



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 3, 2022

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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

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

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

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

Executive Council

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

Parliamentary Secretaries

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

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some very special guests. They are friends of mine and the parents of Char Bergen. Char works in the office of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I hope that you will join me in welcoming Pat and Nick Barnay to the Assembly. During COVID last year they reached several very important milestones, including their 90th and 80th birthdays as well as their 60th wedding anniversary. Earlier today I was speaking with Mr. Barnay, who is a retired barber, and he was telling me that on his very busiest day of being a barber, he actually did 101 haircuts. It looks like some members over here could use the services of the member. Last but not least, it's actually his 91st birthday today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Also, hon. members, joining us in the gallery today are Heather Prendergast and Blair Nielsen of Leading Influence. They are guests of the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Also, guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville: Babs Ajayi and Jummy Ajayi. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Women's Health Care and Reproductive Rights

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday a draft opinion of the United States Supreme Court to overturn Roe versus Wade, the decision which legalized abortion across the United States, was released. This news has shocked many, and it has brought up deep concerns for women about the threats to their health. Hearing this made me think about advancements in women's health that we made while in government. I am proud to have been Alberta's first NDP Health minister. That legacy includes expanding women's health care. This includes expanding midwifery services, public coverage of Mifegymiso, the abortion pill, and creating a bubble zone around women's health clinics so that the staff who work there and the patients accessing the health care in those buildings could do so without harassment, intimidation, and violent images being forced upon them.

This issue hits close to home for many Alberta women. It's why the NDP wanted to create safe spaces. Four years ago UCP members ran from this Chamber 13 times when our NDP government brought forward that bill to create bubble zones to stop the harassment. What was the UCP scared of? Why did every member of their caucus turn tail and run? Well, members across the aisle have voted against women's health care, against women's choice, and have been endorsed by groups who believe in restricting access to abortions. Abortion is health care, and we need a government that defends health care, all health care.

Today our leader gave Albertans our guarantee that an NDP government will protect reproductive rights here in Alberta and across the country. The Premier must reaffirm Alberta's commitment to a woman's fundamental right to choose, guaranteeing that he will do nothing further to restrict access to reproductive health services, and join us in condemning this attack against women's health.

Women across North America, including women here in Alberta, need to know that their health is protected, that it matters, and that it will get better. Alberta women can't trust this UCP to do that, but they can trust the NDP because we know that women's health is public health. An attack on women's rights is an attack on us all.

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

Stanley Cup Playoffs

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The good old hockey game is the best game you can name. The NHL playoffs have begun, and for the first time in a long time both of Alberta's teams, the Calgary Flames and the Edmonton Oilers, have a very good chance to hoist Lord Stanley's Cup.

This isn't just great news for hockey fans; it's great news for Alberta's economy. Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry was hit hard during the pandemic, but now our hotels, bars, and restaurants are bursting at the seams with hockey fans. Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry is vital, contributing approximately \$8.2 billion per year to our economy. Sixty-nine thousand jobs and 20,000 businesses are impacted by this. Our government is working to reduce red tape for businesses, and we are working with municipalities to establish entertainment districts where people can gather responsibly and enjoy events like the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Tonight I will join thousands of Albertans in rooting for the Calgary Flames, the number one team in the Pacific division, with a whopping 111 points. But Flames fans aren't celebrating yet. We know that there's a lot of hard work to do to recapture the cup and bring it home to Calgary. From the Red Mile to Whyte Avenue, Flames fans will pack the bars and restaurants to cheer on Johnny Hockey, Matthew Tkachuk, Jacob Markstrom, and more.

There's nothing like playoff hockey, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta is hockey country. In fact, many of the players in the Stanley Cup playoffs hail from our province such as Lightning's Brayden Point, a two-time Stanley Cup champion; the Edmonton Oilers' Brett Kulack; and the Bruins' Jake DeBrusk, just to name a few. From the frozen ponds to junior rinks to the NHL arenas, hockey is alive and well in Alberta.

I want to wish the Flames and the Oilers good luck, and I look forward to the battle of Alberta in round 2.

The Speaker: I'm just wondering where the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia will be this evening, whether he'll be cheering for the Flames or not.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Forest Industries

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was raised in a family that depended on Alberta forests to help us earn a living and put food on the table. In my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake forestry is one of the leading employment areas.

Every year during this first week of May we celebrate Alberta Forest Week. The week is a chance for people across the province to celebrate everything our forests and forest industry do for us. Alberta forests cover about 87 million acres, an area larger than Japan. Alberta forests give us so much, from recreational areas and environmental habitats to building materials and good-paying jobs.

As our province's third-largest resource sector and the fourth-largest of its kind in Canada, forestry directly supports 722 small businesses and 51 medium to large businesses while providing good jobs for more than 18,000 Albertans. There are about 17 municipalities across Alberta that derive between 10 and 27 per cent of their employment income from forestry. Thanks to work like the forest jobs action plan we're

home to the country's most competitive forest sector, and this industry will be an important contributor to Alberta's economic recovery.

This week thousands of grade 1 students across Alberta will be planting seedlings of white spruce and lodgepole pine, Alberta's provincial tree. As their seedlings grow into strong, sturdy trees, I look forward to seeing our forest sector continue to be a strong and sustainable contributor to Alberta's economy and culture.

Albertans can be proud of the many technologically advanced pulp mills, sawmills, oriented strandboard plants, and laminated veneer mills in operation across Alberta today along with advancements in cogen and biofuels. We also have a stringent, global-leading reforestation program, ensuring the viability of our forests for many generations to come.

I would like to give a shout-out to all the forestry businesses and their workers for doing an amazing job in preserving the longevity of this amazing resource.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It would probably be inappropriate of me to point out the fact that the Minister of Health's phone rang during the member's statement, but I'm sure he'll be making a donation to the hon. member's charity of choice.

Government Record

Ms Goehring: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was bound to happen eventually, but this government's inherent elitism and selfishness finally got the best of them. Albertans are struggling, dealing with the cost-of-living crisis created by the UCP, and when asked about it, the Finance minister had the audacity to blame them. "Get a better job," says the Finance minister, who spent his summer sipping whisky on the sky palace with the Premier. "Get a better job," lectured the Finance minister, who is personally hiking Albertans' income tax by a billion dollars using a sneaky trick the Premier once opposed. The Finance minister, whose record is slashing benefits for seniors and disabled Albertans, hiking insurance costs, hiking utility rates, hiking income taxes, making life unaffordable for students, has zero credibility to tell people to get a better job when their lives could be improved simply with a competent Finance minister.

1:40

But this goes to the heart of this UCP government. The UCP since day one of taking office has taken from Albertans to reward themselves. They cut the minimum wage of young Albertans but then used taxpayer dollars for a private jet ride for their friends. When asked about it, the Premier said that he planned to do it again.

They cut the supports that disabled Albertans use to survive but then defended the Premier's friend who spent tens of thousands of dollars travelling to London's fanciest hotels. They refused to fund schools, leaving nearly 2,000 students in Edmonton without support, and then kicked back with Hawaiian vacations that the rest of Albertans were told to cancel.

This government could charitably be described as out of touch, but in reality it's much worse. This government is so entitled that it would make the Redford-era PCs blush. Albertans deserve better than a government that lives large while telling working families to do more with less. After the next election they'll have a chance to vote for a government that values them.

Thank you.

Legislature Building and Government

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, back in my office in Taber I have three pictures proudly displayed on the wall. These pictures show the purposeful and meticulous construction of Alberta's first Legislature

Building. I've been coming to work here for seven years, and I have to admit that I have sometimes lost my appreciation of the beauty and grandeur that surround us.

In August 1907, just two years after becoming a fledgling province, hard-working Albertans put their shoulder to the wheel and got to work. Within just four years, in 1911, lawmakers were able to hold their first session as the paint dried on the newly constructed walls. Pioneers of the past knew full well that the foundation, in fact all parts of the Legislature, needed to be built with the best material and crafted with the greatest of care. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have this great edifice today because of that purposeful work of our forefathers. Renewal of older buildings is a given as it faces the harsh winters and summer storms of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, building a province, a great province, follows similar principles. Our province continues to be built with great care and great vision. For the past three years our government has purposefully renewed the foundation of our province. That made it the greatest place to raise a family, start a business, or get a well-paying job. That foundation is called the Alberta advantage.

Achieving prosperity is not a fluke. Instead, it is achieved through purposeful, hard work. In the past three years our government has reduced the corporate tax rate by one-third, reduced red tape by one-quarter, and flattened the curve on government spending, which has allowed us to table the first balanced budget in many years. People from all over the world are coming here again to benefit from the Alberta advantage because, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has its swagger back.

AISH and Income Support Shelter Benefit

Ms Renaud: Politics are personal, and decisions made by government impact people's lives. The UCP made cuts to AISH and income support. Cutting by deindexing wasn't enough for the UCP, so they systematically cut income support supplementals through a variety of policy changes.

Let me tell you a couple of true stories. The first one. We'll call him John. John has many issues, both physical and mental. As a result, he is unable to support himself. He receives income support to survive, and that means that as a single person he receives just over \$900 a month. A person can't live on that. He used to receive an additional shelter allowance of \$300, and that small amount was often the difference between being homeless or not.

In January 2022 John was notified that he lost that \$300, so he appealed. At that point he had a three-month reduction in his income. Now, if he's lucky, he can hang on for three months without getting evicted, and if successful, he'll receive over \$900 for those three months. The problem is that in appeal he found out he's only eligible to receive an additional three months of shelter benefits. Once again he's at risk of acute homelessness, and the cycle begins. Here's the kicker: he has to maintain his residence throughout.

Another one. Let's call him Steven. Steven has had a difficult, painful life and now relies on income support to live. He's trying to make changes. He lives at a sober living facility, and he's trying to stay there and heal, but CSS is telling him they don't do additional shelter benefits anymore. The UCP have systematically attacked low-income and disabled Albertans by cutting poverty-level benefits, introducing ableist policies while boasting that AISH and income support are the most generous in Canada. That is not true.

I urge this government again to reindex benefits and stop this speeding train of ableist policies that are inflicting harm all over this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is next.

Energy Industry Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year the federal government finally did something I agree with. I know. Shocking, right? They banned the import of Russian conflict oil. That was the right thing to do. That being said, I was surprised to see the federal Liberals ban Russian conflict oil. Buying and using foreign conflict oil from corrupt and oppressive countries is straight out of the Liberal playbook.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela provide Canada with billions of dollars' worth of conflict oil while everyday Albertans are shoved into the corner and told that our oil is dirty. What a complete slap in the face, Mr. Speaker. It has been proven that Alberta oil development follows the strictest environmental guidelines. Furthermore, Alberta and its energy sector engage in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous communities to ensure minimal disturbance to their lands, and their communities can prosper from the wealth gained from selling clean Alberta oil.

Do you think that Saudi Arabia, a country that does not respect human rights, follows strict environmental guidelines for their oil development? Do you think that authoritarian Venezuela considers the rights of Indigenous people when extracting oil? The answer is no, Mr. Speaker. The double standard is disrespectful to what this province has done for this nation. I, like so many other Albertans, am angry. Now that Russia is beginning to shut off energy flow to Europe, Alberta must be allowed to step up to the plate to ensure that clean, ethical oil is allowed market access.

Alberta's destiny, Mr. Speaker, is to be the arsenal of energy security globally this century. Unfortunately, I am afraid that the Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance with their delusional green, left agenda won't see or support this vision. Here's to hoping that I'm wrong.

Agriculture and Agricultural Land Ownership

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, agriculture is an important part of Alberta. It is a key industry that contributes significantly to the economy of our province. But beyond the economy, Alberta's agricultural industry is reflective of a way of life. We speak of industry as a concept, identifying it through measurements, including how much product it yields and how much it contributes to the economy, but often we overlook the people who are at the centre of this production.

For the men and women who choose the agriculture industry, they are choosing a way of life. They are choosing to be farmers and ranchers, caretakers of crops and livestock. They are choosing to get up before sunrise and work late past the sunset. Mr. Speaker, as a farmer I can attest that these individuals do not have a typical 9 to 5 job. They do not have the luxury of saving work for another day or keeping their livestock and crops uncared for as they are responsible and subject to the life cycle of something beyond themselves.

It is farmers that understand first-hand the necessary conditions to ensure food security for our nation. As stewards of over 31 per cent of our nation's total farmland, Alberta farmers and ranchers are entrusted to protect this arable land. Mr. Speaker, it is the shared realities of the demands of caring for crops and livestock as well as the responsibility to the population to ensure food security and preservation of our agricultural land that brings people together and forms rural communities and culture. It is the Alberta rural community and culture Bill 206 seeks to protect.

Ownership of agricultural land by individuals is paramount in keeping our rural communities strong. For farmers and ranchers, ownership of agricultural land is more than an investment opportunity. For over 100 years families have come and settled in Alberta, put down roots, helped to further develop rural Alberta, and

are the foundation and strength of our rural Alberta communities. Mr. Speaker, by defending the ownership of agricultural land by individuals, we will keep our rural communities and culture strong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many are concerned we are sleepwalking towards disaster. Canada is acting like a hostile, \$1 trillion plus fiscal train wreck, attacking Alberta, threatening to drag us down with it. Yet in spite of Ottawa, Alberta still succeeds. But they are a growing danger. There is a gathering storm. We need to protect ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, if Alberta was not part of Canada and was invited to join this rigged partnership under the current terms, would we join? No. Does loyalty compel us to remain host in a parasitic relationship? No. Alberta is not compelled to suffer constant harassment and attack. But what about national unity? For the sake of unity, are we forced to allow ourselves to suffer attacks from politicians seeking power? No. Albertans do not need to unite with political corruption. Unity without integrity is fake.

1:50

Trust is earned as one's actions are consistent with one's words. There is too much overpromising and underdelivering. The concept of a fair deal needs to be more than a political slogan. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the potential to be the most free and prosperous nation on Earth. What is holding us back? If one is not fair, how does one insist on fairness? If one is not accountable, then how does one insist on accountability? Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity. We must be vigilant to keep it that way.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Economic Recovery

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in the last election the UCP made big promises about jobs and economic growth, but even before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, and 50,000 full-time jobs were lost. Then the pandemic hit, and Alberta had the worst performing economy in Canada. Desperate for some kind of spin, the Premier then promised us that we would lead the country in 2021, only for us to discover yesterday that we actually finished sixth, ninth if you include the territories. Can the Premier explain how it is that he got it so wrong?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the NDP that got it so wrong. When they raised income taxes on Albertans, when they raised taxes on Alberta employers, when they imposed the job-killing carbon tax, when they attacked our energy industry, when they asked Justin Trudeau to cancel Northern Gateway, when they cheered on the death of Energy East, when they opposed Keystone XL, tens of billions of dollars of investment fled Alberta. We ended up with a jobs crisis, an \$8 billion structural deficit. This government has turned that around, leading this year Canada in economic growth, a balanced budget, and tens of billions of dollars of job-creating investment.

Ms Notley: He promised that we'd be first; we came in sixth.

Now, yesterday the Premier also claimed that Alberta's tech sector was the fastest growing in North America. Let's check that:

venture capital investment in Ontario, \$7.9 billion, up 295 per cent; B.C., \$2.9 billion, up 224 per cent; Quebec, \$2.8 billion, up 180 per cent; but Alberta, \$500 million, up just 23 per cent. The Premier's definition of "fastest" appears to be much slower than *Merriam-Webster's*. Why is that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in the last three years the number of tech companies in Alberta has more than doubled. The amount of venture capital has tripled. And according to LinkedIn, in a study that they did, Alberta has the fastest growing employment in the tech sector, not in Canada but in all of North America, thanks to policies like the innovation employment grant, part of Alberta's recovery plan. You know what that is? It's a long-term plan to build, to diversify, and to create new jobs, and it's working.

Ms Notley: Even when we give him the facts, he denies them, you know?

It's important because when it comes to our economy, Albertans actually deserve the facts, Mr. Speaker. You can't make things better if you don't admit how they are right now. We are not leading Canada in recovery; we're sixth. Real GDP is slower than most other provinces, and we are billions shy on tech investment. But the Premier shamelessly throws himself victory parties just to prop up his leadership. Why won't this Premier put his head down, pause the party, tell the truth, and start doing the work?

Mr. Kenney: Well, here's the truth, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition to please continue to focus on this government's economic performance for the next 13 months because Albertans will render judgment on the economic catastrophe of her job-killing, tax-hiking, overregulating, fiscally irresponsible policies. They drove us into a deep jobs crisis. People were leaving Alberta. They're now coming to Alberta. Investment was fleeing. It's now coming to Alberta. They were raising taxes. This government is cutting taxes. Our economy shrank under the NDP. Finally, we've caught up to where they were when they took office.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Women's Reproductive Rights

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans woke up today deeply concerned over the news that the U.S. Supreme Court may overturn *Roe versus Wade*. I'm one of those people, as are all of my colleagues. The landmark decision to legalize abortion was a victory for all women. Now it's under threat. Our bodies, our rights, our choice must be protected. I am hoping that the Premier can stand today and reaffirm to those concerned Albertans our commitment to a woman's right to choose. Will he join me in condemning this attack on reproductive rights in North America?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is asking about a potential decision in a foreign court in another country. That is for the American legal and political system. There has been no change in policy with respect to that procedure in Alberta, and none has been proposed.

Ms Notley: For the many Albertans who are very worried, that answer did not make them feel any better.

Now, as Premier I was proud to introduce legislation to better prevent the harassment of women seeking this health procedure. We created a safer environment for both staff and patients, women making a very difficult choice, often in very difficult circumstances, but we know that we need to do more. Access is still restricted to

the major cities, and we still don't have a complete picture of available resources or other barriers at play. Will the Premier agree today to debate our motion so members can discuss these important issues today and reaffirm their commitment to human rights?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, the member wants to debate a potential decision of a court in a foreign country on a matter that is under the jurisdiction of Canada's federal Parliament. If you want to seek a Canadian application of this issue, it's under the federal Parliament. The member is trying to create controversy where there is none in Alberta. There is no precedent in this place for us to get involved in a running commentary on decisions of foreign courts.

Ms Notley: Well, this Premier claimed he was the economic puppet master of the U.S. last week. That was the most hypocritical answer I've ever heard.

You can understand why Albertans are nervous about this government's intentions when you google their record on these matters. Setting that aside, this draft decision could fundamentally undermine the equality rights of millions of women and gender-diverse people. At times like these, leaders must stand up and declare their clear support for the right to choose and for reproductive health rights. That means reassuring Albertans. Can the Premier commit that the UCP will never act to reduce access to abortion in this province? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand the preamble. Of course, the government of Alberta has a responsibility to engage foreign trading partners on economic issues that affect jobs in Alberta. With respect to the potential decision of a foreign court on a matter that would be under federal jurisdiction, individuals can have individual views about that, but what the leader is trying to do is to invent a political controversy that does not and has not existed in Alberta politics.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Women's Reproductive Health Care and Bill 17

Member Irwin: With the threat to reproductive rights across the border, we have an opportunity in this House to say loudly and clearly where we stand as legislators. Bill 17 gives Albertans time off to grieve or process pregnancy loss – very important – but missing from it is an explicit mention of the word "abortion." We can make amendments to be explicit about where we stand, leaving no room for interpretation and better protecting Albertans from discrimination in the workplace. Will the Premier support this amendment to Bill 17, and if so, will the government introduce it?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be an amendment to Bill 17.

Member Irwin: It's clear that Albertans cannot trust this UCP government when it comes to matters impacting women and gender-diverse folks and their health care. For instance, the Ernst & Young report, that the minister holds up as the blueprint for the UCP's agenda of cuts to health care, includes delisting both tubal ligations and breast reductions. They call these procedures elective when, in fact, they are critical. To the Premier: why is a vasectomy considered essential, but getting tubes tied is considered elective? Aren't both of them critical health procedures?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

2:00

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the statement made that we're delisting services, that is simply not the case. We are investing in our health care system. We are spending \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that, you know, \$1.8 billion over three years. We're investing in capacity across our entire system, EMS, within our acute-care system. Also, we're investing in more spaces in our continuing care. We're focused on delivering health services for Alberta, and that's exactly what we'll do.

Member Irwin: Fascinating that this minister talks about increasing capacity and expanding services for rural communities when there are eight Alberta communities right now where obstetric care has been seriously impacted, including Whitecourt, Rimbey, Lac La Biche, to name a few. That's a serious problem stemming from the UCP's mismanagement of the pandemic and their ongoing fight with doctors. Simple question to the Premier: does he know how much further someone from Rocky Mountain House now has to drive in order to give birth, and if he doesn't, should he maybe go and find out and fix it?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken in this House many times in regard to the challenges in rural Alberta that we're facing in regard to health care professionals. We've spoken in regard to obstetrics. It's incredibly important. We are addressing those. We are investing in building health care capacity across our entire province, and particularly we're investing \$90 million last year, another \$90 million this year to be able to get more doctors to be able to offer these services. Unfortunately, certain services in obstetrics have been shut down in a few areas for a few days, but we are actually getting more services there. We're hiring more individuals, and we're going to deliver for Albertans.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, yesterday 34 members of the UCP voted to kill Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, legislation to establish a framework for the collection of race-based data to address inequities in provincial programs and services. Now, Bill 204 was introduced on March 24, but it was only yesterday, six weeks later, that government members stated that they're working on their own bill to get this done. Yet currently there's nothing publicly available about that, not even a footnote on the Anti-Racism Advisory Council web page or any information about consultations. Can the Premier please tell this Assembly where Albertans can find information on these consultations and how racialized communities and the public can participate before decisions are made?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council concluded their report, sent it to government. Out of 48 recommendations about 22 have so far been implemented. That's because the rest of that particular report also includes race-based data collection. That whole process is working through a cabinet committee, and I look forward to coming back to this Assembly at a future date.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 was voted down as similar legislation was introduced in B.C., a bill rooted in a consultation process started over a year ago that requires robust consultation with Indigenous and other racialized communities before establishing data standards, just like Bill 204. Now, to date this government has made no public mention of holding consultations on this issue, not in the Assembly or at a news conference or even on social media, not until

Bill 204 was introduced. If indeed the government has already begun this work, can the Premier please provide some details. How many consultations have taken place? How many more are planned? How can members of racialized communities take part?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, this is what is so disappointing about the members opposite. They had office for four years. They lifted no finger on any of these issues that they're talking about. This government has done so much to ensure fairness, respect, and equity for minority cultural communities, including our First Nations people. From banning carding to instituting the hate crimes co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice, to including the First Nations police in the Police Act, we are doing much when so much work still needs to be done.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, these are simple questions and they are not partisan, because addressing racism is not a partisan issue. In fact, yesterday multiple members of this government stood, stated that their caucus decision was not motivated by partisanship, and spoke of a need to work together collaboratively to ensure all communities were heard and the legislation made as strong and effective as possible. My colleagues and I agree. Let's come together to address this. Will the Premier today commit to a consultation process on the collection of race-based data that includes all parties of this Assembly in hearing from communities and making decisions, and when can we expect such a process to be announced?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. We would consult, and we are consulting. I am proud of the consultation that the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism continues to do in all of our communities in every region of this province, and I look forward to all that particular work so that we can come together to put forward a bill that actually speaks to the needs of the community, not a partisan tone.

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

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We keep hearing about growth in Alberta's tech sector, and rightfully so. Earlier this year Neo Financial and EY in Calgary and HCL Technologies in Edmonton announced plans to grow in Alberta. Last week Rogers and Shaw announced that their think lab was coming to Calgary. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: how do these recent announcements fit into the larger tech ecosystem in Calgary and Alberta-wide and our work to diversify our economy?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago we set out to put Alberta on the map, and the private sector, our tech sector, has delivered. Recently LinkedIn forecasted that Calgary had the highest growth in labour in the tech sector. That is a true testament to the innovators here in our province. Not only is it the local ecosystem; it's the national attention that Alberta is garnering. We have Rogers, that just announced 500 new tech jobs in the city of Calgary, RBC's innovation hub with over 300 jobs. The tech sector in Alberta is truly diversifying our economy, and it's an amazing story.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of diversifying our economy and the role that tech and innovation are

playing in that diversification and given that Calgary especially is building a strong reputation as a hub for innovators and entrepreneurs, to the same minister: what are we doing to help ensure that investors and job creators know that our province is a strong place for tech companies to grow?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our government has recognized that one of the only issues that can hold back growth in Alberta is making sure we have the right talent here and the right skill sets here in Alberta. That's why we've invested over \$600 million in our most recent budget, to make sure that we can help Albertans get the right skill sets, attract the right talent into Alberta to make sure that we can grow Alberta's economy. And, yes, for everybody in this House, BMO is still forecasting Alberta to lead the country in growth this year and next year. Alberta has an amazing economic story happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hear, hear to the minister. Given that people looking for tech jobs want to have options when it comes to the companies that they work for and given that we have seen impressive growth in the tech sector through venture capital investment and, of course, increased tech talent, to the same minister: investors, job seekers, and entrepreneurs all want to know whether or not the recent growth in the tech industry has been a fluke, or whether you believe that it will continue.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've talked about diversification in this province for decades, and arguably over the last three years more has been done to diversify Alberta's economy than at any time in recent memory, and those job opportunities are real. Calgary and Edmonton: high-paying jobs, affordable living, recognized as major cities as the most affordable in all of Canada, top 10 in the world. But those job opportunities aren't just in the major cities; we're also seeing them in our mid-sized centres, rural communities. Alberta's economy is booming. We've got our swagger back in Alberta.

Provincial Park Administration and Bill 21

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, last week this government introduced Bill 21, and in that bill there were some changes to the Provincial Parks Act and Public Lands Act. The changes give the minister broad powers without specific indications on intent, which the minister claims already exist, and the minister also claims that it's simply being changed so that park partners are able to put up signs or allow dogs off leash, but these changes could create a set of legal puzzles that could make park protections worse and a nightmare to detangle and understand. Will the minister promise in this House today that these changes won't inhibit protections and allow industry in our parks?

Mr. Jason Nixon: I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is still struggling to read legislation. That's not what the legislation does. He should take some time to read it.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that that was a simple question that the minister refused to answer and given that this wouldn't be the first time that this government has tried to sneak changes to our natural areas by Albertans, with the removal of a decades-old coal policy on the Friday of a long weekend, as one example, and given that another example, of course, included their plan to sell off and close down parks and given that this government claims they make these moves in the interest of removing red tape when this bill directly allows the creation of messy regionalized pseudo-regulations, will

the minister explain to Albertans why he is trying to hide the truth from them once again on how he manages our natural spaces?

2:10

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP and, in particular, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would say that legislation to make it easier for park rangers to put up signs to keep people safe inside parks is somehow some great conspiracy. That's an important piece of legislation. It's going to allow individual managers within our 458 parks to be able to adjust signs, keep people safe, and make some local decisions inside their parks. I know the member doesn't leave Edmonton very much, but the fact is that our parks are very, very different across the province, and local decision-makers are the best to make the decisions for parks.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this bill would give the ability for regulations to be amended without involvement from the minister, which seems odd to me that the minister would want to allow a free-for-all in our park protection systems, and given that this could be due to the minister's affinity for allowing OHVs in more parks, as this government has cleared the way for the use of exemption of popular ATV areas from the absurd \$90 Kananaskis fee, is the minister intending to use the changes in this bill as a runway to allow more destructive ATV use in areas of Alberta where they aren't presently allowed?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there it is right there. In point of fact, the NDP at the end of the day just can't help moving forward constantly with their desire to shut Alberta's public spaces to Albertans. At the end of the day that is their primary goal. It always comes out, and even with a simple piece of legislation that helps local park managers to be able to put up signs without having to call into Edmonton and have regulatory and cabinet decisions about safety signs and those types of things, they would be against that out of their desperation to ban Albertans from the backyard.

Workplace Fatalities

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration has reported the occupational disease fatalities, the workplace incident fatalities, and the workplace incident fatalities investigated. These reports, which summarize information provided by the Workers' Compensation Board, are different from the investigation reports, and they're published on the Alberta government website and the open government portal, except that no reports have been published since the UCP took office. A simple question to the minister: where are these reports for the past three years?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. My department, the Department of Labour and Immigration, conducts investigations in respect to workplace incidents and makes those publications public. I am happy to look into the specific concern that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods might have on this particular issue, but as far as I can tell, the department routinely publishes all of those incidents and data across the province.

Ms Gray: Given that last week Albertans paused to remember the lives lost in workplace incidents and illness on National Day of Mourning and given that in 2021 178 Albertans were killed because of their work, including 31 due to COVID-19, and given that this is the highest year for workplace fatalities in Alberta since 2013, to the minister. I appreciate you looking into this. Fatality investigation

reports have been published, but the summary reports have not been published in the past three years. I would certainly like his insight as to why they have not been published.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is always tragic to see the loss or the death of fellow citizens in the workplace, and that is why the focus of this government from day one has been to ensure that our various workplaces are safe for Albertans so that they can go to work and come back to their families in peace and quiet. I am looking forward to continuing the good work that my predecessors have done to ensure that Alberta's workplaces are safe for all Albertans.

Ms Gray: Given that workplace fatalities are preventable and given that this UCP government has made substantial amendments to labour and workplace safety regulations that do not improve worker safety and given that the 2021 report on workplace fatalities and injuries from the University of Regina found that Alberta has one of the highest rates of workplace fatalities in Canada, to the minister: what actions is this government going to take to prevent the deaths of workers in Alberta? Be specific, because this is a matter of life and death.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, this province has a world-renowned program called the certificate of recognition, by which the government works with employers and occupational health and safety partners to make sure that modern practices around safety are there in the workplace. I am proud of the work that the department has done with health and safety partners, especially when it comes to the certificate of recognition.

Alberta Death Rate and Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Loewen: The data shows that Alberta experienced higher than average mortality in 2021. Sadly, approximately 3,600 people, more than the expected average, passed away. Of that total, approximately 2,100 of those were attributed to COVID. Therefore, we have at least 1,500 that are not yet explained. We saw rates of young and middle-aged people dying that far exceeded normal rates. Albertans are extremely concerned that this Premier has presided over such a rise in mortality. Can the minister explain the cause of these 1,500 non-COVID deaths?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. My heart goes out to anyone who's lost a loved one. It's been a very challenging time over the last two years. As the hon. member mentioned, the number of deaths attributed to COVID: this is something that we're not only dealing with as a province but we're dealing with as an entire country, as an entire world. We continue to focus on providing protections to Albertans through vaccines, through adding capacity into our health care system to be able to provide Albertans with the health care that they need, and also through education.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this Premier has failed on the mental health and addictions file, with substance abuse death rates twice as high as before restrictions, and given that thousands of Albertans, primarily young people and working-age males, have died during the past two years, with the last 20 months having been the deadliest for substance abuse, and given that Albertans are very aware of COVID statistics but most remain wilfully unaware of rising addiction and mental health mortality numbers, how exactly can the Premier be in power for three years, claim that 90 per cent of the

platform commitments have been upheld but every failing is still someone else's fault?

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, COVID-19, amongst other variables, has had a huge impact on mental health and addiction throughout Alberta and not just Alberta but throughout Canada and, in fact, North America. That's why we are committed to the 8,000 spaces that we've created to help people with addiction and mental health issues. We're committed to five world-class therapeutic communities. We're committed to the virtual opioid dependency program, an award-winning program that provides same-day treatment to anybody who wants evidence-based medication.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that AHS measures show that as the Premier was celebrating the best summer ever, the health care system was performing worse than ever and given that even with COVID hospitalizations at a seasonal low last summer, wait times across the board were worse than when this government started for everything from emergency departments to most benchmark surgeries and children's mental health access and given that billions more were spent on health care with no discernible result or increase in capacity, at what point will the Premier stop blaming COVID for his own failures to manage and actually improve the health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As said many times in the Chamber, we are investing record levels into our health care system, and we're actually getting some results. I was pleased a couple of weeks ago to announce the chartered surgical facility contracts in ophthalmology, cataract surgeries. We've made tremendous progress over the last year. By using CSFs during the worst part of COVID, we were able to catch up on surgeries. We dropped median wait times from 18 weeks to 10 weeks. That's still too long, and we still need to get them down, but we're continuing to work on it. We took the number of surgeries from roughly 19,000 to 9,000. That's just the beginning, and we're going to get caught up on surgeries.

Addiction Harm Reduction Strategies

Ms Sigurdson: In March researchers at the University of Calgary published their findings on the economic impact of supervised consumption services in Calgary. Over the two years they studied, they found that Safeworks saved the Alberta health system \$2.3 million by intervening in overdoses without the use of an ambulance or a trip to an emergency room more than 700 times. That's 700 times when an ambulance or an ER bed was available for another Albertan. Did the associate minister read this report, and does he conclude that we must urgently expand supervised consumption services in our province?

Mr. Ellis: You know, I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is aware that in the east side of Vancouver in a three-block radius there are 15 to 20 supervised consumption sites, and it has not reduced at all any of the deaths that are occurring, any of the issues that they have in the east side of Vancouver. We are committed to helping people. Supervised consumption sites are part of our continuum of care, and we do support them. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP commissioned another report last month to set the table for the fake committee to study safe supply and given that 50 leading researchers and scientists from across Canada cosigned a letter denouncing the report for cherry-picking studies and data to support a predetermined conclusion and given that these Canadian experts said that the report is of, quote, critical low quality and cannot be used as a basis for policy-making, will the associate minister finally admit what everyone already knows, that his fake committee is nothing more than a bad-faith political stunt?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the NDP quitters' club for asking that question. They are, I would say, consistent with the BCCSU, which is also part of the quitters' club, who was not willing to provide evidence to support their position. Let me be crystal clear. Are we going to call into question Dr. Keith Humphreys, the head of the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis? Dr. Humphreys wrote a report consistent with that of the Simon Fraser University report. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is the only one with the call.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that six Albertans die every single day of a preventable drug poisoning and given that there are proven medical interventions that would have spared thousands of Alberta families a lifetime of grief and loss but given that this associate minister and the UCP have refused to get past their own personal prejudices and take action, does the associate minister have any compassion at all, any regrets for the families of Albertans who have died on his watch because of his decisions? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I challenge that member and any member over there to go to the east side of Vancouver, where they have 15 to 20 supervised consumption sites, where they have de facto decriminalization, where they have safe supply . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: . . . and, quite frankly, they have a state of lawlessness in that zone. Those are the policies that the NDP wants to bring to Alberta. Those are the policies that have caused more harm than any good of anything that they are bringing over to this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Foster and Kinship Care Provider Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, when the safety of a child is threatened and child intervention is involved, thousands of Albertans across the province support these children as foster parents, kinship care providers, or group care providers. These Albertans provide the care for children and youth that the government is legally responsible for, and government provides funding to these caregivers to do so. To the Minister of Children's Services: as cost pressures on all Alberta households rise rapidly, how is the UCP supporting these providers in addressing increasing costs to care for the children in your government's care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is very important work, and I am so grateful for the foster and kinship care providers right across the province that open their homes and their families to support some of the most vulnerable children at times of great need. As the member opposite is aware, we did increase our funding specifically to address caseload growth in this area. We know that this is an important area. We have continued to increase the child intervention budget, unlike the members opposite, and we'll continue to listen to what we hear in pilots like we're doing on kinship care.

Ms Pancholi: Given that, like for all other Albertans, the cost of groceries, heating, electricity, insurance has skyrocketed for foster, kinship, and group care homes and given that the maintenance fees for these providers have not been increased for more than three years, putting more pressure on these Albertans who support children and youth in government care, and given that the UCP has denied a request from providers in December for one-time funding of \$200 per child to help pay for groceries and heating costs, can the Minister of Children's Services please answer why the UCP's balanced budget has no help in it for the children in their care?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is again mistaken. The child intervention budget does continue to increase every single year under this government, unlike the members opposite, who left child intervention underfunded even after an all-party panel on child intervention. We continue to take the feedback that we receive . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It would be much more helpful for the overall decorum in the Assembly if members kept their conversations across the bow to a minimum.

The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to listen to the feedback that we receive. One good example is, like, kinship families. These are very unique situations. We know that when a child is placed in a family in an emergency situation, they need additional supports, and we're providing those.

Ms Pancholi: That is not what providers have been told. Given that these cost pressures are not going away any time soon and given that these same providers have been told that there will be no increases in maintenance fees now or in the foreseeable future and given that it is appalling that the government, who is legally responsible for these children, refuses to ensure there are adequate funds to pay for the groceries, can the Minister of Children's Services please explain to this Assembly how she expects these foster, kinship, and group homes to feed children in their care? Will they be expected to go to food banks or ask for donations from their neighbours?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sorry. With all of that, I wasn't able to finish my last answer, so I do want to go back and just explain some of the areas where we do make changes based on the feedback that we receive. One example is in kinship care. We know that these are emergency placements, and one of the things that we heard is that families do struggle to access basic supports that they need. We, in fact, moved up the payments that we provide to kinship care providers, \$900 immediately, so families can buy whatever they need to support the child in their care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Financial Innovation Act

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this Assembly passed Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. It's essential for our government to create an investment-friendly environment to position Alberta as a place for growth, delivering jobs, and renewing our economy, and we remain committed to that goal. Given that Bill 13 provides the government the ability to establish a regulatory sandbox for industry to explore innovation and financial products and services here in Alberta, to the Minister of Finance: how will Bill 13 assist in attracting investment to Alberta, and, further, can you explain the types of financial services and products Albertans can expect to see as a result?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. With the passage of Bill 13 Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish a regulatory sandbox for financial services products. This will attract fintech companies as they will be enabled to offer new, innovative, novel products to Alberta consumers in a time-limited fashion, in a safe fashion. Alberta already employs over 63,000 folks who work in the financial services sector. This will expand that sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for his answer. Given that the Financial Innovation Act is set to be the first of its kind in Canada in the fintech space and further given that this act would enable innovators to be exempted for up to two years from select rules and regulations but would still limit them to the guardrails provided by the regulatory sandbox, to the same minister: what safeguards are being put in place to protect consumers while fostering innovation and investment, and how will the privacy and safety of Albertan citizens be ensured throughout the exemption period?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each applicant would have to meet specific criteria to qualify for the regulatory sandbox. Additional terms, conditions, and restrictions will be imposed, depending on the product, to ensure that these companies are testing their products in a safe and sound manner. We're confident that our approach is the right balance between providing additional flexibility for companies to offer new and novel products and services and ensuring the safety and protection of Alberta consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for that answer. Understanding that Bill 13, now passed, will create this regulatory sandbox for fintech industry players as soon as July 1 of this year and given that one of the criteria for applicants to participate in the sandbox is proof of physical presence in Alberta to maintain eligibility, again to the Minister of Finance: are there companies expected to relocate to Alberta this summer as a result of this provision, and if so, how long will they have to establish residency, and how many jobs are expected to be created as these companies relocate here?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We've already received great interest around Bill 13, enabling a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech products. Last year we engaged the industry broadly. Fintech companies that were players already in the province of Alberta were very supportive of this initiative. We know that this will spur on activity within the province. We know that this will also attract other companies from outside the province of Alberta into Alberta. This will expand financial services, further diversify the economy, further offer new job opportunities.

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

2:30 Athabasca University and Postsecondary Education

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the town of Athabasca hired long-term UCP insider Hal Danchilla to help them with their campaign to keep Athabasca University in Athabasca. Danchilla was a co-chair of the Premier's election campaign. This is just another example of pay-to-play politics. If you want help from this government, you need to pay their friends, handsomely sometimes. To the minister: can he tell us why he didn't take any action to help the town of Athabasca until they hired the government's close friend to take up their cause?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Of course, the issue with Athabasca University is one that stems from a number of years and, of course, requires a very thoughtful response. That's why we've been working very closely with the university and the town and other interested parties to make sure that we develop a solution that is unique to the environment, one that will enable and allow Athabasca University to succeed as Canada's online university while at the same time creating job opportunities and bringing in employment to the town.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock is a member of this government caucus and theoretically has access to the Minister of Advanced Education and given that Alberta's NDP understands the community desire for a physical campus to stay in Athabasca – we understand that because we were there to listen – and given that the Athabasca county has no faith in their MLA or the minister, otherwise they wouldn't have bothered to hire a lobbyist to do the job, Minister: really, is this how the UCP operates, pay-for-play politics and the only ones benefiting are the rich friends of the members on that side of the House?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, that's so ridiculous. I don't even know where to start. I mean, the town is free to do what they want and hire who they want. I can't understand. I guess the NDP would put restrictions on what municipalities can do and who they can hire and what businesses they can engage in. As it relates to the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, let me just say that the member is a fierce advocate for the community, a strong proponent for the region, more so than the NDP member was for that region when they were in government.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear this government doesn't even listen to government backbenchers, meaning that their members don't have the ability to actively advocate for their own constituents, and given that clearly this government only listens once money finds its way into the pockets of good friends and allies – it was clearly established that the insurance lobbyists were the ones who successfully removed the annual cap on auto insurance, for example – will someone, anyone, from across the way let us

know how much it will actually take to improve postsecondary education? How much money does someone have to spend?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd happily take the opportunity to talk about the incredible things that we're doing to advance postsecondary education in the province. We're investing \$235 million over the next three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions, expand supports and access for low-income students, expand access and supports for apprenticeship education. On the question of Athabasca I know the members opposite are just annoyed that they didn't have the opportunity to be this courageous and to develop these types of solutions. I know the members opposite agree with my position. That's what they stated in 2016. I'm happy to have their support as well.

Local Government Concerns and Government Caucus

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, for the last seven years I have had the honour of representing the people of Edmonton-West Henday in this Legislature, taking the concerns of my constituents, the organizations and local businesses, and stakeholders here so that I can advocate for them. The county of Lac La Biche has hired a team to lobby the Minister of Health to help them attract and retain physicians. Can the Health minister explain if the MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche raised this issue with him, and if he did, can he explain why his constituents felt the need to hire somebody to do his job for him?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, as many members of our caucus, has raised issues regarding the delivery of health care services in Alberta. We have listened. We are focused on expanding capacity across our entire province. As I've indicated in this House before, we are investing \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that; \$1.8 billion. We recognize that there are challenges in terms of retaining and attracting health professionals, but we are hiring more. We have almost 2,000 more nurses than two years ago. We have 230 more paramedics, more doctors . . .

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

Mr. Carson: Well, given that Northern Sunrise county has likewise hired a team of lobbyists to lobby this government to raise awareness of safety issues on highway 744 and given that highway 744 and the concerns have not been brought to this Chamber by the representative of Northern Sunrise county and given that that member was sent to this Chamber to raise these very issues on behalf of his constituents and since that member has not raised these issues here, can the Minister of Transportation please confirm on what dates and times the Member for Peace River raised them with her?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I've had many conversations with many members across the province of Alberta on these transportation topics. Certainly, I have an open-door policy, so if anybody has any specific questions that they would like to bring to me, I'd be happy to hear them out, and I'd be happy to provide more information.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this government has shown no interest in really investing in or working with municipalities to build affordable housing and given that the town of Gibbons, supposedly represented by the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, has hired lobbyists to work with the province on the affordable housing projects and given that this clearly means that the concerns of the town of Gibbons are not being heard in the government caucus or at the cabinet table, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity explain why his constituency has to pay lobbyists to do his job for him?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I guess that member should explain why he knows so many lobbyists. Quite frankly, it's not clear to me what the member is talking about. I'm the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. If he has any questions on that, I'm happy to answer them. If he wants to speak to any lobbyists, he should call them.

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

Hydrogen Industry

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is preparing for a lower emission future, and increased hydrogen production will play a big part in our path to economic recovery. To this end, our government released the hydrogen road map in November 2021. This road map outlines a plan for our province to build a provincial hydrogen economy by becoming a major supplier of clean hydrogen to global markets. Can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity please advise this House on how increased hydrogen production can help Alberta reduce emissions?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe. In fact, three-quarters of all matter is made up of hydrogen, and the best part is that at combustion hydrogen releases zero emissions. So when you capture the carbon and you have clean hydrogen and you incorporate it into things like mobility and heat and power, industrial uses such as we're proposing in the hydrogen road map, it gives you the opportunity to significantly reduce emissions. In fact, we're forecasting that we're going to reduce emissions by 14 million tonnes by 2030.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that hydrogen represents the next great opportunity for Alberta's energy sector and that Alberta is already the largest hydrogen producer in Canada and given that we already have all the resources, expertise, and technology needed to quickly become a global supplier of clean, low-cost hydrogen, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity please advise on the potential economic impact of the hydrogen industry on Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydrogen has the potential to be a 2 and a half to 11 trillion dollar industry; 360,000 jobs by 2050 in Canada. We're going to get as many of those jobs and as much of that investment into Alberta as we possibly can.

Thank you.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that Alberta has all the tools to be a global leader in the hydrogen industry, including a skilled workforce, reduced red tape, and low corporate tax rate, and given that Alberta's Industrial Heartland already plays an important role in our energy industry and given that we have many carbon capture and storage facilities in my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity advise what impact the emerging hydrogen industry will have on the Industrial Heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Industrial Heartland is poised to be a huge player in our hydrogen economy. In fact, we've seen four billion-dollar investment announcements in hydrogen in the Industrial Heartland alone. It's going to mean jobs. It's going to mean investments. We're proud of the work that we're doing in hydrogen, and we're going to keep doing that.

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

2:40

Child Care

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. As many in this House know, child care is essential for the lives of everyday Albertans, including my residents of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. So many families use these services daily, and thanks to the agreement with the federal government, families will start to see a reduction in costs this year, continuing to \$10 a day by 2026. As we come out of the pandemic and more parents return to work, families will be needing access to affordable daycare solutions. To the Minister of Children's Services: where is this government when it comes to making child care more affordable for families who will need it more than ever?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The great news is that nearly 83,000 kids and their families have been seeing their fees go down by an average of 50 per cent for child care in this province. Families that make less than \$120,000 a year are in fact paying an average of about \$10 a day. I just received an e-mail from Kaitlyn, a Grande Prairie parent, who said this. "This difference has enabled my family to be able to pay our bills each month." Fees will continue to drop every single year over the next five years.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that private daycare homes play a big role in helping families receive quality, affordable, and convenient child care and given that these facilities have a long and costly process in order to open and operate their daycare and given that the province is the one who determines if and when new private daycare applications can be accepted, what is the Minister of Children's Services doing to help eliminate some of the hurdles individuals face when trying to create daycare facilities in their communities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. We did fight to include the entrepreneurs who run private programs and represent around 67 per cent of all Alberta child care spaces. We're investing

an additional \$300 million to help child care operators recruit and retain staff. As we speak, we have round-tables happening with operators and the child care sector to fine-tune our investments in this area. We're supporting operators to create more child care spaces in all settings right across the province.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the government's focus on ensuring every child can access affordable and accessible child care and given that it can be especially difficult for families of children with complex or unique needs to find proper child care and further given that last week the minister announced additional funding to support inclusive child care, can the Minister of Children's Services please tell us more about how the inclusive child care program will support these children and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much. Last week's announcement of \$7 million to support inclusive child care is great news for parents, especially those who have children with special, unique, or diverse needs, Mr. Speaker. This funding will be provided to five agencies who then provide on-site training and support for both operators and educators. This investment is through our agreement with the government of Canada. It will double the number of programs that can now access that support from about 270 to 600 programs. I sure wish that the opposition was as excited about this child care plan as Alberta parents are.

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.

Notices of Motions

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that on May 2, 2022, a leaked draft decision of the Supreme Court of the United States indicates that the court intends to overturn its decisions in *Roe versus Wade* and *Planned Parenthood versus Casey* and that the reversal of these landmark judicial decisions would fundamentally erode reproductive rights and access to health services for women in North America. Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights and affirm that access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, is a fundamental right and freedom of all women in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in just a couple of seconds here we'll proceed to the Standing Order 42, but I want to allow the pages some time to distribute some copies of the motion to the members in the Assembly prior to asking the member to move it.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today, so we will immediately proceed. At the appropriate time, during Notices of Motions, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood gave notice of her desire to move a Standing Order 42. As such, she has up to five minutes to do that now and speak to the urgency of this matter.

Women's Reproductive Rights

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislature be adjourned to debate a motion that is quite urgent and pressing and which I read out just earlier under Notices of Motions. I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I have provided the members of this Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, it is our duty as representatives in this Assembly to stand up for the rights of women and gender-diverse folks in our society, and that includes the legal right to seek an abortion. As the motion indicates, for one of the world's largest democracies to roll back women's rights by two generations, it would truly have ripple effects throughout the world. It would embolden those who seek to roll back our rights in Canada. Let me be clear: autonomy over our own bodies is being threatened. This is why this debate is so very important and so very pressing.

While access to abortion is currently decriminalized in Canada, there are still barriers to services and barriers to support. While I won't get into a debate on this matter, I must note there is currently a bill before this House allowing bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, but this bill only provides leave when a woman has a miscarriage or stillbirth. It discriminates in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss that one might experience. Pregnancy loss through either an abortion or termination for medical reasons is a right in Alberta and in this country, but it's a right that we must fight for each and every day. It is these rights that are under threat, as we see in the United States, where they are about to take a massive step backwards and undermine decades of progress.

On this side of the House we stand with women. We stand with gender-diverse folks here in our province and around the world. We will continue to fight for reproductive freedom, and we will defend abortion rights. I know it's a dark day for many. It's a hard day. The landmark decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* were historic victories for all. We do not want to see these victories rolled back. News of the Supreme Court's impending decision makes it clear that the fight for equality may never be truly over. It is a stark reminder that elections have consequences and that our most basic right, to control our own bodies, is very much under threat.

2:50

We cannot be complacent. We cannot ever take these rights for granted, and the fight for our rights has suddenly just taken on new urgency. That is why I'm bringing forward this motion. This Legislature should speak with one united voice that we respect women's rights and that we won't equivocate on matters as fundamental as reproductive rights. This Legislature must affirm access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, because it truly is a fundamental right and freedom for all Albertans. This Legislature must condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights. We must be steadfast. We must be unshakable in our commitment to women's rights and to the rights of the 2SLGBTQ-plus community.

This is why I'm standing here in the Chamber today encouraging, urging members of this Assembly to take this matter seriously, to not dismiss it as something happening somewhere else, to accept and to acknowledge that an attack on women's health care, an attack on the health care for trans and queer Albertans is an attack on all of us. That is why I'm urging this Assembly to take this seriously, to put aside the ordinary business of the day in order to debate this critically important motion. Nothing could be more serious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42 this is a request for unanimous consent but allows a member of Executive Council to respond for up to five minutes. I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen to do that.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I must say that I reject the premise of most of this motion. I'm going to start with "a leaked draft decision of the Supreme Court of the United States." First of all, it's unverified; number two, it's a foreign country; number three, it doesn't affect Canadian law; and, number four, this area of law actually exists under purely federal jurisdiction.

"The reversal of these landmark judicial decisions would fundamentally erode reproductive rights and access to health services for women in North America." I'd like to remind the members opposite that we live in Canada. The Supreme Court of the United States is the court for the United States, not for North America, not for Mexico, and certainly not for Canada. We are not in America.

The next assertion: "condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights." Condemning a decision of a foreign court: it's pretty normal for governments to condemn the decisions of other governments; condemning the decisions of other countries' courts is not acceptable. It's not acceptable for the United States to condemn decisions from our courts, and we don't condemn decisions from their courts. If you want to condemn the United States government, you can do that, but not their courts.

Finally: "affirm that access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, is a fundamental right and freedom of all women in Alberta." I'd like to talk about reproductive health for women in Alberta for a moment, and I'm going to remind the folks in this Assembly that we have a number of women MLAs in this Assembly, and certainly women's health issues affect female MLAs, like they do every other woman in Alberta. In addition to reproductive health issues around terminating pregnancies, I'd like to raise a couple more issues such as endometriosis: painful, sometimes debilitating, and – guess what? – often misdiagnosed. In this Chamber there are probably four of us female MLAs who'll be affected by it. Ten per cent of Alberta women will be affected by fertility issues, and the list goes on.

When we talk about women's health issues, the members opposite have raised over and over again access to women's health services in rural versus urban Alberta. Well, I'm going to remind the opposition of something else. While they were in government, they actually diverted capital from rural areas into urban centres. That's what they did while they were in government.

There's lots to talk about on women's health issues, and we're going to talk about them more and more as time goes on, because my department is working very hard on them. In fact, next week I'm going to be participating in a women's reproductive health activity, and I'd sure like the members opposite to participate with me. I'll look forward to that.

In the meantime I don't see this as anywhere near an emergency debate. Again, the premise of it, with respect to dealing with foreign courts, does not at all indicate we should have an emergency debate about it.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

**Bill 15
Education (Reforming Teacher
Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022**

The Chair: This is the bill's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak and to address Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Many in this Legislature know that prior to serving as an MLA, I was a public high school teacher for 30 years and therefore a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association. Over my 30 years of teaching I, like many teachers, served as a school rep on my ATA local and at various times attended local meetings and various assemblies of the ATA. While I'm no longer a member of the ATA, I am fairly conversant with many of the issues that surround the ATA and, in particular, Bill 15. They are serious and important issues that will need careful and, I believe, nuanced consideration.

Throughout my tenure as a member of the ATA one of the largest concerns expressed by the ATA executive and many of my fellow ATA members revolved around the issue of whether the functions or the professional duties of the ATA should be separated from the mandate of the ATA to represent teachers at the bargaining table. Both are important functions. Bill 15 impacts both of these functions as it separates the professional disciplinary function from the oversight of the ATA to an independent commissioner. Many, many times I have listened to ATA executives and representatives and members argue that the ATA must remain as the organization in control of both the professional and the union functions of its membership. There was and still is, I believe, a firm belief within the teaching profession that to separate these two functions will impact the collegiality within the school community.

There is some merit in this argument, but it is not the only consideration when looking at Bill 15 and whether or not it should be passed. In my experience, schools are not the same as businesses. It is critical for the administration and the teachers to be working collaboratively together. By overseeing both the professional and union functions within the ATA, teachers and administrators are held to the same professional code of conduct. And to the credit of the teaching profession, rarely do the bargaining conditions, wages, and job descriptions negatively impact professional relationships within the school community. Teaching is, first and foremost, about fostering good relationships, because only then will there be the trust necessary to make a meaningful and positive impact on education and the school community.

3:00

Yet after a great deal of thought I will be supporting Bill 15 for two very specific reasons. One, because there appears to be a significant problem with the discipline process as it now stands, and secondly, because I believe that Bill 15 will bring forward benefits to teachers, students, and our system of education.

I want to start by addressing what Bill 15 actually does and what it actually changes. When addressing the professional side of education, it must be understood that the teaching profession has not been organized like other professions. In fact, every profession organizes itself and its discipline process in unique and different ways. Doctors organize, set professional standards, and discipline their membership differently than do lawyers or engineers or nurses

or teachers. In the case of teachers, there have always been multiple players working co-operatively within the profession, impacting professional credentialing, setting up professional standards and the discipline of teachers.

Presently in Alberta there is a role for the Minister of Education, for the registrar, and for the ATA to play within the profession, and this has made the profession different from many of the other professions in how they set and address credentialing, professional standards, and discipline. Bill 15 is going to significantly change how the discipline process will function in the province of Alberta. Bill 15 will change how the government and the teaching profession address the competence of teachers and the professional conduct of teachers. Bill 15 will create a new office to help address the issues of teacher and teacher leader professional conduct and teacher and teacher leader competence.

Alberta has a long history of independent commissioners, like the Privacy Commissioner or the Ethics Commissioner, and Bill 15 will create a new Alberta teaching profession commissioner to oversee the discipline process, for the most part supplanting the role the ATA played in that discipline process. Bill 15 will allow the Minister of Education to appoint a panel to address professional conduct and competency, and this panel can appoint a hearing committee and an appeal committee within the discipline process. Under Bill 15 any person may make a complaint in writing to the registrar, and the registrar may refer the matter to the commissioner for investigation. A hearing panel can be formed to adjudicate the complaint as long as the issue of professional competence occurred within two years of lodging a complaint. This time limit, however, does not apply to an issue of professional conduct.

Upon receiving the complaint, the commissioner will make preliminary inquiries, upon which the commissioner may decide to take no further action, refer the complaint to a mediator, to dispute resolution, or appoint an investigator for further investigation. If, upon completing preliminary investigations, the commissioner believes further action is necessary, the commissioner will inform the teacher or teacher leader and the registrar and create a hearing panel. Once the panel arrives at a decision, the complainant may appeal the decision through the creation of an appeal panel. All decisions will be forwarded to the commissioner, the registrar, and the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Education will continue to have the responsibility of removing or suspending the teaching certificate or certificates or credentials of a teacher or a teacher leader.

This is a significant change to the present system of addressing teacher and teacher leader competence and professional conduct, and as I have read through Bill 15, I believe that it is a reasonable way to handle these two issues of competence and professional conduct and will address some of the problems that presently exist and will provide some added benefits to the profession.

So what problems need to be fixed? Over my years as a teacher and subsequently as an MLA I've heard the following arguments for why the discipline process needs to change. There's a perception by many outside of the teaching profession that there is a conflict of interest within the discipline process because the ATA oversees both union and professional discipline functions within itself. I find this, to a certain degree, to be a fairly subjective argument.

It is true that the ATA often has to try and accomplish the two purposes of both protecting its members while also disciplining them. The ATA mission statement in 1993 reads:

The Alberta Teachers' Association, as the professional organization of teachers, promotes and advances public education, safeguards standards of professional practice and serves as the advocate for its members.

The Teaching Profession Act states that the objectives of the Alberta Teachers' Association are "to improve the teaching profession . . . by advising, assisting, protecting and disciplining members in the discharge of their professional duties and relationships." Protecting and disciplining: in both cases we see that the ATA, like a good parent, has the responsibility of advocating for its members while at the same time protecting the professional practice of the profession through its disciplinary practice.

While I will not go into case studies, there are times when complaints have come forward to the minister or to the registrar that appear to highlight the problem of a conflict of interest. While anecdotal and, I believe, relatively rare, these cases speak to the times when an investigation into a complaint has done a disservice to the student or to a family, when the teacher is protected rather than moving forward through the discipline process.

Even more rarely do we see problems occur at the hearing level of the discipline process, but they have occurred. I do believe that the Michael Gregory case speaks to a problem within the system. In this case, it was not a breakdown at the investigatory phase of the discipline process but at the hearing phase. Upon being found guilty of unprofessional conduct due to the sexual abuse of many students and rightfully having his teaching certificate suspended, the ATA did not, in turn, pass on to the police this criminal abuse. Now, it must be noted that neither did the registrar, nor did the Minister of Education of the day.

As shocking as this is, I am very disturbed that the present leadership of the ATA, which oversees the present discipline process, believes that they are not required to report to the police a finding by the ATA disciplinary body that a member has been suspended due to what is clearly a criminal offence involving children. This speaks to a breakdown of the process, and it is my opinion that the ATA position to not report is clearly not in the best interests of either students or parents or the teachers within the profession.

Bill 15 will address this with a duty to report findings to the minister and to the registrar. Any suspension of a teaching certificate or certificates will be published in an online registry that the public can access, and there will be a duty to report to the police. This duty to report unprofessional conduct, especially of a criminal nature, is clearly in the best interests of the students, the parents, and the profession in its entirety, and in its entirety it has my complete support.

The disciplinary process also addresses teacher and teacher leader competence, not just unprofessional conduct. There appear to be problems with how the profession addresses this under the present system. Over my 30 years as a teacher the vast majority of the teachers I interacted with were hard working and highly professional. The children I taught were always individuals who brought those strengths and weaknesses and learnings into my classroom. It was my job to assess where those students were at and to try, through a wide range of pedagogical methods, to help each student to engage with the curriculum, assimilate the skills and knowledge, and interact with that knowledge to bring about a higher understanding of the material under study.

The standard for doing this was never perfection. I was not a perfect teacher; neither did I teach perfect students or have perfect parents or perfect administrators to support both myself and the students. At the same time, the profession must be prepared to address those very few teachers who over time do not meet the teacher qualification standards and are therefore not professionally competent.

There are over 40,000 teachers in the province of Alberta, yet under the present system over the past 10 years there has not been a single hearing for teacher incompetence. This should be concerning. Admittedly, our postsecondary system of education

prepares our education graduates, and they do an amazing job. We prepare some of the best educators in the world to teach within our schools in Alberta, but there are also teachers who struggle, and we seem to have a problem identifying them and then addressing the issue of teacher competence when it arises. This seems to point to a problem of a conflict of interest within the discipline process, a process overseen by the ATA, where the professional responsibility for identifying and addressing teacher competence appears to be subservient to job protection.

3:10

So I conclude that Bill 15 addresses a problem in the discipline process in a reasonable fashion by introducing a process that will be headed by a familiar and a successful practice of appointing an independent commissioner to oversee the discipline process. At the end of the day, this is not solely about the ATA and its capacity to oversee both the functions of a union and a professional association; Bill 15 is primarily about ensuring that our students are safe and that the discipline process that addresses teacher competence and professional conduct is transparent and accountable. I believe that Bill 15 moves us in that direction, and I also believe that there are some benefits that will come with the passage of Bill 15.

Bill 15 will create a single, effective, consistent, and efficient discipline process that will oversee every teacher, principal, superintendent across the system regardless of where they're employed or if they are a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association. What many people don't realize is that presently teachers employed in independent schools or charter schools are not members of the ATA, and therefore they actually fall under a separate discipline process in the province of Alberta. Bill 15 will ensure that all teachers and all teacher leaders, regardless of where they are employed, will fall under one discipline process overseen by the commissioner. Placing all teachers under one process ensures that consistency and transparency and accountability will be applied to all teachers and to all teacher leaders, and therefore it raises the bar for every teacher and ensures that all students in the province of Alberta will benefit.

While this should not be necessary, Bill 15 will reinforce requirements for education system stakeholders – stakeholders like the Alberta Education registrar, the commissioner, the ATA, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and employers – to report to police when there may have been serious harm or a threat to student safety. Why we should have to put that in legislation I am not sure, but it needs to be there, obviously.

It makes sense to me that the registrar at Alberta Education be responsible for the intake of all complaints in the province, and this will help avoid duplication of complaints. The Alberta teaching profession commissioner will have the authority to address and to investigate a complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action to take regarding that complaint. By making the discipline process more transparent, both student safety and the teaching profession are actually enhanced.

By further expanding the online teacher registry established under the students first act, the following will be made publicly available: all hearing, appeal, and minister's decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence will be publicly available to all Albertans; any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner where there is a finding of unprofessional incompetence or unprofessional conduct will be publicly available to Albertans; all hearings and appeal dates will be publicly posted and available. This raises the bar, and this is in the best interests of the profession.

My decision to support Bill 15 is not based on a desire to weaken the profession or to weaken the public system of education but the

exact opposite: to enhance it, to strengthen it, to protect. My support for Bill 15 is not so that the government can distract from decisions on the curriculum or funding that the ATA has not agreed with, as some have charged. That is a red herring argument brought forward by those who seem to be unwilling to address the serious issue of professional discipline. Rather, I believe Bill 15 could lead to greater accountability, greater public assurance, and consistency in addressing complaints under one legislated governance structure by the commissioner's office, which in the long run, I believe, will be best for students and for the profession as a whole.

Madam Chair, Bill 15, I believe, is a step forward in the teaching profession. It addresses some of the issues that have obviously come to fruition as we've looked at the discipline process, and finally it does make some positive changes. It will therefore have my support.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Madam Chair, thank you. I would like to stand in support of Bill 15, the Education Amendment Act, 2022. I want to share an experience with the Legislature. Shortly after my election as the MLA for Red Deer-South central Alberta representatives of the Alberta Teachers' Association asked to meet with me. I said yes. In the course of our meeting I asked the ATA union two questions. First, I asked them what the ATA union could do better to serve children, who are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union. Second, I asked the union: how many teachers last year were let go for incompetence? The ATA union said that they would get back to me with answers to those questions. I never heard back from them.

Madam Chair, since that time I have learned the answer to one of those questions. As mentioned, there are over 45,000 teachers under the ATA union, yet over the past 10 years with the ATA union in charge there was not a single hearing for teacher incompetence. Nobody believes that in the past 10 years there was not a single incompetent teacher in Alberta. This is proof positive that the ATA union was not diligent in its trust to protect higher standards for the teaching profession. The ATA union has lost its moral authority to be entrusted with this stewardship.

Madam Chair, by way of contrast, I am a member of the Law Society of Alberta, and if I am incompetent, I get sued. In some cases a grossly incompetent lawyer can also be disciplined and even disbarred. The Law Society posts notifications of these actions. Now, providing legal advice and teaching children have differences, but both are important. There need to be mechanisms to address incompetence.

The ATA union failed to do so. Albertans may conclude that either the ATA union is incompetent in identifying and addressing incompetence or they were influenced by a conflict of interest as the union being a discipline body. Madam Chair, which is it? I do not know. Maybe it was some of both. The ATA union certainly is in a conflict of interest running teacher discipline. As it relates, though, to conflicts of interest, it is not only important to avoid an actual conflict but to avoid the perception of conflict.

Bill 15 takes teacher discipline away from the union. The ATA union does not like Bill 15. It reduces their power. It is interesting to see the ATA union arguing against Bill 15. They did not do a good job. Does that matter? They are in a conflict of interest. Does it matter? The union argues that they should regulate themselves, that they should be immune from government accountability. But, Madam Chair, just as a lawyer is accountable to a client who pays their bills, so should teachers have some accountability to those

who pay their bills, in large part the parents of children, who pay taxes to government, who fund, through them, public education.

3:20

Teachers and the ATA union are not the same thing. The ATA union should not conflate teachers with the union. The ATA is a public-sector union. Sometimes the ATA union will represent themselves not only as teachers but also as students and parents, but, Madam Chair, what happens when the interests of the ATA union are not aligned with children, parents, or Albertans, who fund our education system? When push comes to shove, the ATA union is in a conflict of interest to put interests of teachers, even if it is contrary to the interests of children, parents, or Albertans – they may not wish to admit it, but that is the truth.

Yet using proxies and their own communications, they will sometimes seek to frame a self-serving position as in the interests of parents and children. Often there is alignment, but sometimes there is not. We see this when a union will strike near the end of a school year and claim they are acting in the interests of students. Madam Chair, that is not in the interests of students. This makes Alberta cynical and less trustful, when unions distort the truth.

Now, the majority of teachers are competent, seeking to be excellent, to teach and serve children. I have experienced that myself both as a student, and I have seen it as a parent. To those teachers: thank you. Teaching is a rewarding and wonderful opportunity to serve. But, Madam Chair, it is so important that we ensure that there is an accountability and standard of excellence. While it is the exception rather than the rule, let's confront reality to strengthen the profession for the majority of teachers. Let's nurture an increased culture of excellence. Removing conflicts of interest furthers this overarching objective.

Madam Chair, children are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union. Teaching our children is a privilege and serious responsibility. Done well, it can be rewarding and fulfilling. I want a culture of excellence in our teaching profession. It is too important to do otherwise. Bill 15 seeks to put the best interests of children first in the teacher discipline process. By so doing, Bill 15 not only increases student safety but will strengthen the standard and reputation of the teaching profession. That is something that I hope that we can all agree on. It is in the public interest.

With that, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I thank the minister for bringing it forward. Just spending some time reviewing exactly what this legislation is doing. Of course, last year the UCP government passed the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which allowed captive insurance companies to set up, get licensed, and operate in Alberta. What we're seeing in this legislation is making one substantive change, that was recently passed through that previous act, regarding redomestication provisions, ensuring that Alberta-based companies who have captive insurance companies operating outside of Canada are able to bring those operations home. I guess this is finalizing or adding onto some of that previous legislation regarding the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which we saw previously.

It's an interesting topic that we have before us, where we see insurance companies across the world less and less likely to insure

oil and gas projects, specifically energy projects within the fossil fuel industry or sector, so we find ourselves in a position where we need to look within our own jurisdiction and our own regulatory opportunities to provide that insurance. I think that it's a reasonable ask, to try and bring some of that insurance back in-house or offered by organizations within the province when it comes to insuring our own liabilities.

But it's also important, I think, to reflect on how or why exactly we have come to this point in the first place. Obviously, there are many external pressures, one being that the returns for these insurance companies are increasingly being affected by things like extreme weather events and climate change concerns, both what the environment is doing to projects and what that is costing these energy companies as well as the insurers of those projects but also, I would say, external pressures around people's perspective on these types of projects as well. That's not just, you know, regular people across North America or across the world but also how investors are looking at these projects. I again appreciate where the minister is coming from regarding this Insurance Amendment Act and the idea of captive insurance across the province, ensuring that we are able to properly insure the energy sector here where in some cases it's becoming increasingly hard to provide or get that insurance elsewhere.

Now, with that being said, Madam Chair, I think it's also important to reflect on the fact that the UCP is as a government moving towards making it easier for large companies to receive insurance or become insured, but on the other hand, when it comes to regular Albertans, we've seen this government do the exact opposite. Take, for example, at the beginning of this government's term, their decision to let the 5 per cent cap on personal auto insurance lapse. Since then we have seen skyrocketing insurance costs for Alberta families, upwards of 30 per cent, if not higher in some instances. Again and again, as we see these inflationary pressures and as we see so many Albertans struggling to have to make decisions between keeping their lights on or putting food on their table, unfortunately, this government has done nothing to support them.

We continue on those calls. I believe just recently we called for a further cap on personal auto insurance, to the point of calling for a zero per cent increase over the next year, recognizing that so many Albertans are still struggling with the ongoing pandemic and the increasing costs that they're seeing across this province because of decisions that the UCP has made. Again, I think it's an important contrast, Madam Chair, to recognize that on one hand we have this government willing to do anything possible to ensure that these companies are able to hold onto insurance, going as far as creating new opportunities to provide this insurance and create new companies, potentially, that may have otherwise not been possible and changing regulations on that matter, but, on the other hand, making decisions to reduce coverage for Albertans who find themselves in potentially life-altering collisions, reducing the amount of payout that Albertans are getting, and still letting those insurance premiums get out of hand and skyrocket upwards of 30 per cent for many Albertans. And we continue down that path with no assurances that that is going to change by any means.

3:30

Again, as we reflect on the Insurance Amendment Act before us, I think that it's reasonable to expect these types of regulatory changes to allow these companies to provide this captive insurance opportunity and to potentially bring home some of the companies who are currently operating outside of Canadian jurisdictions, to ensure that, whether we're talking about potentially insuring

tailings ponds or insuring wells, there are going to be opportunities for those companies to get insurance.

I think that there's also another important discussion that we need to have in terms of the support and the costs that we are incurring as a province based on things like orphaned oil wells. Unfortunately, there are many conversations that still need to take place regarding insurance for these companies and regarding often the liabilities that are being put back on municipalities when we aren't properly assessing the costs and potentially aren't expecting the right type of insurance for such energy projects.

I do look forward to hearing more from the minister. Potentially some questions that I would be interested in finding out: how many companies we believe across the province are going to benefit from this idea of reinsurance or captive insurance; how many companies, insurance companies specifically, working outside of Canadian jurisdictions that are potentially offering insurance even for energy companies outside of North America we expect to come home; what type of capital we expect to be brought back into our provincial jurisdiction with some of these changes. Again, I look forward to seeing how this legislation rolls out and what type of economic opportunities there are here.

Finally, I would say that, again, while we have the Insurance Act open before us, we've had many opportunities in this House not only today but previously to ensure that we are supporting Albertans to the best of our abilities. Why are we seeing decisions like this made but, on the other hand, leaving consumers, specifically around personal auto insurance, behind? We do have a real opportunity here with these changes that we see before us to support, in many cases, medium-sized and large energy companies. I think it's an important move, but I think it's just as important to ensure that the Albertans who are depending on us to get their kids to school in the morning, get themselves to work so that they can put food on the table and keep the lights on in their house – I think we have a responsibility to them as well to do everything we can in this House to support them with their household budgets and, in this instance, the skyrocketing rate of premium increases that we are seeing under this UCP government.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this legislation. I think that it's a reasonable request of the minister. I think that there are likely to be more questions as we see this industry start to take place here in the province, and at that point we will continue this conversation.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, just a reminder that while Committee of the Whole is certainly a more casual and lenient time of debate and light conversation, there still needs to be the opportunity for members to be heard despite the activities you have going on. Just a reminder that the lounge is available for all that wish to have louder chats in the Chamber.

At this time I am seeking speakers to Bill 16. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I'm happy to see that so many members of the Chamber are in jovial moods as we debate this piece of legislation. Well, most members, anyway. No; with that, I jest as I'm looking at members smiling back.

I'm happy to talk to this bill. You know, the long of the short is that I support this bill in how it's amending the Insurance Act and recognize that likely when the Minister of Finance brought forward the Insurance Act in our last session, that brought in captive insurance as a solution to a niche problem. I respect the fact that it's easy sometimes even for government to miss some nuances. In this,

I suspect that members from our energy sector came forward and approached the minister and government with the challenge that they face.

Obviously, the energy sector, critical to Alberta's economy and critical, quite frankly, to the Canadian economy, requires a great deal of insurance. They have very expensive assets. This bill – and I'll talk through it a little bit – will provide an opportunity and a potential solution. I mean, it'll be interesting to see what companies do with the changes in this bill. And then, Madam Chair, in my time I will circle back to the fact that here we have an amendment to a bill that was done last year, and I'm not criticizing the government or anyone for doing that. That happened under our term as well, where bills had to be reopened.

But the disappointment I have in the bill in its current form, Madam Chair, is that we've missed an opportunity, an opportunity to provide relief for drivers. We know that drivers have experienced significant jumps in their premiums, myself included, over the past couple of years. You know, it's an interesting discourse in that under our government we put in a rate cap of 5 per cent, which is nothing to sneeze at. I mean, the fact that companies could increase the fees by 5 per cent per year for most years: that outpaces inflation. Again, we're at a period in our time where we're seeing record-high inflation. Well, record in the past 30 years. Drivers have seen their costs shoot up, yet there has been very little relief for drivers.

Now, I will admit, Madam Chair, that the insurance cap was not meant to be a permanent, long-term solution. It was meant to be an interim solution to work with industry to come up with what would be a reasonable amount for them to charge drivers, recognizing, quite frankly, that costs for insurance companies have gone up significantly. Quite frankly, I recently had a conversation with folks in this space, and although we have – you know, cars are being built with all of these sensors and safety mechanisms that, in theory, should help reduce the number of accidents that people get into. The challenge is that, when you think about how many sensors are in your bumpers, what used to be a small fender-bender, that could be fixed for a few hundred dollars, is now costing thousands and thousands of dollars because of the sensors that are in them.

3:40

I say this, Madam Chair, to acknowledge the reality that insurance companies are facing and why rates and costs are going up, but at the same time we also need to recognize that wages have not gone up concurrently with cost of living, so Albertans have fewer and fewer dollars at the end of the month. We've heard a number of stories where Albertans have to choose between, you know, paying their bills and having enough money for groceries, or that Albertans are also deferring – I won't even call them luxuries but just certain purchases that they have to put off. In this bill there was an opportunity to address the challenges that Albertans are facing, again, providing some kind of relief for drivers.

The other thing that's missing – and then I'll go back to the meat and potatoes of this bill – is that the government is no longer producing a report that they used to. The Minister of Finance used to prepare the superintendent of insurance annual report every year. That was done for many, many years. I don't have the date of when it started in front of me, but I know that this was customary for many years, including when we served in government, our term, to long before. You know, the fact that the report was produced right before a long weekend, on a Thursday beforehand: I can tell you, Madam Chair, that what that does is that it makes Albertans question why it's being made public late in the week ahead of a long weekend. Is it trying to be buried, or what is the reason if not that? It definitely raises questions for folks.

Here are the different opportunities that were missed in this bill. Legislating that report to be produced and shared with the public would be one thing that we would have liked to have seen in this bill, the other being relief for drivers that's missing.

I'll get into some of the changes in this bill. Again, as I mentioned, the one substantive change that is now in this bill: when we talk about the Captive Insurance Companies Act, that was passed last year, it creates redomestication provisions, which in my understanding – and I have a limited understanding in this. It basically allows Alberta companies who have a captive insurance company located outside of the province and internationally, so somewhere in the U.S. or elsewhere – they can bring them back home here to Alberta without any disruption to the services that it's providing.

Again, there are reasons that companies will want to do this. In fact, I have learned, for example, that Suncor has a number of companies that they will now redomesticate back here in Alberta. I think that's great news. We want our companies to be here at home. Obviously, there are additional benefits for the province such as, you know, greater tax revenues from that. I appreciate the conversations that took place between ministry officials and the Official Opposition where they indicated that they were pleasantly surprised at the amount of interest companies have in this part of the bill and how many have indicated that they will be redomesticated. So that's good news, Madam Chair, and I definitely support that.

The second thing that this bill is doing is making changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. Again, here, essentially, my understanding of reinsurance is that it's insurance for insurance companies. There are a small number of large global players that do this, that provide this type of insurance, so here we're ensuring that Alberta's oil and gas companies can have that type of insurance. Obviously, it's critical for them, as I mentioned earlier. What this may do is – I mean, it provides the ability or the opportunity for the energy sector to look at potentially creating a reinsurance company or several companies here at home. It doesn't guarantee it, but it provides that provision or is an enabling piece of legislation.

You know, my understanding of this is that it's a good-faith attempt. It's something that the government is hoping companies will take advantage of. It provides that opportunity for them for a solution that is not a risk to the province. What I appreciate about this is that it's not the province backstopping or being the reinsurer; this is about providing the private sector with the ability to do that. When I first read that, Madam Chair, I thought: well, this seems like an innovative solution to a challenge that industry is facing. Hats off to industry for coming up with this potential solution. I would imagine it came from industry. But either way, another reason for me to support this bill.

The third, Madam Chair, is making it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. Now, companies can only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies – in other words, insurers that are not licensed in Canada – only in circumstances where there are no domestic insurers that will underwrite a policy for a particular risk. I appreciate that this is going way into the weeds, but I recognize that the challenge with how it's currently structured is that if you have an unlicensed insurance company operating in another country and, for example, they decided that they aren't going to pay out a policy – or, say, they go under – there's no recourse. Again, if we're talking about our energy sector companies, these are companies that have assets in the billions, so if there is a major disruption or need for them to call in their policy, they may not be able to, and that is an incredible risk that they shouldn't have to bear.

There are other details in my notes that really go even further down into the weeds, so really the thrust of my comments here today, Madam Chair, are that I support this bill, the three different

parts of it and what it's going to do and what it potentially could do, again, you know, fixing a problem that I'm sure was recently discovered after last year's legislation.

But I'd be remiss if I didn't point out the fact that there was a missed opportunity here to provide some real relief for Alberta drivers. I know that between insurance costs and the high cost of gasoline many folks are taking the bus, are leaving their vehicles parked at home. I appreciate the fact that the government brought in some relief to drivers at the pumps, but, again, when you look at the costs and how they've compounded, it's a real struggle for Albertans. Again, it's not just insurance and gas; it's also the cost of utilities for folks.

3:50

You know, at least when I was watching BNN this morning, it sounds like there's going to be another rate hike on insurance, which may have already happened as I've been in this Chamber. That's going to impact Albertans who have a substantial amount of debt. That's going to impact mortgage rates. That's going to impact lines of credit. Again, I appreciate the fact that the lenders are looking at trying to get a grip on the rising pace of inflation, yet at the same time that's going to have a very real effect on individual Albertans and Alberta families. In this bill I wish the minister would have brought forward some tangible measures and ideas to be able to provide relief for drivers when it comes to rising insurance rates.

Now, my final comment as I wrap up, Madam Chair, is that I appreciate that the minister has said that his advice has been that rates should start coming down – and maybe that's the case; I'll wait with my fingers crossed – but I can tell you, from talking to individual Albertans and constituents, that they have not seen their rates start to drop yet. Again, relief was needed months ago, it's needed now, and it's unfortunate that this bill doesn't address that.

But for all the reasons I laid out, Madam Chair, I will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to Bill 16? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Very good, Madam Chair. It's great to hear the supportive comments on Bill 16 from the members opposite. I think it's a good bill that everybody can support. The Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, further advances our efforts to modernize and grow Alberta's insurance and financial services sector. The proposed amendments in this bill amend the recently passed Captive Insurance Companies Act. Specifically, they would add reinsurance provisions to the Insurance Act, allowing provincially licensed insurance companies to solely focus on reinsurance and to enter into limited partnerships to do so. Reinsurance is essentially insurance for insurance companies.

Many people are not aware, but the reinsurance industry in Canada is limited, comprised mostly of foreign-based enterprises, many of them operating through subsidiaries and engaging in businesses in Canada through a branch. In fact, most of the reinsurance capacity right now is located in Europe, the United States, and places like Bermuda. As you can appreciate, Madam Chair, this can make it challenging at times for Canadian and Alberta-based insurers to access reinsurance. It's important that we do everything we can to attract additional insurance capacity to Alberta and to diversify insurance offerings. Diversifying Alberta's insurance sector will have both short-term and long-term benefits for the province's economy, our businesses, and Albertans broadly.

This bill also proposes new redomestication provisions for the recently passed Captive Insurance Companies Act to specifically address the relocation of foreign captives to Alberta. The new

provisions will help companies understand how they should bring their foreign captives to Alberta.

Lastly, Bill 16 makes a number of administrative amendments to the Insurance Act, which should help to ensure a clear and efficient regulatory framework for the conduct of insurance businesses in the province.

Again, I'm pleased to hear that the members opposite support this bill. It's a good bill and another step forward, and I encourage all members to vote in support of it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this bill, Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. It's my first opportunity to speak to this bill, and it's an important piece of legislation. In fact, insurance is important. It's the way people manage their risks, and these policies are used to hedge against the losses, whether they are personal injury kinds of losses, whether they're financial losses, property losses. These products, this new concept, are critically important to managing the risk in our society.

For the constituency I represent, it's more important for many reasons as well. Part of the area I represent was hit by the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canadian history – the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canadian history – and I do live in my riding as well and personally was impacted by that. You know, I also saw the destruction that hailstorm levelled across my constituency, across northeast Calgary. People's homes were destroyed, their sidings were shredded, and their cars were destroyed.

There were many losses that were not covered by insurance policies, and there were many reasons for that. One of the reasons was that it was during the pandemic. For instance, in the case of vehicle insurance, many people parked their vehicles because they were not driving as much, and they only had parked insurance on those. That's why they didn't have the comprehensive: they didn't need it, they were not driving as much, they were trying to get by because of the global pandemic, because of the loss in business revenues, because of job losses, and all those things. People were certainly impacted. Their bottom lines were impacted by that.

I do hear from my constituents directly to this date about that hailstorm and how there was no help from the government. Just to be clear, nobody was asking this government to act as an insurance company for northeast Calgary. All they were asking was that at least the government work with these insurance companies and for the government to make sure that people are treated fairly, that their claims are processed in a timely fashion, and that their roofs, their homes are repaired in a timely fashion. And the government didn't lift a finger.

Every time I've raised this issue, this government, this Premier have even ridiculed it, as if northeast Calgary was looking for a handout and somehow these people in northeast Calgary didn't have insurance at all and whatnot, but that was not the case. People were asking this government to at least advocate on their behalf so that they are treated fairly, their homes are repaired timely, their claims are processed in a reasonable time. Even after two years, when you drive on the streets of northeast Calgary, you can still see homes damaged. You can still see vehicles that are damaged. So these policies and how government approached these policies, insurance, this industry, are important to my constituents.

The second reason it's important to my constituents is that there are many in northeast Calgary and in my constituency who drive cabs, who drive for delivery companies, who drive ride-share vehicles, and they do that to earn a living. Certainly, in order to drive, you need insurance, so, again, any changes that the government makes to this industry, to

these products are important to my constituents, people in northeast Calgary, and, of course, all Albertans.

4:00

Another thing, specifically, I guess, that has been brought up by many people in my riding and across Calgary with respect to insurance is insurance for the trucking industry. They also drive for a living and provide valuable services across this province, across this country, and changes that are made by this government certainly impact them as well. So every time the government opens up the Insurance Act, every time some changes are suggested, I think my hope is that the government will actually also look at issues facing my constituents, facing people in northeast Calgary, facing everyday Albertans across this province.

For instance, this bill makes, broadly, three changes to the Insurance Act. One relates to captive insurance, a kind of niche area. The second helps to license stand-alone reinsurance companies, something that will benefit insurance companies. And, third, it will make it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance when there is no licensed product available in Alberta. Nothing in this bill addresses skyrocketing insurance costs for everyday Albertans. While I have no major concerns with the content of this legislation, I'm more concerned about what I hear from my constituents, from people in northeast Calgary, from everyday Albertans across this province.

Yet again the UCP is refusing to take any action whatsoever to reduce auto insurance bills that are punishing Alberta families and businesses since this government took over. We have tried to work with this government to address that issue. We have suggested that a legislative committee be established to look into why insurance premiums are so high, but this government, in the interest of insurance companies, has refused that.

When we were in government, there was a cap, a 5 per cent cap, on insurance premiums. As soon as the UCP became government, they were lobbied by their friends and they removed that cap. We were told and Albertans were told that unless they do so, insurance companies won't be able to survive. We were told that they might leave the province.

Every day we heard that they were removing products from the market, which, by the way, did not happen during our term when there was a 5 per cent cap. We knew that was not true. We knew that whatever the government was telling us on behalf of insurance companies was garbage. In order to hide that, they even tried to not publish a report that was published continuously for a hundred years. They just decided not to publish that so that the people of Alberta would not know what they were telling Albertans to believe, that insurance companies are broke and we all need to chip in to help them out.

Finally, when under pressure, they were made to publish that report, they released it quietly on a Thursday, and Albertans were able to see that whatever the government was telling us about insurance companies and how they are not viable and how they won't be profitable without removing that cap – they charged Albertans \$385 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019. While Albertans were struggling to make ends meet during the pandemic, these companies were making huge profits with the help of this UCP government. They collected more money from Albertans at a time when they were able to afford it the least. And then they tried to hide that information. That's exactly the reason that Albertans don't trust this UCP government.

Plus, they were saying things that were not true. Then they were hiding the report that Alberta has published for 100-plus years. And when the report came out, it was written in black and white that insurance companies were not broke. They charged Albertans more at a time when they were not able to afford it. They raised auto insurance,

for instance, anywhere from 20 to 30 per cent. If somebody was paying \$100, they're now paying \$300 thanks to this UCP government.

And still, when the UCP opens up the insurance bill, they turn a blind eye to the real issues facing Albertans across this province, that we hear every single day. Madam Chair, we do know that the government hears the same as well because we are sometimes CCed on those e-mails. But what the government does is that it ignores those Albertans. It doesn't listen to those concerns. They're completely – and they're just listening to what their lobbyist friends in the insurance industry tell them.

So one has to ask: while you're opening the Insurance Act, making these changes, that we have no concerns with, why is it that the government is not taking any action on skyrocketing insurance premiums? I don't think that answer is enough that the government tries to give to Albertans, that there are five, six companies that have asked for a rate reduction. Guess what? They increased the rate by 30 per cent; now they're asking for a rate reduction of 1 per cent or 2 per cent, 1.5 per cent. That's not enough. Why is it that the government is not willing to do anything or willing to take any action to address those skyrocketing insurance premiums?

4:10

And since the government works very closely with the insurance industry – they have close friends, the Premier's former staff, who are on insurance lobbyist teams – is there any rough idea how many more millions or billions Albertans have to chip in to make this insurance industry viable? Any rough estimate will help. I urge government members to share that information if they have that available. If not, the government should ask their friends in that industry how much more Albertans need to pay.

Also, with respect to the report that the government earlier tried to hide, while this act is open, why is it that the Minister of Finance is not bringing forward changes to make sure that we have that in legislation, that that report is published every year and that report is tabled in this Legislature? Why is that? Is there anybody who is willing to talk to the Minister of Finance and provide that answer for Albertans? Albertans would like to see how insurance companies are doing.

These are the concerns that we hear every single day in our constituencies. These are the concerns that we hear from Albertans every single day. They are worried about their insurance bills. They are worried about their utility bills. They are worried about costs being piled onto them by this government. Insurance costs are such that if you have to drive to get to school, if you have to go and do groceries, if you have to drive kids to soccer games, you need to have a vehicle. You will have that cost. And government policies are punishing Albertans just to insure their vehicle. It's getting harder and more difficult for Albertans to afford this UCP government anymore.

So while these changes to captive insurance, these changes to get unlicensed insurance for companies, and these changes for stand-alone reinsurance companies are good, the Minister of Finance and this government also need to make changes to make sure that Albertans can also afford insurance products, that they're able to afford to insure their vehicle. It is not enough, these talking points are not enough, that there are companies that are applying now for rate reductions after increasing that 25 to 35 per cent.

The government represents, first and foremost, Albertans, not the insurance industry and not their lobbyists. The government should step up and work for Albertans, and this is something that Albertans need action from this government on. They are hurting. They are unable to afford insurance products. And if anyone from this government wants to hear how these changes made by the UCP have impacted Albertans, they can come to my riding, and I am happy to take them on a tour.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 16 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I want to just start by acknowledging the importance of the previous member's speech, when he was talking about the residents of northeast Calgary and the devastation that so many experienced because of the hailstorms and then, unfortunately, the lack of support that this government provided. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has been a fierce advocate when it comes to advocating on behalf of the residents of northeast Calgary and the impacts of this devastating storm.

You know, I think it sets a tone for how we're discussing what the needs of Albertans are versus the legislation that we see put before us, and today is no exception to that pattern that we continue to see. When we're advised that the Insurance Amendment Act is coming forward, there's always a bit of hope that perhaps now this government will do something that actually has an impact and supports what Albertans are asking for.

Unfortunately, the pattern and the trend that we've seen are that the government will introduce something, and then, unfortunately, it actually does nothing to support what Albertans actually need, which is lower insurance rates. While there's not a lot in this piece of legislation that supports Albertans, it's not necessarily something that I would vote against. What's glaringly obvious in this legislation is the lack of actual tangible pieces that will actually support Albertans.

I know that many across the province have experienced insurance increases, around 20 to 30 per cent on average. I know the members opposite know this because we as opposition are CCed in most of the correspondence because there's not an actual response or action that comes from the government. I just think of the ongoing pleas that I hear as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs from my constituents about how difficult times are right now. Financially people are struggling. We have seen a government bring forward legislation that has potential to actually make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

However, again, we see in Bill 16 nothing that actually helps drivers in Alberta. We know that driving is something that is quite essential for many across the province. I would say that this government has arguably made that even a higher requirement, because if you live in rural Alberta right now and you need to access a doctor, you have to drive. You can't simply just walk down the street or ask a neighbour for a quick ride to go see your physician, because there aren't any.

In order to access something as essential as health care, unfortunately, many residents of the province are required to drive. You know, as someone who grew up in Whitecourt, Alberta – and my little brother was born in Whitecourt – I just don't understand how the bad decisions around supporting health care or the lack thereof from this government are putting so many people from my hometown in a place where they can't have their children in a hospital in their community. They have to drive who knows how far to be able to access that.

As a mother of three I can tell you that when a baby wants to come, they're coming now. Part of your prep is planning on what that looks like, and not knowing where your baby is going to be delivered, not knowing how far it's going to be is quite a big stress and not needed at that time in this expectant parent's life.

I think that when we're looking at what this government could have done, we've seen a history of what they have done. I would like to just take a walk down memory lane when it comes to insurance and what this government has done. Previously in this sitting we've seen, again, insurance legislation opened, and unfortunately what the UCP

thought was important at that time was to decrease the status of a concussion through an accident. They reduced it from being a serious injury. I don't understand how something as serious as concussions, something where we know there's so much research that has gone into the impacts of concussions and the extreme seriousness of that injury, with potential life-long impacts, was determined by this government to not be serious.

4:20

When we had the legislation open under insurance previously with this government, another thing that they did was reduce the number of physicians that were able to actually talk to an accident claim. You know, having been in conversations with people that have been in accidents, unfortunately, there are potentially several physicians that need to weigh in on insurance and the outcome of this individual that experienced an accident. You could have mental health, you could have surgeons regarding any of your bones, and you could have brain injury. There are so many things that happen. To be able to decide arbitrarily which physician gets the right to deliver the report, because this government reduced it to one physician, is a major, major impact on Albertans that have been in a motor vehicle accident.

That's the history that we've seen so far with some of the things that this government has chosen to do when they open up legislation.

Now, one of the things that we're seeing, definitely, with this government is that if you are a friend of theirs, you will have impact. I would argue that insurance companies have definitely had an impact when it comes to the decisions that this government is making, specifically their lobbyists, their friends, because we've seen in the province an incredible increase to the profits that insurance companies have and not an increase in Albertans' pocketbooks. We've seen decisions that actually are costing a lot more to the average Albertan's household.

We've seen insurance rates go up, like I mentioned previously, a 20 to 30 per cent increase on average. We've seen tuition rates skyrocket for students in the province. We've seen utility bills absolutely astronomical in this province. Those are the things that I'm hearing from Albertans, things that are impacting their income, their ability to make decisions on how to spend their money, whether it's their unfortunate \$400 electricity bill or their skyrocketing insurance to drive their car or food to feed their families.

We know that the food banks are up substantially in the number of individuals that are accessing them, and it's because people are being forced to pay rates that they shouldn't have to pay. They are being forced to pay for things that this government could easily come in and support. However, that's not what we're seeing. When we have bills presented on legislation that make changes but don't actually do what Albertans are asking for, there is a big disconnect between what Albertans are saying that they need and what this government is proposing as legislation.

I know that we had asked for a report – it is something that has been done in the province of Alberta by the Finance minister for over a hundred years – and unfortunately it took pressure from Albertans for them to produce this report. They did, reluctantly, and they put it out on a Thursday before a four-day long weekend, Madam Chair. Now, when you hear that, you know it's not going to be good news. You know that Albertans are not going to be benefiting from the details of that report. I just wonder why the favour is with highly profitable insurance companies as opposed to Albertans that are paying for insurance.

I have two young drivers in my family, and the cost for their insurance is absolutely ridiculous, what they're being asked to pay for insurance. Now, I understand that as young drivers their insurance is naturally higher. One of my children is a male; therefore, I know that

it's higher. But when you put in the cost of a 20 per cent to 30 per cent increase, they can't afford it.

One of my children is currently enrolled at the University of Alberta. She is pursuing a career in education, and a lot of her time is spent on her studies. She doesn't have a lot of extra time to work. She was laid off – she worked in the service industry for most of the pandemic – and she just doesn't have a whole lot of savings that she can access. She needs her car. She has the capacity to pay the insurance, but there are a lot of struggles that are impacting there. When you look at the cost of her tuition, when you look at her lack of access to employment over the pandemic, she's in a position where she's literally living paycheque to paycheque, and I can tell you, Madam Chair, that she's not alone.

There are so many young people in this province that are currently deciding whether or not they can afford postsecondary. Some of them are in their second, third year. Some of them are just deciding whether or not they should enter at all, if they can afford it. Those are conversations that absolutely should not be happening in the province of Alberta. We have a government that's made horrible decisions throughout the pandemic. They put an attack on the health care profession. We've watched decisions being made that did not reduce skyrocketing utility bills, and now we have this piece of legislation before us that really could have made an impact. Bill 16 could have been an opportunity for this government to show that they have actually heard Albertans talking about what their needs are. We don't see it in this. We see a piece of legislation that does nothing for Alberta drivers. It does not decrease their insurance.

I can tell you that there has been a lot of discussion from so many in Edmonton-Castle Downs about just the affordability right now in the province. I'm hearing from people that I'm shocked are considering leaving the province: educators that just feel completely defeated and unheard, unrespected in their profession, based on so many things that this government is doing with legislation, whether it's curriculum – it just doesn't end. When the cost of living comes up, it's not something that this government should be ignoring. People are struggling in the province. People have come to the government expecting that their needs are being met. They should be able to have access to health care providers in their community. They shouldn't have to drive to see a doctor.

These are things that we know they're asking for, yet this government isn't doing anything. They propose a piece of legislation like the Insurance Amendment Act and do nothing to actually support Alberta drivers. It's really concerning when over and over and over we're watching pieces of legislation that have potential to actually make a difference do nothing of the sort. I have had countless conversations with individuals about ideas that are just not being listened to, pleas for help when it comes to the cost of living in the province, some sort of support when it comes to utilities, their insurance, but this government instead chooses to put forward legislation that doesn't actually support them. It's very confusing when there are no changes in this legislation that would actually benefit drivers. We know that the insurance companies have billions in profits – billions – yet we don't see any support to the average Albertan and drivers.

We have many questions that just continue to go unanswered, and unfortunately I can tell you that that isn't unique to this piece of legislation. It's been an ongoing theme from this government to put in pieces of legislation that don't actually have an impact on the day-to-day lives of Albertans. If there is an opportunity to have an impact, we hear: don't worry; it'll be done in regulations.

4:30

We have a clear message that we're hearing from people all across the province. They need support with insurance. They need reductions. This doesn't do that, Madam Chair. I question: why would you take an opportunity to open the legislation, to create an

Insurance Amendment Act, and then not actually do what Albertans are asking for? It's a question that continues to go unanswered. It's something that we've watched over and over, where they favour their friends in decision-making. We watch them make pieces of legislation that keep their friends and insiders happy, yet it doesn't actually support Albertans.

So with that, Madam Chair, I will end my comments, and I look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and make a few comments with respect to Bill 16. I appreciate the debate in the House during Committee of the Whole. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has made a number of assertions around Bill 16 and, more broadly, around insurance in general. There are certainly a number of points that I have to agree with her on. Insurance costs are high, and we certainly recognize that. We are in an inflationary environment right now globally, certainly within the North American context, and I would agree with that. Affordability is a concern for Albertans, and I would agree with that. What I don't agree with is the assertion that this government is taking no action. That I simply can't agree on because we are taking action. Again, we're certainly taking action through Bill 16.

I'll talk about some of those details, but I do want to again just respond to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs around utilities. We are taking action with utilities. We are providing an electricity rebate, and that's a tangible, measurable affordability piece that will provide relief to every Alberta household. We're also taking action by suspending the fuel tax, saving every Albertan, every Alberta business, every Alberta nonprofit every time they go and fuel up their vehicle at the pumps. So, Madam Chair, we are taking action.

We're taking action on the insurance front as well. We're taking action in Bill 16. We have a hard insurance market in this province, in this nation, really in this continent. What that means is that there have been losses in the insurance industry, large claims over time in recent times, that have caused insurance providers to raise their premiums. They raised their premiums to recapitalize. They raised their premiums to reflect what they may believe are additional risks going forward. We're seeing that not only in Alberta; we're seeing that across the country, and in fact, to some degree, it's a global phenomenon. But we're taking action.

That's, in fact, why we brought forward to this House Bill 41. Bill 41 clarified, amongst other things, the definition of a minor injury with respect to automobile accidents. Certainly, our actuaries as well as industry actuaries all agreed that by providing that additional clarity, a similar definition to that used in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere, we would expect to see approximately \$120 of premium relief for every Albertan in terms of vehicle insurance. At the same time we added additional care in Bill 41 so that Albertans who had the misfortune of being injured in an automobile accident would in fact be able to access more care. So, Madam Chair, we are taking action.

You know, we hear from members on the opposite side, time after time, their reference to massive profitability in the insurance industry, and there's no doubt that insurance companies are profitable. Madam Chair, I've had a real interest in that question myself. I believe fundamentally that it's government's role to create a very, very competitive business environment, an environment that encourages more players to be active in a marketplace. Right now we have approximately 45 insurers in Alberta offering automobile insurance to consumers. We want to see that number go up because I believe that with increased competition we'll see better value for Albertans.

I have inquired with my department, who inquired with the body who is ultimately responsible for gathering statistics... [interjections] Madam Chair, the members opposite are heckling. They should listen because they're going to learn something right now. I have inquired with the statistical agency that gathers statistics with respect to premiums, losses, and profitability for Alberta insurers, in fact for insurers across this country. What I have found is that in 2020 – and this is statistical information that's available, I believe, to the public, certainly to the department, and I'm happy to provide it – on average insurers had a profit in the automobile insurance industry market. They made on average net \$11.59 per vehicle insured, and that's a profit. I was interested, you know: are they making \$300, \$400 a vehicle? Are they in a loss position like they have been in some years? No, they were in a profitable position in 2020, netting \$11.59 per vehicle.

Madam Chair, I'm not suggesting that automobile insurance premiums are low. They're not. But what that tells me is that we need to deal with the systemic issues that are driving up costs in the sector. That's how we'll ultimately provide better value for Alberta automobile insurance consumers, and that's why we brought in Bill 41. The good news is that at this point in time we're seeing automobile insurance premiums flatten out, level out, which is very encouraging because even under the NDP rate cap they were going up, at a minimum, 5 per cent per year. They're levelling out right now, and we're continuing to monitor that. It's our role to ensure that we have a regulatory framework that provides an efficient, effective automobile insurance experience for insurance companies but, more importantly, for Alberta consumers. We continue to monitor our progress.

With respect to Bill 16 we're taking action. Last fall we passed I believe it was Bill 76, the captive insurance corporations act, which effectively enabled captive insurance companies to exist and operate here in the province of Alberta. That was tangible action to deal with an insurance challenge. In Bill 16 we are further enhancing that captive insurance corporations act to provide clarification around redomestication if an Alberta company has a captive insurance subsidiary domiciled outside of the nation.

This additional clarity will make it easier for these Alberta parent companies to redomesticate their captives into the province, with a goal of expanding the insurance industry in Alberta, expanding solutions and options for, ultimately, insurance consumers and for growing our financial services sector right here in Alberta. I have to say that when we enabled captive insurance in the province, it was very well received by Alberta parent companies who have captives domiciled elsewhere, but also it was very well received by other entities within the province who were considering a captive insurance company as an insurance solution.

Bill 16 also enables reinsurance and, maybe more importantly, offers a well-understood corporate structure that has served Alberta businesses, companies, entities very well in other applications, and that's the use of a limited partnership. We've taken advice from an expert committee around insurance. Certainly, this was a recommendation that they believed would be important, would move the meter in terms of attracting attention and investment in the reinsurance space. That's what Bill 16 is all about.

4:40

I have to say, Madam Chair, that we recognize that insurance costs are high, but we're taking action. We're working to ensure we have the most favourable regulatory environment in this province so that businesses can set up shop here in Alberta and offer Albertans the most cost-effective insurance products available, possible.

Madam Chair, I could contrast that to the efforts of the NDP when they were in office. Their ultimate move was simply to put a rate cap

in place. I think we all recognize that if a rate cap is put in place – if we as a government legislate what businesses can charge but don't deal with the systemic issues that are driving up their costs, what happens? Companies that work in that space just start to pull out, start to pull back. We were starting to see that. Had we left that rate cap in place, I am very confident that we would have had massive capacity by this point in time pull out of the insurance industry in Alberta, leaving fewer players, fewer choices for Albertans. Ultimately, if left in place without dealing with the systemic issues driving up costs, it would have led to a collapse in the insurance industry, and that would have been unacceptable to Albertans.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the chance to rise and debate Bill 16 in Committee of the Whole, and I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 15 and report Bill 16.

[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 certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 16. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 15.

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

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

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

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time 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.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 2: Member Irwin]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment RA1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before I begin speaking about Bill 11 – I know it's not customary under current standing orders, but I think in this instance you'll make an exception – I just want to recognize that our previous Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Brian Hodgson, is here visiting. Perhaps he became a little nostalgic and wanted to be back inside the House. I just wanted to say that it's wonderful to see you, sir. I hope that you're doing well, and I'm wishing you and your family the very best.

Of course, we are discussing Bill 11, Continuing Care Act. We have before us a reasoned amendment, and of course this is so that the proposed piece of legislation just not carry forward. I think that on this side of the House we've been able to demonstrate significantly that although this bill is an administrative piece of legislation, there are so many other things that the Minister of Health has failed to address when it actually comes to continuing care here in the province of Alberta.

Now, of course, continuing care legislation and rules are split between many different acts and regulation, including the Nursing Homes Act, the Hospitals Act, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, and the co-ordinated home and community care regulation. Bill 11 consolidates various acts so that different parts of continuing care, both home care and facility-based care, have similar processes, governing legislation. Notably, the bill does not make much significant change since most of the substantial aspects of care, which are, of course, the fees, the standards, and the staffing, are all going to be decided through regulation, Madam Speaker. I think that I along with my colleagues have been able to demonstrate significantly that these are the things that most Albertans are truly concerned about when it comes to this particular bill. It's disheartening to see that they're not being addressed in legislation.

Of course, so many Albertans, those particularly who have family in care, are really concerned about staffing and the ratios. It's been proposed before, and I don't know why it's something that the Minister of Health couldn't potentially actually put forward in the legislation here today, but staffing ratios in relation to the amount of people in continuing care are a serious situation that could have been dealt with within this piece of legislation. Of course, staffing and the issues that people who work in this particular line of work experience are a considerable issue that could have been addressed in Bill 11 as well, and unfortunately we just didn't see it.

I mean, it's not just coming from us on this side of the House. The facility-based continuing care review highlighted so many of these issues that we're currently bringing up. I mean, just fees alone: it's quite incredible the amount that people have to pay in order to keep a loved one in continuing care here in the province of Alberta.

You know, we just finished hearing this diatribe from the Minister of Finance saying that in relation to insurance – of course, he was debating another bill. He was saying that you welcome privatization in and costs are supposed to go down. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on this side was, like: well, how many companies have to come in in order to bring that price down, to bring that cost down here in the province of Alberta when it came to insurance? The minister said that there are currently 45, so how many do we need? Do we need 100? Do we need 200? How many? Then again, when it comes to continuing care facilities, is that the type of thing that we want to be bringing into the province of Alberta? How many continuing care companies are we going to need in order to drive down the price for continuing care here in the province of Alberta, which in essence is the service of caring for loved ones with dignity?

Because the staffing ratios aren't there, that's not what Albertans are getting, and you have this paradox because, you know, the company is trying to obtain the greatest amount of profit through this process as possible. What are your two major expenses in any

business? Well, it's going to be your rent or the mortgage you're paying on the business in order to conduct that business and then labour. Of course, in the continuing care industry you have these private operators trying to do their very best to lower their costs, because that's how private business works when they're trying to achieve greater and greater and greater profits.

4:50

That's why this is so important. Yes, we are leaving this industry or opening up this industry to the free market, but at the same time there need to be certain regulations in place because, number one, we're talking about the service of caring for people in continuing care with dignity and respect. You can't just leave that entirely up to the market. You cannot leave that entirely up to the market and for operators to basically just come up with their own rules and hope for the best. So, yes, we do need regulation when it comes to people in care to make sure that they are treated with dignity and respect. The bare minimum that the government could do is actually provide in legislation ratios for staffing to people in care. I think that this would be the bare minimum that the government could provide, yet the Minister of Health has omitted that very suggestion that has come from a number of advocates and stakeholders in this particular industry.

It's saddening, really, because I honestly believe that a lot of seniors especially are not being treated with dignity and care inside of these facilities. We've all heard the horror stories, so why can't we agree on this? Okay. I'll give it to the members on the other side. You know, I'll let them have – certain things, yes, should be just left to the free market, but this is not one of them, especially our seniors in this province, that have dedicated their entire lives contributing to our society. This is definitely not one of them.

As I've explained time and again in this House, when it comes to the free market and the laws of supply and demand, you're going to have people that are going to be able to access – you're just not going to be able to get people that will access the level and quality of care that they deserve in a free-market system. This is what's so disheartening, that we see this government pushing us more and more and more when it comes to not only this industry but almost everything in the province of Alberta, pushing us more and more towards a free market, to free-market principles, right?

We have the Minister of Infrastructure and the fact that, you know, he's completely open to P3s even though we've seen in jurisdiction after jurisdiction the horrible application of P3s. You know, essentially, it's a way that governments can actually hide costs when they're balancing the books, but those costs are still there in the long run, never mind, Madam Speaker, when you're talking about the externalities, as I've mentioned several times in this House. It's almost like you're trying to save a buck today, but you're going to end up having to pay exponentially later. That's why I don't understand why the members on the other side can't see that, right? It's disheartening to see that even though you have statistical studies out there, that we could reference, where it's not always the answer – and this is definitely not one of them.

For that reason, I would really hope – and I know it's a long shot – that all members in this House will actually vote in favour of this amendment. Now, we've had the opportunity to debate, and I'm really happy that the Minister of Health has actually gotten up, especially in Committee of the Whole, and has addressed some of the issues that we've brought up in debate, but of course he hasn't talked about all of them. He hasn't addressed them all when it comes to this particular piece of legislation.

As I already mentioned, the government has not acted on several recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review, and you can't help but ask: well, what are they waiting for? They've

been in government for three years now. For three years they've been in government, and I get it. When you're in government, you have certain priorities, and you want to get certain things done. Sometimes you can get to everything, but on this one, on treating especially our seniors with the dignity and respect that they deserve, you'd think that this would be one that's important, the one that they would move on when it comes to the facility-based continuing care review. Of course, that review stated that there needs to be an increase in the amount of home care provided, just that alone; then, again, improving work conditions for continuing care staff.

I've already highlighted it in debate, but I believe that it bears repetition here once again, and that is the fact that the majority of the people that actually work in this industry are new Canadians, racialized people. Because of the fact that we have private continuing care operators that, again, are seeking the greatest amount of profit by providing this service, these staff are paid the lowest wages and then, on top of that, don't have benefits. Why? It tends to be racialized Canadians. When you're a racialized individual and you look at this scenario and you see that whenever it comes to the private sector – and the only job that you can get is within that private sector – you're treated with no benefits and lower wages, you start asking yourself: well, why is this? Why am I being treated as a second-class citizen?

Ultimately, you know, there are a number of issues of fairness that need to be dealt with here as well, and that's another reason why the Minister of Health could have come forward with a proposed piece of legislation that could actually address these issues, because racialized individuals within this province are feeling discriminated against. You know, I remember my mother, of course, coming to this country, having to learn English, and I remember having many a discussion with her and her feeling the very same way, that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to offer some comments on this amendment. Let me just follow up on some of the things that my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie was talking about during his speech. You know, he was talking about his opinion that the continuing care sector is not one that should be dominated by market forces, if I could summarize it succinctly like that. Let me just build on that and say that I firmly and strongly believe that for-profit continuing care service is immoral. It is not right that people should profit off caring for the sick and the elderly and people who are not able to look after themselves. That's not to say that I don't think people should make a living being able to look after that. I think that people who work in the health care field should absolutely be able to look after themselves while they're looking after others who need it, but I do not believe that investors, shareholders should profit off people's pain and suffering.

5:00

I'm not the only one who believes that, Madam Speaker. In doing a little bit of research around the history of continuing care in the province of Alberta, it was astounding to me that the Social Credit government of this province also agreed that it was immoral to profit off caring for people who needed it in the long term. They made it illegal to profit off caring for people who were in long-term care facilities. I think that that is something that the province of Alberta would have been wise to continue.

I can see that my friend the Minister of Infrastructure is again audibly sighing listening to my speeches. I would encourage the minister that if he takes issue with the things that I have to say, either he can get up and respond to them, or he can remove himself

from the Chamber. But interjecting in this way is not helpful and only serves to lower the tone of the debate in this House.

On this particular amendment, though, the amendment is worded such that this bill – if the amendment is passed, this bill would not be read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the minister didn't adequately consult with the families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care. As we've said over and over again in this House, hundreds of people lost their lives to COVID while in continuing care. This bill does absolutely nothing to address the circumstances that led to that happening or make any attempt to try to fix it.

In fact, the minister is so closed off to the idea of addressing the problems that led to the deaths of so many people in continuing care due to COVID that he refuses to even open up public consultations on the matter. When I asked the minister the last time that we had a chance to talk about this a few days ago – I asked him directly if he would allow some forum, some public forum, for the families who have lost their loved ones to COVID to at least have their stories heard, to at least be able to tell the minister and the people in the Health department who are responsible for continuing care what happened to their loved ones who died from COVID. What did the minister say? He brushed it off. He said: "No, we don't need any more consultation. We've done enough consultation on this matter." He's not interested in listening to people share their stories about this anymore. That's completely offensive.

There's been no public consultation whatsoever on how government has managed the COVID crisis in continuing care or anywhere else. I know of no forum where the families and friends of people who died of COVID in continuing care can even submit their stories for consideration.

Mr. Carson: No Seniors Advocate.

Mr. Schmidt: There's no Seniors Advocate anymore.

People are left to carry this grief, mourn their loss on their own, with no hope of any improvement for people who are still living in the continuing care system and at risk of dying of COVID. I don't think that that's fair. I don't think that that's responsible government. At the very least, give people an opportunity to share their stories so that their loved ones didn't die completely in vain. I mean, it's too late now to take actions that could have prevented the deaths of the people who we've already lost, but it's not too late to take preventative measures to make sure that it doesn't happen to anyone else.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

COVID certainly hasn't gone anywhere, as much as the government refuses to admit that it's a problem anymore, won't talk about it anymore. COVID hospitalizations are as high as they've ever been, with the exception of a few days in January of 2022. So the risks of residents of long-term care dying from COVID, I would suggest, are as high now as they've ever been at any point during the pandemic, and the minister doesn't want to hear a word about it.

That's why I'm encouraging all of my colleagues here in the House to vote in favour of this amendment. Give the government time to construct a meaningful consultation process with the families and loved ones of those who died of COVID in continuing care. Hear what they have to say. I'm sure they'll offer some suggestions on how continuing care facilities could be safer. We could also make sure that we bring in experts or people from other jurisdictions who've done a better job of managing COVID. Now is not the time to be passing this piece of legislation. We need to give the families of the people who died a voice. We need to validate their experiences and show that we've learned from our mistakes and are doing better.

So for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues here in the House to vote in favour of this amendment and give the families of those who we've lost to COVID hope for justice of some kind.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this reasoned amendment. I offer a few thoughts that I will begin with by recognizing the tremendous number of front-line workers in the long-term care and assisted living sector in Lethbridge. We have a large number of seniors and folks over 65 in varying levels of congregate care and a great deal of home-care workers as well as a result of the demographics of the city.

Indeed, people have worked through tremendously challenging conditions through the pandemic. Certainly, long-term care and assisted living in particular and home care, I would argue, are areas where folks are just managing at the best of times. During the pandemic people were asked to go over and above, oftentimes without, especially in the early days, appropriate PPE, without having any explicit rules around working in one site, often without those full-time hours and that full-time employment, which we know leads to better outcomes both for the staff and folks who continue to see themselves in these personal care professions but also over time in terms of the outcomes and health care outcomes for people even absent a pandemic but certainly during it.

There is no question that we owe these front-line workers a great debt of gratitude. In fact, when I was reading through the Royal Society paper on COVID-19 and its effect on long-term care, the Royal Society of Canada indicates that this is an area where the workforce is prone to a great deal of burnout and leaving this line of work. Even still, people in these areas of work report a great deal of satisfaction with their jobs.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, oftentimes people working in these areas are providing a voice to the voiceless. The frail elderly have shockingly few advocates, and oftentimes in assisted living there is more family interaction because the family is taking up a great deal of the care work with respect to getting their elderly parent often to appointments and so on. But in long-term care the isolation became even more pronounced during the pandemic, and it was oftentimes the workers that filled in those gaps, certainly, during the pandemic.

We had 1,600 Albertans perish of COVID-19 in congregate living facilities, seniors, during the pandemic. By contrast, in Quebec there has been a coroner's inquiry when 4,000 people died, and it's quite a larger province. That coroner's inquiry called 220 witnesses, including a couple of ministers. In Ontario, which also saw a great deal of deaths in long-term care and assisted living, they had a commission that just recently submitted its final report to government.

In Alberta we have an Auditor General who has looked into the issue but was blocked, specifically blocked, from making his findings on his investigation into the COVID-19 response in long-term care and assisted living in Alberta by UCP MLAs who blocked his request, refused it, voted it down a couple of times, for him to make those findings public and answer questions about those findings at the June meeting of the Public Accounts Committee.

I believe that families, front-line workers, and the residents themselves deserve better. I believe that the isolation and the stress of the pandemic and the separation from family and loved ones was quite likely exacerbated by understaffing and had a great deal of

effect on people in their final days. I believe this because I saw it up close. I shared with this House watching someone in the final year of her life move from assisted living into long-term care and back to acute care and back to long-term care during the context of the pandemic. People didn't get what they deserved, certainly, or even what they needed in terms of their health care needs at that time.

We see a workforce, Mr. Speaker, that is disproportionately women, immigrants, and racial minorities. We see a workforce that in Alberta, by the government's own figures, is short approximately 6,000 FTEs. We see a long-term care and assisted living system whereby private, for-profit care settings fared worse through the pandemic, where we see lower ratios, potentially lower investments in building maintenance, in PPE, and lower pay.

We certainly see a situation in Alberta where creativity for quality of life was not at all – not at all – something that we were able to see our way through to providing for people. People were reduced to waving at each other through windows rather than having the appropriate staff ratios and enough personal care aides to get elderly people outside so that they could engage with their family members, sometimes at the end of their lives. We haven't seen any level of accountability, not even allowing the Auditor General to speak to the public about his findings on this.

We have seen the minister get up and be very proud of his legislation because it provides a better administrative and statutory framework. Well, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. That does not exactly rouse the enthusiasm of families and those living in long-term care and assisted living through the pandemic. That's not what leads to quality of life, a better administrative framework. This sort of bureaucratise is no salve for what people actually need. What people actually need is a commitment from government that "the fractures in our nursing home system," as they are referred to in the Royal Society of Canada report on the matter, resulted in "high levels of physical, mental and emotional suffering for our older adults."

I'll quote directly from this Royal Society report because it actually hit home for me.

Those lives lost unnecessarily . . .

They're referring to the COVID-19 pandemic.

. . . had value. Those older adults deserved a good closing phase of their lives and a good death. We failed them. We have a duty to care and to fix this – not just to fix the current communicable disease crisis, but to fix the sector that enabled that crisis to wreak such avoidable and tragic havoc. We have the capacity, the knowledge and the resources to take immediate steps toward restoring the trust we have broken. This is our choice.

That's directly from the Royal Society of Canada working paper on long-term care, that came out by June 2020. Canadian researchers got straight to work on the extremely important public policy conversations that needed to come out of COVID-19 and the level of accountability and what we needed to learn and how we needed to measure it as a result of this crisis in long-term care and assisted living.

That is what we have been asking for as an Official Opposition as an approach to this issue. There is nothing in this legislation in terms of measurement, metrics, data gathering, any kind of evaluation, any kind of guarantee of better outcomes. One can put those things in legislation. One can give those statutory expression. There's nothing stopping us from doing it except that this government will not. It won't even have the conversation about better quality of life for elderly people, let alone learn anything from what we've just been through over the last two years.

Now, the government's own facility-based review exercise, unimplemented, indicates, as I shared with the House, 6,000 FTEs required. Other organizations have also studied this matter of

learning from the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care. Again, the Royal Society's executive summary indicates that

provincial and territorial governments must make available full-time employment with benefits to all unregulated staff and regulated nursing staff. They should also evaluate the impact on nursing homes of "one workplace" policies,"

as I discussed. By the way, parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, this is something that was happening all across the country. Alberta was months behind other jurisdictions on the one-workplace policy. I remember the government providing various excuses for this monumentally unsafe approach to our nursing homes, our long-term care and assisted living facilities. They tried to blame the unions or something, but it was completely ridiculous. All they needed to do was make it happen and appropriately fund it, which they did not do, which put people's lives at risk.

We also need better continuing education for the unregulated and regulated direct care workforce and, really important to a conversation we've been having recently in this House, around data collection in all appropriate spheres. One of the recommendations of the Royal Society indicates that

data collected must include resident quality of care . . . quality of life, resident and family experiences, and quality of work life for staff.

It sure would be easier to collect that sort of data if we still had an office of the independent seniors' advocate, Mr. Speaker, which we do not, that this bill could have restored.

I'm back to the Royal Society report now.

Data must be collected using validated, appropriate tools . . . must address disparities and compounding vulnerabilities among both residents and staff, such as race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, guardianship status, socioeconomic status, religion, physical or intellectual disability status, and trauma history screening;

in other words, making sure that our care for our elderly people appropriately fits in ways that we now make sure and understand that we need to deliver all of our provincial services, whether it's health care, education, social services, housing, justice services, and so on. The extent to which we care about this issue is the extent to which I believe we care about our whole human family, from beginning to end.

5:20

I'm going to conclude with a quote from Carole Estabrooks, who is a U of A researcher and professor. She's quoted here in a University of Alberta Folio piece on some of the national standards and other investments and recommendations that the Royal Society made in the wake of the first wave of the pandemic. This quote really stood out to me.

In the end, Estabrooks said she is hopeful that change is coming, but worries about those who suggest the cost will be too high.

"It is going to cost more, and the federal government is going to have to help," she said. "At the end of the day, it's as simple as, "What can you expect when you live in Canada and get old? Will you be cared for in such a way that you not only have good quality care, but you also have a good quality of life, even in advanced dementia?"

"What is that life – that life that raised us, that built the economy, that paid taxes – what is it really worth to us?"

These are Carole Estabrooks' words, but I think this, too.

I think it is worth a lot, that the value we place on a life lived should be no less than that which we place on one about to be lived.

This is health care by yet another name, Mr. Speaker, but it extends into an area of our lives that we have allowed to wither, believing that we can have some people pay for it and other people just be isolated away with very small levels of care delivered by

workers who are not honoured in the appropriate way for their time and their talent.

That is why this bill just is not good enough. It does not reflect the level of urgency, the social and economic need for a real reckoning with how we approach long-term care and assisted living. It is for that reason that I speak in favour of this reasoned amendment, and I exhort the members of this House to recommit ourselves to do better by our most frail, elderly people, who are often, too often, left voiceless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other members looking to join on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. As I had an opportunity to speak to the body of it before, I just will take a moment to reiterate sort of the central theme, and that is that I certainly am supportive of the ongoing work to improve continuing care, and I certainly agree with the expansion of home care that is intended by this bill.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

I was, you know, quite clear when I first spoke to this that there are a number of parts of the bill that I really support. I mentioned section 20, section 49, section 48, and many others. I took the time at that time to talk about the pieces that I appreciate because I really, certainly, want members of the government to understand that any of my criticisms are about improving the bill and moving it forward and doing good work, good work based on some work done by members of the government side.

I mean, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was involved in the facility-based continuing care review as the chair of the committee and spoke quite well about the amount of work that went in, the number of people that were consulted with, which, you know, became the basis of this act. At the time I commended that member – and I continue to – and, of course, all of the people that participated in that review, putting the time in to ensure that there was deep consideration for the issues that are at hand here.

The thing that I am concerned about and the reason why I'm standing now to agree to this amendment is because I think that work that was done by the facility-based continuing care review is not adequately reflected in this bill. There's no reason for it not to be. Certainly, many of the recommendations from that review could be brought forward, and I would like to see the government actually take the time to do exactly that. You've done the hard work; just finish it off. Don't get two steps before the finish line and then stop and pause. You know, that's the old fable of the rabbit and the tortoise. The tortoise ends up winning only because the rabbit actually stops in mid-motion. It doesn't continue at the pace that it was initially headed out in. What I would like to see, for once, is the rabbit to win. Just continue the work that was started quite well by this facility-based continuing care review. That's the most important piece.

But I want to take my time to talk about something a little different than what has been talked about by others up until this point, and that is my deep desire to see a serious amount of attention being put on home care and the expansion of home-care services so that things are available for citizens in this province that are actually already available in many other jurisdictions around the world.

I happened to have the opportunity, while I was vice-president of family services at Catholic Social Services, to be responsible for a program that was examining the role that Catholic Social Services may take in expanding home care. I had an opportunity to work for a few years on a pretty extensive review of what's possible in home care, where it is conducted. It is now some almost 20 years ago – I'm too old

– that we took the time to actually look at what is possible in home care. Unfortunately, it has not moved forward very well in this province at this time. People are still in the position where unless they have a family member who is able to surrender their employment and provide for them, they're most likely going to end up in some kind of continuing care if their health requires it.

Now, thankfully, medicine has also moved us to a point where many people are able to stay in their own homes throughout the duration of their life, with very little time in any kind of a care facility and many even with no time in care facilities. Thank you to all the great health care practitioners that have made sure that that is now a reality for many people in society. I certainly wish this government would spend as much time celebrating that kind of success as they spend fighting with doctors and nurses and trying to take the money away from respiratory therapists and so on.

The thing I want to talk about most as absent in this bill and the reason why we need the amendment is because there really has been a lack of effort in moving home care along. I understand partly why, because it is indeed a complex issue. The issue isn't simply an issue of health. It's also an issue of social demography and responsibility and employment and pensions and benefits and all those other things that come up, and that is that when someone is in the state of having ill health, we have a medical system that often can deal with the issues of health in terms of pain management or of slowing down at least, if not reversing, actual health conditions and trauma to the body.

But often the reason why people move into continuing care is not their health itself but their ability to respond to daily needs. Those daily needs are often not health needs but, rather, the other kinds of needs that someone has. You can be at home and have your health maintained, but if you can't get out the door to go buy groceries, you've got a problem. If you can't, you know, clean your floors, if you can't clean your bathrooms, if you can't do your laundry, if you can't make your bed, these are all issues that come to the place where you start to say: I can no longer live alone. It's not because the medical system isn't able to help you manage the health problems that you have, but the complexity of managing those in a solitary situation is very problematic.

5:30

I remember my mother used to joke that she wished she had a little drawer with a man inside that she could just open up maybe once a day and have them do one or two tasks and then put them back in the drawer and close the drawer again. The reason why is because she needed help with specific tasks, and although, you know – lots of children in our family – we all came by regularly to see her until COVID made that very difficult, we clearly were not there full time every single day. That meant that while tasks would get done, they would get done at the convenience of people who were not resident in the home. Therefore, whenever we happened to come by, there would be the jars on the counter: "While you're here, could you open these jars and put them in the fridge for me? Can you move these boxes of things? Can you put some more things into my fridge from the storage room?" You know, a variety of small tasks like that.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

It is a very complex area, and we need to take the time to look at: what is it that helps an individual to stay in their own home beyond the issues of health management? If we continue to neglect those kinds of problems, we are never going to be able to ensure that people are able to stay in their own home. At some point they are going to give up because they simply can't do all the tasks.

Now, one of the things I know is that people in society are very kind and generous. They certainly do things like volunteer to shovel walks, and often a neighbour is great at helping to pick up groceries and so on. But the problem with charity is that it is always at the whim of the charity giver. It is not consistent. It is not organized around the needs of the recipient; it's organized around the availability and the desires of the giver of charity, which is why we have systematically moved away from a charity model to a more structural model of care in our society to ensure that people are well taken care of.

In other areas in our lives it would be considered absurd if we said: "Well, let's not teach children how to read. Let's just depend on the charity of others to teach the children in their lives how to read." You would say that's silly. We send them to school and make sure that a hundred per cent of the children have the opportunity, not just the ones who happen to have someone around who happens to have the time and so on.

So we can't depend on charity because it is by its nature unreliable and, by its nature, is not focused on the needs of the individual receiving it. You know, charity as a moral imperative is wonderful because it impels people to actually do some things about it, but very few people say the ultimate: I am going to give up all of my own needs in terms of employment and earning an income and the benefits and pensions that come with that in order to take care of somebody else because they have a greater need than me. I certainly know people that have done that, and I have deep, deep respect for that, but that is so rare that it is ridiculous for us as a society to depend on that kind of thing.

Then there's also the question about who it is that inevitably ends up giving up all of their own personal benefits – their job, their benefits, their pension plans, and so on – and the vast majority of time that falls on women and is not equally distributed with men. So we have a systemic problem here. We have a problem that if we do not provide adequate home care in the way that it should be provided, we are essentially asking women to do what we would never ask men to do, and that is to give up their employment to take care of another.

Now, I know that's not the intention. We say, "Well, anybody can do that," but we know statistically that doesn't happen. Statistically it's women that end up losing their income, losing their choice, and losing their own mechanisms of well-being in order to provide care. It is therefore important that as a society we not allow that to happen, not allow a systemic discrimination to continue to occur, and we should establish a structure that provides for the well-being of all citizens that does not depend on discriminating against one group over another. That's just something that's no longer acceptable in our society. As such, we need to make sure that we have a systemic, well-organized, universally accessible, and publicly paid for service that helps to provide expanded home care services so that we can keep people out of continuing care.

Now, this may sound, you know, like pie-in-the-sky idealism on my part. However, from the work I did when I was at Catholic Social Services, I was able to learn that this already existed 20 years ago and is being used in many countries in the world, typically in northern European countries. Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland, Germany all have models that have what I'm talking about to some significant degree. Finland, for example, has an almost completely comprehensive model in which they have been able to reduce the number of people going into continuing care by a significant amount. The vast majority of people, even with needs that make them dependent, whether it be health care or other kinds of in-home care needs – it's down now to a very, very minimal number of people that are going into care. I think that's good. I think that's positive.

I think it's something that we should aspire to and something that we can achieve simply by learning from other jurisdictions, which is exactly the point of this amendment, that we are seeking to have this no longer move ahead until we've done the work to actually make this section of the bill more robust and to deal with the issues that are in front of us. We know that not only should we do it in order to avoid systemic discrimination against one group in society, but we can do it because it is being done in jurisdictions that are very similar to our own. It's simply a matter of political choice. Are we prepared to do what we can to ensure that people stay in their own homes and live the good life that they possibly could live, or are we prepared to just say, "No, people are just going to have to suffer and go into longer term care situations, which are certainly not as satisfying as living in your own home"?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has stood.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon, or evening, to speak to the proposed amendment before us, that, again:

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.

I completely support this amendment. I've appreciated the points that have been made by several speakers before me this afternoon. It's going to be hard for me to do a better job than that. That's just simply the fact.

But I, like many of my colleagues before me, have concerns with Bill 11. First of all, I guess, just reflecting on the decisions that this government has made previously in regard to long-term care sites – you may remember that back in April 2021, I believe, we saw this government put forward legal liability protections for continuing care or long-term care providers. At the time we were seeing – about 61 per cent of deaths, I believe, from COVID-19 at that time were happening in these long-term care sites or facilities or homes. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a devastating fact and figure and clearly shows that this UCP government and we as a society did not do enough to protect the seniors in those communities.

But at the point of seeing this high amount of life loss in our communities and across the province, instead of increasing protections and increasing quality of care for seniors across the province, this government decided to add legal protections for these long-term care facilities and these long-term care companies. Unfortunately, since then we have not seen much work done to improve the quality of care, to improve reporting, necessarily, or monitoring of these facilities.

5:40

We have heard from many speakers before me this afternoon reflecting on what we saw from this government: the facility-based continuing care review. I would repeat and echo the comments of previous speakers that there was a real opportunity to make impactful change for seniors and for families across this province if only the government followed through on the proposals that were put forward in this review. There were many important pieces within this that would have been attainable from this government, but, again, as we look at Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, the most consequential amendment that we see in here in terms of holding these companies and these long-term care sites accountable is an amendment talking about increasing the amount that an operator can be fined to \$100,000 from \$10,000.

While I can appreciate that, on one hand I think we must also reflect on the fact that through the COVID-19 pandemic and onward we have not seen any movement from the government to strengthen regulations, to strengthen the requirements to provide quality of care, to monitor things like staffing and the idea of staffing burnout, and ensuring that we don't see staff going from one facility to another.

As we heard from previous speakers, often this type of work can be precarious. The people on the front lines are well intentioned and trained, often as best as they can be, but the fact is that in many instances there aren't benefits being provided to these workers and there aren't full-time opportunities. That is something that was spoken to in the facility-based continuing care review recommendations from the final report on April 30, 2021. It discussed the fact that in many instances these workers were not getting full-time employment, that they were potentially going from one site to another and had the potential to create further spread of COVID-19.

It truly doesn't seem like this government has learned anything from this report, as good as it may be, which is truly unfortunate because they had a real opportunity to make choices, and they could have been reflected in this Bill 11. But, unfortunately, we see very little in terms of the recommendations that were put forward in this report. Again, when we look at some of the topics that it talked about and issues and concerns, the need for an increased focus on quality of life and person-centred care for facility-based continuing care residents, have we seen anything to prove that the government has made any changes to this model and ensuring that regulations and rules that are in place are increasing the quality of life for these families?

There's no doubt that it has been incredibly complicated and complex keeping seniors safe but also ensuring that they have a better quality of life and ensuring that they are able to stay integrated into their community, whether they are in their home but, more specifically, in a long-term care site. But the fact is that the government hasn't taken any steps required in terms of ensuring that there's adequate staffing, ensuring that those staff feel that they have mental health supports in place, ensuring that those staff have benefits that are going to ensure that they don't have to go and get a second job, that they don't have to go to several long-term care homes to be able to support their own family, let alone the families that they are trying to support in these sites.

Again, some of the other recommendations in terms of improving co-ordination for monitoring and inspections. This truly goes back to the idea that, again, not only is this government trying to reduce the liability to these long-term care companies and again, through Bill 11, increasing the fines, but increasing fines does nothing. It means nothing if you aren't increasing the regulations and the requirements of these facilities to provide adequate quality of life, to provide adequate monitoring to ensure that the families that are relying on these sites and on these homes are getting adequate support.

We saw this tragic story play out – and very unlikely that it was a unique situation here in Alberta; I'm sure it's happened in other sites, but I'm not sure that we've learned anything from it – in the story of the family who found that their senior or their parent had been mistreated in a facility, that they had died from dehydration, that they weren't being provided adequate supports, and that they weren't being taken care of properly. What we saw from that is staff reporting that they were completely burned out, that they didn't have the proper supports to ensure that they could in turn support the families that they were supposed to be caring for. What have we learned from that? Through Bill 11, what we see before us, it seems this government has learned nothing.

As we reflect on this amendment to Bill 11, that it not now be read a second time because we aren't of the view here in the Assembly that sufficient consultation on the contents has been carried out, I again completely agree with that amendment. I think it's completely

reasonable, that what we see in Bill 11 is not adequate in terms of supporting the families across the province who have not received the proper care and support that they should expect from this government and that they would expect from any government.

I think that there was also an important point, that I believe the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford made and likely several other members, about the need for more long-term home care, and that is reflected in that report, that report recommending that we shift the current distribution here in Alberta of continuing care services from 61 per cent long-term home care and 39 per cent facility-based continuing care to a ratio of 70 per cent and 30 per cent. What movement have we seen from the government with this expert review report coming back to them and having a year to reflect on the important issues that have been raised by this report? What movement have we seen on that?

I know that when we look at the supports that are provided by this government and the decision from this government to deindex important benefits like the Alberta seniors' benefit, that this year alone is costing many seniors \$750 a year – of course, that would only increase year after year when it was previously indexed. The government went back on that decision, so we are seeing systemically dollars being taken out of the pockets of seniors, and it is only going to see more and more needing further service from the government and increased costs on our health care system across the board, which is completely disappointing but not surprising from this government on the many backwards decisions that they made.

Another one, an important thing that needs to be pointed out and has been by members so far, is the lack of an independent seniors advocate here in the province, the government's decision to not find somebody to fill that position. I've spoken with many people out in the community, whether it be nonprofit organizations who deal with seniors, whether it be aging citizens in my community who are deeply concerned that such an important role, the role of an advocate to, well, Mr. Speaker, advocate on behalf of these seniors – that whether it be about long-term care, whether it be about facilities in their community, whether it be about income supports, whatever the issue might be, they have somebody to go and talk to and potentially get answers. Unfortunately, this government, on such an important role, the seniors advocate, has made the decision to not fill that role. Completely devastating.

5:50

You know, looking at the facility-based continuing care report, again, something that – the UCP government commissioned this report, had the opportunity to reflect on it and improve the services provided to seniors through long-term care and, unfortunately, just didn't follow through with these things. I just do not understand, because in many situations, while some of them likely would cost more money when we are talking about providing adequate staffing levels and providing that mental health support – but these things will pay themselves off in the short term. But in some instances, whether we're talking about expanding home care, their own report shows that it's very likely to save money, so I'm not sure, especially in the continued pandemic that we see ourselves in and the need to provide adequate space and a feeling of belonging to seniors, why we aren't moving forward with that model that has been proposed through this report.

You know, the idea of being able to interact with family members and friends and caregivers has become increasingly difficult through the pandemic. I can appreciate that entirely, that as a representative – and I'm sure many people in the House here have had the opportunity, whether it be for Easter, whether it be for Christmas or any other special event, to go spend time with seniors and, of course, above and beyond that, take time as the representative for these citizens in our community to ask them what

is important to them. Unfortunately, through the pandemic that relationship has completely changed. I can appreciate that, but there would be further opportunities for seniors and families to be able to visit with their family members if they were potentially in home care instead of being locked down in these long-term care homes.

There is so much to be said, Mr. Speaker, on how completely wrong the direction of this government has been, specifically on how we are taking care of our aging population, specifically on the lack of action to strengthen regulations to . . . [Mr. Carson's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Peace River has risen.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak on this amendment on Bill 11. The first thing I want to address is the minister. The Minister of Health, bringing this forward, I think, has done a terrific job on a number of fronts and is beyond reproach when it comes to his sincerity in his desire to see a system that works, works for Albertans and works for seniors. I think that if we start with that premise, understanding that the minister, first of all, when it came to consultation, has been doing this for a long time with the help of other members, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and others, in doing the consultation with the FBCC review – we have to remember that the legislation that we're currently working under is as old as 1985. That's a long time ago for legislation that governs a very important part of health care delivery with continuing care, and it does need updating.

This amendment in particular would suggest that we do not continue in second reading, which would mean the bill would die, would prohibit moving forward on important enabling aspects of that review.

Now, I appreciate that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford made, I think, a very thoughtful speech going into details of why there are many good things in this legislation but, he thought, even better things in the review that are not included in the legislation. The reason for that, as the minister has explained previously in the House and I'll help to try and elaborate now, is because this legislation allows us to do the transformative work from a number of different pieces of legislation. I think it's six different pieces of legislation under one house, one legislative house, updated for today. We're looking at something that's over – what is it? – 35 years old or so. The truth is that this legislation is enabling.

I heard some interesting comments and thoughtful comments from Edmonton-West Henday, who was speaking previously, asking for us to do a number of things. His reason for opposing the bill and for this amendment, which effectively kills the bill, is because there's staffing burnout, and he wants to strengthen regulations. Well, Mr. Speaker, the proper place to strengthen regulations is in the regulations. The legislation itself is an inappropriate place. Obviously, this Chamber needs to be making decisions for the enabling framework so that we can do the transformative work we need to in continuing care. To put the kind of regulations that the members opposite are asking for in legislation would be misplaced and ill advised given the importance of that review that the members opposite also appreciate and see as something that we need to be finishing.

I do think it is important we understand as a Chamber the best way for us as legislators to structure the future generation of continuing care. It would be a mistake for us if we did that in a short-sighted way and overloaded our legislation with details that need to be changed and updated. As we can see, there's much legislation and demand on this House, and the very fact that we have not updated this since 1985 is a testament to that. That was back when we had even fewer pieces of legislation as a government,

fewer bills that we needed to manage, continue to update. Technology and best practices are continuing to advance very, very quickly in all fields, particularly when it comes to health care, this important piece.

The Member for Edmonton-West Henday also talked about staffing arrangements, working in multiple facilities. I could not think of a worse place to deal with staffing arrangements than in a piece of legislation. It strikes me as very, very much something that ought to be in regulation or in policy. Many of these very important points that are being brought up are right to be brought up. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, as the minister has promised in this House and in public, that they will be addressed. We take very, very seriously the FBCC review, and the reason we take it so seriously is because we know it's transformative. It's important for future generations and perhaps even some in this Chamber to have the continuing care that we need, but that will not happen if we try and bog down the legislation in ways that cannot be updated in appropriate ways as these changes come about.

Then another part that I would like to bring up particularly is surrounding home care. Now, the work in home care I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is very right to bring up as paramount. In my own review that I did when it came to end-of-life and palliative care, it also came across brightly as one of the most important points that we need to invest in, and it's true as well in the FBCC review. I think that is obvious to all members of this House, on all sides.

I'm very happy to report that the 2022 budget that we passed – unfortunately, members opposite voted against it – is increasing home care by \$81 million, totalling that to a \$750 million investment. Now, for that money to be spent in an appropriate way, for it to be able to enable home care in its most effective way so that we get as many folks in continuing care with as many supports as possible in the comfort of their own homes, in the way that we all believe they ought to be cared for, we need to have the legislation and the framework there to do it.

When we heard the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar say that this is not the time to be passing this legislation, I could not disagree more.

The exact opposite is true, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely need to be passing it today. Any more delays are only delays on the care that we ought to be delivering. Any more delays now, any more filibuster, any more proposed amendments, reasoned or hoist or otherwise, are continuing to slow down the work of this House and, effectively, the work of that review that we want to be implementing in the appropriate space, in the space of policy, in the space of regulation, as it ought to be done.

I encourage the members opposite to take up their own challenge and to move forward so that we can vote against this amendment, for the bill, get it out of second reading, look at any thoughtful, genuine amendments when it comes to Committee of the Whole, and get it passed. Our seniors, those who worked so hard to build this province, those who have laboured so much to build the families and the communities and all the civil society we care so much about, deserve it. They deserve very much to see us move forward as serious legislators, as adults in this Chamber, and say: "We agree on the importance of the review. We think the review is right in its recommendations. We think home care should be enabled, that the \$81 million ought to be spent in the best possible way."

We need to be serving these individuals, and the way to do that is by putting aside any differences that you might have over questions of allocation of staffing when it comes to the legislation, because the right place for that is on an operational basis. Legislation should not be dealing with those sorts of intimate operational questions of who is staffed, in what building, when.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the important thing that we need to do is vote down this amendment quickly and move quickly out of second reading into Committee of the Whole and as soon as possible be able to do the transformative work needed for our seniors and for our province.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, and very good timing.

I see that the time is now 6 o'clock, which means that we are adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	1053
Members' Statements	
Women's Health Care and Reproductive Rights	1053
Stanley Cup Playoffs	1053
Forest Industries	1053
Government Record.....	1054
Legislature Building and Government.....	1054
AISH and Income Support Shelter Benefit.....	1054
Energy Industry Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards.....	1055
Agriculture and Agricultural Land Ownership	1055
Federal-provincial Relations.....	1055
Oral Question Period	
Economic Recovery.....	1055
Women's Reproductive Rights.....	1056
Women's Reproductive Health Care and Bill 17.....	1056
Collection of Race-based Data	1057
Technology Industry Development	1057
Provincial Park Administration and Bill 21	1058
Workplace Fatalities.....	1058
Alberta Death Rate and Health Care System Capacity.....	1059
Addiction Harm Reduction Strategies	1059
Foster and Kinship Care Provider Funding	1060
Financial Innovation Act.....	1061
Athabasca University and Postsecondary Education	1061
Local Government Concerns and Government Caucus	1062
Hydrogen Industry.....	1062
Child Care	1063
Notices of Motions	1063
Motions under Standing Order 42	
Women's Reproductive Rights.....	1064
Orders of the Day	1064
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 15 Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022	1065
Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022	1067
Second Reading	
Bill 11 Continuing Care Act.....	1074

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca