautionary tale, Madam Chair, of what can potentially happen. While I personally can tell a story of a real benefit, there are also many who can tell stories of real harm.

Now, that, in and of itself, is not a reason to be against this legislation. I think that in all situations, as the minister himself said just now, as he was talking about impacts on employment, we always have to weigh possible gain versus possible risk. And what the minister is proposing here, to my understanding, with this regulatory sandbox is creating a smaller area in which to try some of these ideas out to minimize the amount of risk that might come. If we find something that is successful within the confines of this regulatory sandbox, there could be an opportunity then to expand that to regulate something in a way that could potentially provide a larger benefit through a larger scale deployment in the financial services sector. And again I would say that that is not an unreasonable approach.

I certainly appreciate the thoughts, you know, that the minister brought forward as he was just talking now about the importance of diversification, trying new ideas. Certainly, that is a refreshing change from his remarks in late 2019, when he declared diversification a luxury at a time when his government was taking away all of the government supports for our tech and innovation industry, including some that had existed long before our government had been in place and that existed in every other province in Canada, like the SRED credit. But as I've noted in previous debate, this government has had a Damascus road experience when it comes to the tech and innovation industry, and certainly there have been some great improvements in their policy towards it.

But, really, the key issue here is a question of trust. Can Albertans trust that if they purchase these products, that if they engage in products that are developed within this regulatory sandbox, they are going to be adequately protected? It seems quite clear that the minister feels that it is the role of government to take those steps to protect them, to provide that consumer protection. He talked about how they looked at other jurisdictions to see whether they'd taken that step, what concerns there might be, talked with the officials, asked: have there been any examples of consumers' privacy being materially breached?

He said that, no, in fact, there were no documented cases of that, which is great to hear, Madam Chair, particularly since, you know, that was a concern that came up, at least, when I was at committee recently with my private member's bill, where government members, in their words, said that they could not let that bill go forward because they were concerned about privacy impacts. I noted at the time that members of this government were very happy to pass Bill 46 back in the fall of 2020, a bill in which there had been no consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which she flagged as severely concerning and indeed potentially taking Alberta backwards on the protection of Albertans' private health information, but the members of this government party rejected every single amendment

that was based on the recommendations from that Information and Privacy Commissioner and voted in favour of that legislation.

So it's good to hear that in this instance the Finance minister is indeed considering that aspect here, but it does lead me to question how this government approaches these sorts of situations. Again, here we have the government speaking up and saying: "Okay. Well, we believe we can provide adequate protection for Albertans who are facing potential risk from products that are developed within this regulatory sandbox. Indeed, it's been our job to do so, and we are capable of doing so." Yet when my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview brought forward his Bill 203 to establish an Alberta venture fund, these same members of that committee said that they were deeply concerned that, you know, this would look like the government was endorsing something that was potentially very risky for Albertans, that they felt that that was a reason that bill could simply not even be debated in the Legislature.

But here we are with the government bringing forward a bill which, again, will allow Albertans to make investments which potentially may be very risky for them, and suddenly the tune is different because it's coming from their Finance minister as opposed to a member of the opposition. In the last few days I've heard members of the government toss the word "hypocritical" at me and my colleagues. Well, I think it certainly fits here.

That said, I appreciated the remarks that the minister provided and the conversations he had with officials. They looked at whether there had been any privacy issues. They looked at whether any product offerings had gone off the rails, and there was apparently no documented case that they could find of a material loss for a consumer under a previous regulatory sandbox, products developed in such in another jurisdiction. Certainly, I appreciate that the minister considered that and looked at those particular issues.

I certainly agree with him that transparency is critically important, and as he noted, there are terms and conditions that the minister can impose. There are requirements for what must be posted online around exemptions, terms and conditions, restrictions, expiry date, amendments or revocation or cancellation of a certificate. But, again, Madam Chair, I would note that these government members, at least the ones that were at that committee, were deeply concerned about Albertans' ability to understand products that were put in front of them, financial products like the Alberta venture fund, so I have to ask, then: are we absolutely sure that government can and will provide this information in a way that is understandable by Albertans? It's excellent that this information has to be posted online, but the question is: how will this information be posted, in what kind of a format?

4:40

Certainly, Madam Chair, I am not someone who has delved deeply into financial services. Certainly, I have a financial adviser. I certainly appreciate their advice. We have conversations about how to invest for my RRSP and other things, but it is not a personal area of expertise. I am not sure that if this was put up on the website in fairly technical language, it would be something that I could say that I felt confident reading and being able to make a decision on. Now, perhaps the kinds of products that are being envisioned here are for folks who are more experienced. Perhaps that will be made clear. I haven't heard clearly on that from the minister, whether this is envisioned as something that's going to be for the general populace, for the average person, who may not have a high degree of literacy in financial services and products, or whether this is intended more specifically for those who do have that level of expertise and may perhaps be browsing and considering these on behalf of clients. That would be something I'd be interested in hearing a bit more clarity on.

The other thing that occurred to me as the minister was speaking on this point is: will there be – and again I'm not aware of it in the bill, but perhaps I've overlooked – or are there any limits or requirements on how these products may be advertised or promoted? That is the other question. Certainly, making these products available and having certain fences around them within the regulatory sandbox and certain requirements to be posted online, but the question is again: if these are products that are going to be offered to average Albertans, what requirements are there about how these products are described in advertisement or promoted, or how can they be promoted? Can one of these companies simply take out a Facebook ad and say, "Click here?" Could they just be put out on social media? Can they run advertising on television? What steps are allowed to be taken?

It's possible that the minister is simply saying that these would be handled like any other financial product, that they would simply have the fences within. But then again, given that these are, for lack of a better term, experimental and certainly subject to unique conditions, are there provisions that that must be included and must be noted when these products are in fact being promoted? I think these are important considerations because, again, the largest component that we have here is trust. I appreciated what the minister laid out about the due diligence he has done and discussions he has had with his staff.

Certainly, if I may stray for a moment into the more political, as all members in this House are wont to do from time to time, Albertans have reasons to question trust in this particular Finance minister for some of the decisions that he has brought forward on behalf of his government; for example, this government's insistence on continuing to dally with the idea of an Alberta pension plan when certainly the numbers do not seem to suggest that that would necessarily be a wise investment on behalf of Albertans, that there could be costs involved, and that a vast majority of Albertans do not want it. But this minister continues to say that they are considering it.

This minister sits at the cabinet table, where this government continues to pursue potentially the idea of an Alberta provincial police force, which again would raise costs for Albertans and would create new risks for municipalities in terms of the rising costs and put more burden on the backs of Albertans. They want to potentially force Albertans to make that investment despite the fact that Albertans have been very clear, two-thirds, that they do not support that idea.

When we were talking about trust in a government, that's certainly a considerable issue that – of course, this minister was also at the table and writing the cheques for the \$1.3 billion on a pipeline that went nowhere as the Premier insulted elected leaders in the U.S., an investment that cost Albertans and for which they have received nothing. Now, again, Madam Chair, I freely admit that that is stepping more into the political than the direct question of this bill, but it is fact nonetheless.

We do, though, have questions, and we'll continue to ask. Certainly, there is the potential that we will support this bill under the parameters that are set out. But we do continue to look at it and question and ask about some aspects, the power to exempt some of these new financial products from consumer protection laws. Now, I just outlined some of the basic concerns that would be there and some of the things I'm certainly curious about in how these products may be promoted, sort of how they may be advertised, how they may be put across, who may bring them forward, what shape they might take, how they might be described. Certainly, with the minister having the power to choose to exempt some of these products from existing consumer protection laws, that is something that should be very, very carefully guarded. That is a large power.

I know at times this government has been very fond of awarding some fairly wide and sweeping powers to its ministers. I recall Bill 10, the concerns that were raised around that, and then an entire summer in a committee that had to be spent and an entire bill of amending to undo the very things the government had been warned about.

Again, it is worth asking: what safeguards are going to be around the minister exercising this kind of power on something that could potentially impact Albertans? I appreciate, again, that the minister has talked about having considered this and looked at other jurisdictions, but the fact is that we are talking about new and innovative products.

My understanding is that Treasury Board and Finance, in fact, does not necessarily have the requisite experience on hand for this kind of work. They do not currently have anyone necessarily within the ministry who understands and has expertise in these particular kinds of new, innovative financial products. I'm assuming that the minister himself does not have this expertise, or at least he certainly has not indicated that he has.

Certainly, if he has experience in this, then I would be interested to hear it, but I think he is likely then, in making his decisions around which exemptions he might grant, going to be very reliant on expertise from his department, expertise that the department does not currently have. That was what we were told in the technical briefing from officials, that it might well be the case that Treasury Board and Finance does not currently have the expertise they need, but if required, they could put someone on contract. I would certainly suggest, Madam Chair, that that would be required.

I think that if we are going to have government making these kinds of decisions – and, again, members of this government have expressed their deep concern about how Albertans may be misled or may lack information or the ability to understand something as basic as an Alberta venture fund, so I imagine they are equally concerned, then, with these kinds of complex and new innovative products, that Albertans may have challenges there as well and may be potentially put at risk.

Certainly, I think it's essential that the minister has expertise available to him to sit down and have these conversations, to provide him with much-needed guidance before making decisions like exempting some of these products from existing consumer protection laws. It's certainly my hope that the minister is preparing for that now. I admit that, of course, we don't want to presume the will of the Legislature and which direction we might vote, but certainly I would hope that they are starting to look at that possibility and consider individuals that could be sought out to provide that advice and expertise should this bill pass.

I think Albertans have a lot of trust in their financial institutions in general. You know, I can be fairly sure that when I put dollars in my savings account, it will still be there tomorrow. I have fairly good protections and assurances that when I make that investment in my RRSP, it will continue, those dollars will be there. I generally trust my bank with my mortgage. Albertans consider dealing with financial services companies as safe, and they should. In line with that, then, that ties in with what I have been saying. Albertans have that feeling of safety.

The Chair: Are there others to join debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13 in committee. You know, seeing that we're in committee and it was lovely to see the Finance minister pop up and correct the record or try to add some comments based on what was said, before I go into some of the other comments that were made and some of my concerns about this legislation, first, let me say that

I actually generally am in support of this particular piece of legislation. I would like to get some additional information around some of the concerns we've raised.

4:50

The Finance minister, a few speakers ago, actually, you know, talked about how awesome the government books were. Fair enough. I mean, the Auditor General has certainly issued a clean audit. However, I would like to add a few comments there, and I would like to qualify that. If you think back to 2020, there was a special auditor's report issued, and as a result the UCP government needed to correct a few actually fairly significant errors in order to get a clean audit. I think it's important that we get that on the record and that we don't forget this.

At the time our Auditor General, Doug Wylie, actually flagged \$1.6 billion worth of accounting blunders and oversights. There are three of them specifically: a couple of really big-ticket item ones and then one smaller one. The first one, of course, you will recall, was KXL. He noted that the government had to make a \$100 million adjustment to the KXL pipeline investment. The government made that investment before the fiscal year-end, he said, but the money wasn't reflected in the proper balance sheet. The Auditor General also said that the government failed to update its cash-flow model for the Sturgeon refinery after prices cratered earlier in that year, which was 2020, due to COVID-19 and a global oil price war, leading to a recommended \$795 million adjustment in expenses. Madam Chair, that's a pretty big error.

There was also another one that I talked about a little bit yesterday. It was an error around reporting expenses in the correct year. There was \$152 million added to costs for two income support programs, those being assured income for the severely handicapped and, of course, the other one being income support itself; that was, barriers to employment and expected to work. The problem, as I explained yesterday, was that the government stated that they were changing the payment dates to help Albertans, which we know is not true and ended up causing a fair amount of harm. Now, there were some reasons that they shared that, you know, probably could have flown, but at the end of the day there was harm. There was not enough notice. The big problem, as pointed out by the Auditor General of Alberta, is that 12 months of expenses were not recorded in the 12 months of the fiscal year, so the UCP government had to correct that error.

Overall, there were – what did I say? – \$1.6 billion in accounting errors, blunders, actually, that needed to be corrected in order to get the glowing report that the Finance minister talked about. So I just wanted to correct that.

Moving on, I think that we've heard again and again and again in this place that there is a lack of trust for this government. You know, let's be honest. There's probably not a lot of trust for any government around the world for a variety of reasons, but this one in particular, this particular government, the UCP government, is a government that has a huge trust deficit. So whenever we see a piece of legislation, I sort of look at it as: I think that this government needs to prove to Albertans that they have Albertans' backs, that they are indeed going to do what they say and Albertans will be protected and, actually, life will be made better by that particular piece of legislation. While I will be happy to support a bill that assists in diversifying the economy, that creates opportunity, and that supports innovation – I'm happy to do that – I would like some additional information.

As I mentioned before, one of the concerns that we have is that there is a power to exempt new financial products from consumer protections laws that can easily be abused. Now, you know, don't get me wrong. I am not saying that companies that are able to use

this regulatory sandbox, as it were – I'm not saying that their intent will be malicious in any way. I'm just saying that it's best to prevent problems before they happen.

Some of the new problems, you know, with fintech or whatever – and my colleague was really eloquent in describing some of them – are that sometimes these new financial products or these new innovative products have the same problems but just in a new form. For example, a loan is still a loan, electronic payments are still electronic payments, and they come with all of the potential sort of hazards or problems that the original products, or now kind of the old-fashioned products, come along with. However, we've had many years to establish some consumer protections around those older products that we may not see with a new one, with an innovative one that is able to use the regulatory sandbox.

My colleague also mentioned, that I would like to reiterate, a lack of transparency around cost and business models. Often these very new and innovative products can appear to be free or low cost, but they may not be. Sometimes there are hidden costs that don't even appear until after you're into the use of the app or the new product or whatever it may be, and they don't even appear until after you sign up and you're in the process. Sometimes those costs aren't necessarily sort of – the costs aren't financial. Maybe it's a cost around data sharing and, you know, all of those problems that come into play around sharing data and personal information.

This might not sound like a big deal when we're talking about this sort of innovative regulatory sandbox, but if you think about the vulnerabilities of some Albertans – and I would hope that products like this, like the ones we're talking about, would be open and accessible to all Albertans. There are some issues around very simple things like no human records, lack of consumer or customer service, or what happens when things go wrong. You know, I heard my colleague talk a little bit about his very interesting Bitcoin experience, but he had the wherewithal to actually figure out how to go back and find an old account and follow the steps required to do the work he needed to do to see that he ended up doing pretty well after the fact. But what about people that don't? That is often why we have some really basic consumer protections, to provide those safeties and securities for people that may not have the same level of skill.

Fast and easy sometimes causes a lot of problems. You know, fast and easy credit sometimes will create fast and easy debt. Sometimes a lack of regulation or the lack of oversight, the lack of consumer protection will sort of draw in people that perhaps don't have the wherewithal or the ability or shouldn't actually be incurring the additional debt. Sometimes slick mobile apps or things, different products like that, can gloss over or can miss some important protections.

Financial technologies or financial innovations, technological innovations, sandboxes – I mean, it's great. I think that this piece of legislation is building on something that has obviously started. It's nice to see for once sort of government reacting quickly and being innovative and trying to get ahead of things because, as we all know in this place, government can sometimes be really clunky and really slow. So this is good, to see this piece of legislation that will maybe do the opposite.

However, I think that if we want to do it responsibly and well, we need more than just standing up in this place and having, you know, government members or ministers stand up in this place and say: "Yes, we believe in consumer protection. Yes, we want to do the best. Yes, we want what's best for a diversified economy and keeping Albertans' money working for them and keeping them safe." I think that we've all learned that saying it is one thing; doing it is quite another. So I think it would be great if someone on the other side would just be more specific about what concrete protections will be

in place. What can you guarantee Albertans will be in place to keep their money safe, their investments safe?

A lot of upsides to financial sandboxes. Obviously, you know, it does encourage innovation, relief from uncertainty and regulation, and it's been great throughout some of the research that I've been doing and some of the reading and listening to the government talk about the upsides. But there are some downsides to a piece of legislation like this. The upside is that we get to test or companies get to test new approaches, sharing information, pilot projects and data sharing, all good things, all with the potential to do great things.

However, there are some serious downsides that I don't think we can responsibly ignore, things like – I'll say it again and again – the elimination of consumer protection, fair lending. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo mentioned, you know, some of the dangers or why we need consumer protection in lending, truth in lending – what is the real cost in lending? – ensuring clear, plain language so that people understand contracts that they're getting into or the terms that they're agreeing to.

5:00

Another downside is the real risk assessment in the promotion. You know, when you start to promote risky innovation, sometimes in the speed or the desire to highlight the really exciting potential – I mean, I think we've all sort of seen that, bought into that – there is a failure to really say that to do your due diligence, you really need to assess this risk for you personally or for your company.

Vague promises of consumer benefit and innovation. You know, I think we've all at one time or another tried a new product, whether it's banking related or otherwise. We've all done that because it just looks so great, and sometimes what is too good to be true is just that.

A concern, too: I have read a number of accounts of a regulatory sandbox having pilots. You know, pilots without specific end dates can go on for a very long time, so have consumer protection or some rules around length of time. This may all be under consideration by officials already, but we as legislators in this place, who will be asked to vote on this legislation, don't know about that. It's always: "Trust us. We've got this. We'll do it in regulation." That may be the case, but it would be great to have more detail.

Finally, I think, you know, that when we talk about new markets and things, there will be an impact on competitors. Let's be honest about that. We've seen it time and again, and I'm not saying that that's necessarily a bad thing. That sometimes is just life, that as innovations happen and if other companies don't keep up and innovate, they will suffer some losses. But I'd like to hear more from the government about what kind of assessment was done to determine what those risks were to competitors.

So those are some of my concerns. I look forward to hearing more from the government about what they intend to do.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 13.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 13.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

[Adjourned debate April 27: Ms Hoffman]

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods rising.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, at second reading today, this afternoon. I had the brief opportunity to begin my remarks on Bill 11 while we were debating a referral amendment that would have seen Bill 11 moved to a committee for more discussion and more analysis. Now, we are no longer on that referral amendment, but I would like to continue some of the comments that I had started to make at that time, specifically because they are incredibly relevant to the main bill as well.

The Continuing Care Act, for those who are watching the debate at home or reading the *Hansard* after the fact, is a piece of legislation that has been introduced to streamline, to improve transparency and accountability, and is in essence taking four pieces of legislation and combining them.

In my initial remarks I reflected on concerns that there may be loss of some standards in the combination. Certainly, there are concerns with the volume of decisions that are being deferred to regulations through the implementation of Bill 11. Certainly, a lot of conversation has happened regarding how Bill 11 is intended to start implementing improvements to the continuing care system that the government has been consulting on, and in fact it released the facility-based continuing care review 11 months ago, almost a full year ago.

Now, the facility-based continuing care review included 42 different recommendations, and the minister at the time suggested the government would be working quickly to develop an action plan, to study some others. Certainly, when we saw Bill 11 introduced into the Legislature, the members of the opposition were eagerly looking forward to this piece of legislation, thinking that it would be related to some of the recommendations out of the FBCC report, particularly given that the minister at the time said that the recommendations on staffing and hours of direct care would be reviewed over the summer and acted upon in the fall. Here we are in the spring, moving into the

summer, and not only have we not seen action on staffing and hours of direct care, but these changes are not to be found inside of Bill 11.

When it comes to Bill 11, there are significant gaps. In my remarks to the referral I had just started to talk about the continuing care challenges that Alberta experienced, and there were challenges in continuing care across Canada. In Ontario we saw them take these challenges very seriously through a review and through a very strong commitment to improve, particularly, the staffing challenges.

Madam Speaker, a lot of the staff in continuing care are overworked. A lot of the staff are dealing with major issues of burnout. A lot of the staff have dealt with a lot of mental health stresses, particularly during this pandemic. We know, for example, that from the implementation of the single-site staffing through the pandemic, it really shone a light on how many of these staff are lower waged, working multiple jobs, and therefore not getting full-time hours or full-time pay or full-time benefits and therefore have to work in multiple facilities, which during a pandemic had major implications to our pandemic response.

I reference this because similar things were seen in Ontario, where the Ontario government has now committed to invest \$1.9 billion annually to create more than 27,000 new positions for personal support workers, which are the equivalent to HCAs here in Alberta, as well as RNs and LPNs in long-term care and that those additional funds would be used to increase the number of staff, to start addressing culture change, to start addressing workload and working conditions, and to really address retaining staff and improving conditions of care. Some of these things we saw out of the FBCC review, which had a section specifically addressed to dealing with some of the challenges we have with labour shortages and the current workforce, particularly given the increasing need for continuing care that is coming up.

I really wanted to get on the record here at second reading my disappointment in not seeing more through Bill 11 to address what is happening with the workforce that we currently have given rising resident acuity, the gap between training and experience, the challenging work environments, labour supply, and insufficient funding for staff wages and hours of care, all things that the government has now known for 11 months, longer if you consider the time period during which they were consulting.

5:10

As we talk about Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, and the work that has been done to consult on this, it really raises the question along: who has been consulted for this particular Bill 11 piece? Given what has happened within our province during the pandemic, has there been adequate consultation with the friends and families, the loved ones of those who've been impacted by COVID-19 in the continuing care system? I would submit to you, Madam Speaker, that based on the debate so far and based on the government not sharing more information about who they consulted with, how that feedback has fit in – yes, we have the final report of the FBCC, but that was of course completed 11 months ago and did not speak directly to Bill 11 – as there's such a gap between the 42 recommendations from the FBCC report and what we see here in Bill 11, it certainly has caused concerns for a lot of public health advocates, for seniors' advocacy groups, and for the Official Opposition.

Having said that as a bit of an introduction to my remarks at second reading, at this point, Madam Speaker, I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: This will be known as amendment RA1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I move 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 because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

Madam Speaker, this particular amendment, a reasoned amendment, is predicated on the real challenge the Official Opposition has had in trying to understand Bill 11's positioning within addressing the issues within continuing care. Has the input of the families who have lost loved ones from COVID-19 while in continuing care gone into Bill 11, and how is that reflected here in Bill 11 and the opportunity to potentially come back and introduce legislation that addresses the 42 recommendations from the FBCC report, including improvements when it comes to the workforce? That is one of the areas of particular concern that I have, but certainly there are a number of areas within those 42 recommendations of the FBCC report.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

This piece of legislation does not fulfill the UCP's own promise from a year ago to increase home care, the number of hours of care that residents would receive, or the proportion of full-time staff. Again, I will contrast this to the province of Ontario, where investments of \$1.9 billion annually have been put forward to address these very real concerns. Bill 11 consolidates but fails to make substantive and meaningful changes, and I believe that that may be because the government has failed to consult adequately with the families and those who use this current system of continuing care.

Now, as I've listened to my colleagues engage in debate on this piece of legislation, I have been struck by the personal experiences that colleagues are sharing and putting on the record, both their work experience from working in pieces of the system as well as their own personal experience in caring for loved ones within the continuing care system. One of the things that I know I have heard from families who have lost loved ones as well as from families who have loved ones within the system is the feeling that the UCP was neglecting seniors through the pandemic and that Alberta was lacking certain protections or measures that other jurisdictions had; namely, an independently accountable independent Seniors Advocate. The UCP removed the role of the Seniors Advocate, claiming that the Health Advocate would be sufficient. They also changed how they were searching for that Health Advocate to appoint someone with ties to their political party.

The Health Advocate here in Alberta has been relatively silent during the pandemic while, to compare and contrast, in B.C. the independent advocate made practical recommendations specific to making life better for seniors. I think that speaks to the need to have a Seniors Advocate here, something that is not happening within Bill 11, and again calls into question the consultation that has been carried out on this particular piece of legislation.

I would note that the Canadian Association of Retired Persons has been reaching out to MLAs across the province – so all MLAs are likely already aware of this – to call for an independent Seniors Advocate. Certainly, this is not something that is a partisan issue; rather, it is one of making sure that there is someone who has that lens, that eye, on to the issues that seniors are experiencing and is responding to that and providing recommendations to that effect.

You may be familiar, Madam Speaker, that the NDP has put forward a private member's bill to create an independent advocate. It would be ideal, through consultation with the families of those loved ones who have lost their lives from COVID-19, to see a Seniors Advocate role potentially incorporated through new and revised legislation to improve the Continuing Care Act. Let us not forget that as of April 12 1,677 continuing care residents of Alberta have passed away from COVID-19. That is a stunning number

when you hear that said. We've had a major tragedy within the continuing care system, and we need to be able to learn from it. Other provinces are learning from and responding to the challenges, not only receiving a report and then waiting 11 months and bringing forward legislation that doesn't implement those recommendations, investing real money and putting forward real strategies that will address many of the issues.

Again, I spoke specifically to the workforce challenges because as the labour critic that's an area that I know quite well, but the other areas of the FBCC report are equally important, including enhancing quality of care, recognizing cultural sensitivity and diversity in care, making more information accessible, increasing hours of care to residents – again, something that the Health minister at the time suggested that there would be action on; review through the summer, action in the fall. Here we are in the spring – soon we will be in the summer – and we have not seen that action.

Bill 11, as you may hear from my voice, feels quite frustrating because it misses the mark on what Alberta seniors and other Albertans are looking for from this government when it comes to our continuing care system. I do want to acknowledge that certainly the continuing care system is not just for seniors. We have Albertans of all ages who are within that system and deserve the highest quality of support from this government and from the system that is supporting them.

I move this amendment with the hope that we can actively see more consultation with these families and that the government will share the results of those consultations in a detailed way with this Chamber so that all members can be aware of the feedback that was being given to the government and how that feedback is being used to implement Bill 11, or future legislation, should this recent amendment be accepted.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on RA1. Would anybody wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton . . .

An Hon. Member: McClung.

The Acting Speaker: . . . McClung. Thank you very much.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Nellie would be proud.

I'm pleased to rise this afternoon once again to speak this time to RA1, a referral motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who I think rightfully focused many of her remarks on the thrust that we've had as opposition members to this Bill 11, and that has been a consistent theme and a current and ongoing insistence that the result of the pandemic and the deaths that have been referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and others in this House – I'll once again restate that there were 1,677 deaths of residents of continuing care from COVID-19 in Alberta as of April 12, 2022. That's from the National Institute on Ageing.

That number is an astonishingly high and tragic number, Madam Speaker, and it's something that we had hoped would be a motivation for this government to go forward and address the huge gaps that COVID-19 has revealed and magnified, gaps in the continuing care system not only in Alberta; across Canada. But, for sure, Alberta was not exempted from the glare of those gaps as we saw those gaps reflected in the death rate that occurred in continuing care facilities in Alberta amongst particularly seniors but also others of different age groups who also use the facilities and live in continuing care facilities in Alberta.

Over 1,600 deaths, Madam Speaker. If you think about that, that's the size of, I think, the largest Alberta high school. It's a huge number, and every one of those individuals has families, extended

families, and friends who certainly did not anticipate that they would succumb to COVID-19 while in a facility purportedly under the care of professionals who would know what to do in a situation where there was an infection such as this running through a facility.

Many of these deaths were preventable, Madam Speaker, and that's the tragedy of it, that COVID-19 has shown that we have done a poor job in our continuing care facilities of preventing deaths that would be caused by something like an infection of COVID-19 in the continuing care system. These are gaps and situations that have been highlighted before but were neglected over time and that caught up with us in Alberta as well as across the country.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview so clearly stated in her opening remarks when Bill 11 itself was introduced in March 2022, the critic for Seniors and Housing for the NDP made a statement saying, of course, that many of these deaths were preventable and that she was hoping for significant and transformational changes to the continuing care system to be announced through the bill such as working condition improvements for continuing care staff and increasing the number of full-time staff to provide care. These have been some pretty basic ongoing demands of our continuing care system that remain unmet, and one would have hoped, as the critic for Seniors and Housing, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, made clear she hoped, that this piece of legislation would address more than the housekeeping items that it does. It does not provide the transformational changes that the continuing care system desperately needs, and given the tragic failures we have seen over the two years, it's another reason we really can't trust the UCP to do the right thing.

Now, we have been consistently calling for an independent Seniors Advocate. Indeed, our party presented a private member's bill to this House to do just that, yet that was ignored. That's another reason, Mr. Speaker, why we bring forward the amendment that we're considering today to not proceed with Bill 11 at this time but to further consult on the legislation so that the concerns of those 1,677 deceased, the concerns of their family members and their friends, can be properly heard and properly aired. That's where we're going to hear exactly where the gaps are and how people have been affected by those gaps. The individuals who are visiting on a regular basis the loved ones that they know in continuing care situations are the ones that can very, very concisely and correctly identify what the gaps are, what the problems are.

Many of us in this Legislature have had loved ones in continuing care. I know that I have as well. Certainly, it has been frustrating, in my experience, to not feel that I've been heard when bringing forward concerns about either my relative who happened to be in continuing care or situations that I became aware of while visiting continuing care locations. I mean, it doesn't take somebody with experiences I've had working in continuing care situations and having some training in that. The family members themselves are pretty aware that if you've got somebody sitting in a commode for three hours, there's a problem.

It's the case many times, Mr. Speaker, that one staff member doesn't know what the other staff member is doing – there could have been a shift change, two part-timers changing shifts, and communication didn't happen – and, as a result, somebody has been forgotten about. It can be a very difficult thing for anybody, never mind a senior, perhaps with dementia, who has been forgotten on a commode in the room for hours on end. Can you imagine the panic that that causes? Not only that; then, of course, they begin to seek their own solutions and attempt to get up when they may not be able to actually walk anymore, and it causes potential injuries.

That's just a small example of some of the concerns that I'm thinking that residents' family members will bring to light if indeed they are given the opportunity to properly bring their concerns forward by not having this bill continue and be read a second time now and that consultations be sought so that the family members will have the ear of the government.

The number of times that we've heard a family member's horror stories in the long-term care facilities has not diminished as a result of COVID-19. In fact, it became patently clear that the difficulties that we were concerned about before were exacerbated by COVID-19. The tragic number of people who died as a result is something that should have been a call to action to this government to do more than a compilation of a number of different acts to bring together the continuum of different continuing care facilities into one piece of legislation or under one legislative home. The expectation would have been, Mr. Speaker – and I think Albertans, rightfully, are wondering why this didn't take place – that there would have been a significant and realistic review of the difficulties that the long-term care facilities experienced during COVID-19 and are still experiencing. I mean, we haven't learned lessons yet, and this is what we should be doing from the loss of life that's occurred so far during the pandemic.

5:30

It's mind-boggling, to say the least, that the government hasn't seen fit to properly consult with a resource that is there at their disposal, a group of hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of people in this province who would be willing to come forward with their experiences that they felt as they witnessed the living conditions and the food conditions, the COVID-19 safety conditions or lack thereof during the pandemic and, as a result, had their family member pass away or their friend pass away. Believe me, Mr. Speaker – I'm certain I'm not wrong – when I say that there will be thousands of people willing to come forward, given the opportunity of a forum to properly discuss what they felt were discrepancies in care that should never have happened. People are not silent when it comes to the health or the life and death matters of family members, particularly those that are vulnerable and that are in care.

It's very clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government wilfully decided not to have such a conversation with individuals who've suffered the loss of a loved one during the pandemic in this province and in the long-term care facilities perhaps because it was politically dangerous to do such a thing, because there is ultimately responsibility for taking action or not in this province, and the government has chosen, very clearly, not to take action in this case.

I think that the amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is a deserved response to the government's unwillingness to face up to the tragedy that's occurred in long-term care. It gives them an opportunity to stop the clock and say: "Okay. Let's do more than just the amalgamation of the various pieces of legislation that govern the operation of long-term care facilities in this province. Let's find out what the deficiencies really were. Let's see if indeed we can prevent deaths in the future that are caused or had been caused by gaps in the system."

Glaringly in Alberta we've heard calls for a solution in terms of staffing that seemed to me would go a long way to alleviating some of the difficulties we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care, and that is having full-time staff, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as has been alluded to by others, full-time staff come with a requirement to pay benefits, so there's a higher cost to an employer to have full-time staff members covering all the shifts rather than part-time. I'm not saying that there's not a role for some part-time, but by and large the continuum of care that people receive on a daily

basis is much better if they're being looked after by full-time people rather than two or three part-time people during the day.

You can even imagine it yourself, Mr. Speaker. If you've been in a hospital situation or you've stayed in a place where you needed care, if you had two or three people coming on a daily basis looking after you over an eight-hour period rather than one person, you would soon understand the level of knowledge that those people have, the three part-timers, versus what the full-time person would have of your needs and your conditions and your general state of health and perhaps your likes or dislikes of food, your capabilities, your physical ability to walk, or any number of things that you would expect a caregiver to be aware of. All of that is much better if you are being cared for by people who are with you for longer periods of time.

These are the things that consultation would bring forward and allow us to see more deeply where the gaps are, and that's why I support the referral amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the referral? I see the Member for St. Albert is on her feet.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment, that it not be read a second time because there has not been sufficient consultation on the contents of the bill. I think it's very easy to demonstrate that.

Number one is that, you know, I don't know how many members – they like to heckle: did you read the report? Well, did you read the Meyers Norris Penny report about continuing care and the recommendations that were made? This was contracted by Alberta Health Services, and they were very clear about what needed to be done or what should be done. I would suggest, just based on the discrepancy from the report, the recommendations, what we heard from experts, from families, from individuals themselves, and what's in this legislation and what's missing in this legislation, that there has not been enough time to consult, let alone time to read the various reports.

In any event, about this piece of legislation and why I think it's important to take time and to speak to people and to hear their stories. Strangely enough, I'm going to tell you something that just happened – this just happened – and this relates to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and specifically relates to division 2, home and community care, and it starts on page 11. Obviously, it goes on for a little bit until page 12, but it talks about – for those of you that don't know, continuing care is a vast range of supports that provide supports for people that need them. One of those is self-managed care with home care. Home care has a number of different products; one of those is self-managed care.

People in this Chamber might be familiar with persons with developmental disabilities. PDD is what we refer to it as, and that is a financial program under Community and Social Services that actually pays for staff to allow them to live independently in the community or to be employed, people with developmental disabilities, obviously. So it doesn't cover people that do not have developmental disabilities. For example, if you have a spinal cord injury or something that just affects your physical being, you don't qualify for PDD supports. You would, in turn, have to go to home care, which is Health, self-managed care, if that's what you choose.

I just had a phone call about a young man, and I have permission to talk about him. He's 29 years old. As a youngster – I think he's got a bit of a following in the capital region; you may have heard his story years ago – I believe he contracted meningitis, if I'm not mistaken, and as a result, sadly, his arms and legs were amputated. Now, he currently lives with his mom, who is aging – and this is the story of many people with disabilities if they've lived the majority of their lives with parents

or other family members – and she is no longer able to care for him as she once did.

Now, thankfully, this young man and his mom do live in a home that's accessible, so they have stable, secure, accessible housing, which isn't the case for a lot of people, but I just want to put that on the record, that he does have that. But he asked for what he needs in terms of care, what his mother is providing right now. You talk about the unaccounted for cost of care in Alberta. This is a perfect example of that. She provides 24/7 care. As you can imagine, without arms or legs there's not much that you can do, Mr. Speaker. You require assistance with all aspects of daily living, not to mention that this young man is very talented in a number of areas and is just dying to work and support himself, but he's unable to do that without physical assistance due to the nature of his disability.

Anyway, after a very long process of applying for the supports through home care, which is a continuation of care, after applying for supports that he needed, he finally got – he went through all of the steps, the final appeal was heard, and then he waited for the decision letter. It actually arrived today, and the answer was: no, you cannot have supports 24/7 to hire staff that you need to help you. In one of the recommendations from that appeal panel – and, again, this is not the Appeals Secretariat with Community and Social Services. This is Health. One of the recommendations was: contact your MLA. That was literally the recommendation. There's a gap in the system. There's a huge gap in the system. Now, I'm not his MLA, but they did contact me. There's a huge gap in the system.

5:40

The reason I bring up this particular example, that just happened today, is because this illustrates very, very clearly that we have not, this government has not done everything it can to ensure that the continuation of care, the continuity of care, all of these things are included in this piece of legislation. So I bring that up.

Yesterday I talked a little bit about one of the other examples of concern that I had with this piece of legislation, and that was the wholesale repeal of very large and complex pieces of legislation that actually had been amended over many years, some of them to meet the needs of a number of different communities and a number of different specific needs. One of those that I really want to talk about again is the Resident and Family Councils Act. There's a wholesale repeal of that piece of legislation that I think was proclaimed in 2017 if I'm not mistaken.

Now, to the government's credit, they did actually mention it in their legislation, in their new legislation, which is on page 34. It talks about resident and family councils. It's quite lovely. It talks about, you know, if someone is a resident of continuing care, they do, if they request it, have the ability to form this council. And it goes on to talk about how relatives, friends, guardians are certainly welcome to participate in these councils. That's pretty much it.

On the surface it looks like, "Okay; that's okay; that seems fine; no problem there," until you look at what legislation was repealed and what was lost as a result of the repeal. Again, government will counter and say: well, you know, we'll just take care of that in regulations. Well, I think we've already established that there isn't a lot of trust with this government. I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, why they would repeal an entire piece of legislation and then just address it in a couple of sentences. In any event, what was lost because of the repeal?

I'd like to draw your attention to the Resident and Family Councils Act, 2017, under section 2, the establishment of a resident and family council. Now, keep in mind that all of this is gone. This used to be in place because this was a problem, and this was the enabling legislation that needed to be there to ensure that the work was done. You know, to the credit of operators of all different types of continuing care facilities and services, they're overwhelmed on

a daily basis with the work that they have to do. I know this. They have an extraordinary amount of work to do. However, I think that we have made the case – we made it in 2017, and we're making it again now – that if you follow, if operators follow this legislation and the spirit of the legislation as well, it can actually prevent a lot of problems. I know this first-hand because I've actually seen it.

Anyway, what is missing? This is what used to be in the legislation. If there's a "group composed of residents or persons of importance to residents or both . . . in place in the residential facility for any purpose described in . . . [the section], the group is deemed to be a resident . . ." No problem.

Where there is no family council in place in a residential facility, the facility operator – and this is key – must

- (a) post a notice in a conspicuous place in the . . . facility advising residents and persons of importance . . . the right to establish a . . . council,

To give examples.

- (b) ensure the notice remains posted until . . . a council is established.

This is very key, that this information, this education is there until – for people that are, let's say, in the more intense continuing care support, so more towards, like, what we would traditionally call, you know, a lodge or nursing home, family members and friends don't always visit every day, so maybe they may not see that posting until they go and visit. So it needs to be there longer. There needs to be more support to get this work done.

Here's another key one.

- (d) within 6 months after the coming into force of this Act and not less than . . . 6 months thereafter until a resident and family council is established, convene a meeting to inform residents . . . [and] families and persons of importance

which was already described

to residents of the right to establish . . .

So it's not just about posting the information and leaving it posted until a council is formed. It's about in-person education until that council is formed. These councils are that important. They are truly that important.

It goes on. Let me tell you that the purpose of establishing these is so important. I touched on a few things yesterday. This doesn't just apply to large facilities. I'll give you an example. I was invited to a resident council meeting at a facility in St. Albert. It's actually a blended facility, so there are more independent folks that live with people on another side that are more dependent and have more nursing care. It's called Chateau Mission Court. It was really wonderful to see this council because both groups – as you can imagine, the more independent seniors and the more dependent seniors had very different focuses, but this council laid out opportunities for everybody to have their ideas put forward.

Some of those were around menu, and it's prescribed in the old legislation that residents must have input into their menu. In an age when people are living on very tight incomes and particularly seniors are living on very, very limited income, they can't afford increasing costs that go on even at these facilities, and they do go up. They go up steadily. They go up by little bits, and people cannot afford it. Having these meetings is a venue for people to talk about the menu, nutrition. These might not seem like big things. These are very big things.

Recreation: another huge topic for facilities like this. Even for supportive independent living facilities, which we sometimes call group homes or things like that, where it can be as small as four people living together and sharing expenses, this legislation applies. It's so important to have these resident meetings because it forces them to talk about – you know, I've seen this in my time in my previous job, life, where you maybe had someone that was really

into heavy metal and the other three were not, and that could be a problem if there wasn't sort of a space to say: let's talk about house rules; let's talk about when the music has to be turned down.

Mr. Speaker, the value of this legislation that was repealed and then not replaced is that it forced the focus on the residents or the people that, at the end of the day, live there, not the staff, not the operators. They were just there in a support capacity, and they were truly there in a support capacity to take notes, to log the issues that were being discussed, and then to take them back to get information when those information requests were presented.

This legislation was very prescriptive, but it was really essential because, let me tell you, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure people in this Chamber know this – not all operators in continuing care are the same, and not all, sadly, provide the same level of care. That is just a fact. If you don't believe me, you can go through the Protection for Persons in Care Act, the reporting. There used to be online reports about the different allegations and investigations and then subsequent recommendations. It's there. You can see the types of problems that happen. With something like this, the value to prevent problems is huge.

The reason that I keep going on and on about this example is because this is just one of four pieces of legislation that were repealed in their entirety. I'm just checking that it was four; I do believe it was four. They were repealed in their entirety and basically, you know, a few sentences about: "Yeah, we're going to do this, and the rest will be in regulation. Trust us. We'll get it done properly."

Mr. Speaker, I'm worried. The state of continuing care in Alberta is not great for a number of reasons. I'm not saying that it crashed and burned in the last three years. There are some problems that have been around for a very long time. I understand the desire to make things simpler and to bring a number of pieces of complex legislation under one umbrella. I understand the intent may be good, but I am so worried that so many things will be lost as a result. In this day and age, when operators are so busy and so focused on so many different things, at the end of the day, it is going to be Albertans that suffer.

So it is for that reason that I actually support this referral, to just slow down and to do more consultation. You know, we were here yesterday debating. I haven't heard a lot of answers from the government. I hope we get those soon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. It's an important piece of legislation, but before I go into details, I want to, first, acknowledge the very hard work that health care professionals have been doing, yes, over the last two years, especially throughout COVID, but for a very long time. Many of those are working in professional settings that are very, very difficult and trying and burdensome on them not just in terms of the professional obligations but the emotional burden that they face as well, the personal cost that it is to them.

I also want to acknowledge all the volunteers, particularly, that work in this space. When I did something at the request of the minister for the palliative and end-of-life care review, which is, you know, tangential and associated with this health care space, I was blown away by the degree to which that space was people who are caring for others voluntarily. These are volunteers in hospice societies. These are, to be honest, more than anything else, family members, individual family members that spend their time and energy, when they have jobs and children and obligations in their

communities, still caring for their loved ones. For my money, there is no better care than family care, where possible, in your home. That's what I think is most important for us.

That is why I think this legislation, Bill 11, is so important. What it does is that it takes six different pieces of legislation, with six different regulations and three different sets of standards, and it puts them into one comprehensive piece for uniformity. What it also does is that it opens up the ability for transformational change in our health care, particularly continuing care, where we're able to invest more, as we've done in this last budget, in home care. Now, this is an important investment. I say that not as a legislator today; I say that as an individual. Sadly, it wasn't from COVID this last year, but my mother did pass away. She passed away while in home care, where my brother and my dad were caring for her. It was incredibly good to have the resources we did for my mother as she passed. It allowed her to be a mom to me, a wife to my father, a sister to her siblings. It allowed us to be able to enjoy those last moments with her before she passed.

This kind of legislation allows us to further invest in those most important parts of continuing care, where we can put the decision-making and the care, the loving care that's just not possible anywhere else, back into homes. That, I think, is just so properly ordered, so right. I want to thank the minister for the work he's done on this legislation to bring us here. I do think it is terribly important for us to recognize the volunteers and particularly those family members who are caring for others, throughout the pandemic, of course, but for all of Alberta's history. We have to find ways for our laws and legislation here to work with their lives in their homes.

That's why this sort of simplification, that members opposite have said is a noble intent, is not only a noble and important intent, but it's urgent. It is important. Delaying this would be a problem. It would be a problem because there are many, many families that need to have that transformative change, that need to be able to get better access to resources, that need to have the standardization of care, these different levels of standards, in one place, and these different acts compiled in one place so that the system is less confusing. It is terribly difficult now for people in health care and continuing care to manage it, never mind individual family members who find themselves, sadly, in these difficult spots trying to work with individuals in the system. So this is an important initiative, and it's timely and urgent.

Now, we heard from a number of different members on the other side and, obviously, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who brought forward this amendment RA1, that the purpose is to try and slow things down for the purpose of consultation. I think it's noble, of course, and a good intention, but I think it's important also that we do talk a little bit about the consultation that's brought us to this point right now.

Over the years many of the different stakeholders in this space have been asking for a very long time for the review mentioned but then also for this updated legislation. They have been asking for many, many years for us to look at this. The original legislation, that we're really amending, first came forth in 1985, and that 1985 legislation is something that is outdated, Mr. Speaker, and something where we are not capturing all the different spaces we ought to be when it comes to this legislation, when it comes to these regulations.

I think it's important to understand the sense of how long the people who work in this space and the organizations have been waiting for us to get here. I am reluctant to say that we ought to be slowing things down. I think we should be prudently moving forward.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that after the consultation with a number of different stakeholder groups from across the province, we've had 33 written formal submissions, relatively lengthy submissions, on where we should be going when it comes to

continuing care. Those organizations submitted them, and that was a part that deeply informed the bringing about of this legislation to where we are today in second reading.

I think it's also important to understand that advice and recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review saw over 7,000 Albertans, including family members, residents, caregivers, operators, community organizations, and many of those groups I mentioned at the start were a part of those 7,000 individuals. Now, that wasn't exclusive to anyone who was in continuing care for any particular reason, whether it be someone there because of old age or struggling with dementia, early-onset Alzheimer's, COVID, or any of that. Every single Albertan had that opportunity, and it's right that every single Albertan should. I'm very lucky that, in the course of when my mother passed away, we were able to have the supports we needed. But were we not, this avenue would have been open to us in terms of consultation.

It's right, Mr. Speaker, to open it up to all Albertans. Any time an Albertan's life is taken away, it is a sad moment. It's very difficult for anyone to deal with, and I think we all have important stories to share. I want to recognize all of them. That sort of input should continue on through this Legislature, with us as MLAs reaching out to our constituents and the constituents feeding those stories in as we come in to debate the legislation, as we come to Committee of the Whole and put forward amendments. I'm sure members opposite will put forward thoughtful ones in the debate to come. I think it is important that we open it up to all Albertans, because not one life lost is any less tragic to any family because of how that happened.

I also think, Mr. Speaker, that it's important we recognize that if we were to continue going on and referring this to committee or, with this reasoned amendment, slowing this down for another round beyond the year already that we spent talking about this with the public, it would delay the ability for us to implement a lot of this legislation, which is absolutely fundamental to moving forward

with what I believe is transformative in our health care and continuing care. We owe it to our constituents. We owe it to those who work in this space, with all the sacrifices they've made, to give them a good piece of legislation. Of course we owe them that. I believe that's what we have here. There will be, of course, lots of work to be done.

As everyone in this Chamber knows, this is enabling legislation. A lot of those same standards we had before will be kept or increased when we come to this regulation, but the regulation is the right place for those details to be found, Mr. Speaker. It's where we have the ability to work very closely with different communities to inform ourselves as a government on what those regulations should look like, and of course we'll have the ability, as we see fit, as time comes, as things need to be updated, to change that regulation through orders in council.

This is an important point. From 1985 is a long time to go in a space that has changed dramatically in terms of standards of practice, best practices, levels of care, technology. I mean, in 1985 the fax was a very, very useful thing. Things have changed. To give you an illustration of where we're at now in technology and communications, you can imagine how much things have changed when it comes to continuing care as well.

I think it is incredibly important, Mr. Speaker, that we have a certain amount of agility in how we can move forward as a province so that we can continue to serve very well the seniors in this province, those who worked so hard to build the province, to give us the advantages we have today. We owe it to them, because of the sacrifices they've made, to get this right.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; 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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