



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 4, 2022

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Carson
Dang
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Dach
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is with our greatest admiration and respect: there is a gratitude to the members of the families who share the burden of public office and public service. Today I'd like to welcome the family of the former member Jack Cookson who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Mr. Cookson was the former Member for Lacombe who served three terms in this Assembly from 1971 to 1982. He passed away on July 8, 2021, at the age of 92.

I would ask each of the family members to rise as I call your name and remain standing until you've all been introduced. Jack's son Bruce Cookson, his granddaughter Kasia, both joining us from North Vancouver; Jack's daughter Sally Weenink and her husband, Ken Weenink, from Lacombe; and Jack's granddaughter Amanda Cookson and her friend Darcy Meyer from Calgary.

Hon. members, I ask you to rise and spend a brief moment reflecting upon Mr. Cookson's service each as we may have known him.

Hon. members, please welcome this family to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: It brings me a special joy to introduce to all members of the Assembly this afternoon a special guest and the partner of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Ms Jo Cusack. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members, we have several guests joining us in the gallery today, including parent council representatives and students from the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord francophone schools of l'école Gabrielle-Roy and l'école Michaëlle-Jean. They are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Also sitting in the gallery today are 15 guests from Lakeland school in Dewberry. They are guests of the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

SCAN Unit Property Shutdown in Calgary

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Lethbridge-East I'm very happy to report to this Chamber that today Lethbridge is a little safer place to live, work, and raise a family. Today the Alberta sheriffs have shut down drug activity at a problem property in our city. The safer communities and neighbourhoods, or SCAN, unit of the Alberta sheriffs obtained a court order against the owner of a known drug house that gives investigators the authority to shut down the property for 90 days. The community safety order obtained in the Court of Queen's Bench took effect today, May 4, and bars people from the property until the closure period ends on August 2.

Mr. Speaker, crews installed a fence around the property, boarded up the house, and changed the locks to prevent unauthorized access before then, a strong intervention and step by the Alberta sheriffs to continue to address the issue of drug dealing and property crime. The

property in this case is also the subject of a court-ordered sale. The SCAN unit will continue to monitor the premises until the community safety order expires on April 26, 2023, or until the property is sold.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Alberta sheriffs who work alongside other law enforcement agencies in shutting down properties that are being used for illegal activities. They along with the Lethbridge Police Service and our local drug courts have made a considerable and noticeable difference in reducing crime over the past year or two.

Since its inception in 2008 Alberta's safer communities and neighbourhoods unit has investigated nearly 7,000 problem properties and issued nearly 100 community safety orders across the province. The majority of complaints are resolved by working with the property owners to keep criminal activity out of the community.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act gives law enforcement another tool for fighting crime by targeting properties associated with illegal activity. Community safety orders help break the cycle of crime and allow law-abiding Albertans to take back their neighbourhoods and rest a little easier at night.

Thank you again to the officers at SCAN for the important work that they do.

Jobs, Economy and Innovation Minister

Ms Phillips: In 2017 the now Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation was campaigning for leadership against the now Premier. At that time he said he disagreed with the Premier's socially regressive views on LGBTQ and abortion rights. In contrast with this Premier, he claimed to be socially progressive.

The MLA for Calgary-Elbow said the UCP would never out gay kids, but one of the first bills of the UCP government, that he supported, did just that, and yesterday when asked about his government's position on the right to choose, the minister ducked the question. When asked about his own personal opinion on abortion, the minister still refused to answer. His refusal to even act like he has an opinion on this issue might come as a surprise to some people, but his loyalty isn't to the folks in Alberta; it's to the Premier's office.

This is the same minister whose chief of staff was fired after coming forward with serious allegations of sexual harassment. The minister claims she was an excellent staffer, but he didn't know why his chief of staff was fired, and he had no part of it. Does he really expect Albertans to believe that he just allowed his excellent chief of staff to be fired and didn't ask a single question why?

His views on gender equality were made clear when he ignored the child care and other challenges faced by working women during the pandemic, when he claimed they were, quote, choosing to stay home and out of the workforce. A minister that ran for leadership on a socially progressive policy has quickly shown that to be false. After three years in cabinet he's shown he would rather cater to the Premier's social views about women than represent his women constituents in Calgary-Elbow.

But, surprise, women have the right to vote, and in the next election the women of Calgary-Elbow have a chance to choose an MLA who values gender equality. We need an NDP government.

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

Seniors' Issues

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to pay homage to Alberta seniors. Seniors are responsible for developing this province into the amazing place it is today. They created the

bedrock and the infrastructure that allowed us to grow to be one of the most prosperous provinces in the Confederation. Their hard work and their dedication must not go unseen or unrecognized.

Yet I've received word from seniors in my constituency of Calgary-Cross and, frankly, across the province that they feel ignored, forgotten, and disrespected. This cannot stand, Mr. Speaker. We must ensure that Alberta seniors have every bit of access to services that allow them to live a full life like every other Albertan. We must do better.

While this government has created new plans to tackle elder abuse, improve seniors' housing, and created transformational shifts to continuing care, there is still a need to engage meaningfully with seniors in Alberta's communities to ensure that their needs are met. I strongly encourage the Minister of Seniors and Housing to continue to find new ways to ensure that seniors can participate fully in society. To accompany this, I also implore the minister to continue to find new ways to engage meaningfully with seniors to ensure that they feel heard and that their needs are met.

As a member of the government caucus I want to assure seniors from Calgary-Cross and across Alberta that you have and will continue to be heard. As your representative I will continue to do my best to engage with seniors and relay this information to both the government and to the minister to ensure that we set ourselves on the right path.

Intergenerational respect is paramount within our society. Alberta seniors have never forgotten about us. We must never forget about them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40 NDP Provincial Election Candidates

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are looking for a government they can trust. They're looking for a government that will help create good-paying jobs and drive investment in new and emerging industries. They're looking for a government that will help keep the lights on and put food on the table. They don't want to live paycheque to paycheque, in fear of something happening that could teeter them into financial ruin. They want a government that will protect and improve public health care, ensuring Albertans get the care they need when and where they need it. They want good teachers, good schools, and a curriculum that prepares their kids for the future. They want a government that protects their parks, not demolishes them to make way for coal mines. There's more, too, but the bottom line is that Calgarians are getting none of this from the current government.

But there's a team that's being built, Mr. Speaker, that will deliver for them, a team of New Democrat candidates with credentials, work ethic, and devotion to the people of Calgary. That team includes, of course, the members for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and Calgary-Mountain View, but it also includes world-renowned medical researcher and neurologist Luanne Metz. It includes energy analyst Samir Kayande. It includes antipoverty advocate Janet Eremenko, teacher and community organizer Rosman Valencia, realtor and community builder Parmeet Singh, military veteran and Indigenous advocate Marilyn North Peigan, educational assistant Julia Hayter, and business owner and college instructor Gurinder Brar.

The team is growing, too, Mr. Speaker. Next week members will choose between two fantastic candidates in Calgary-Glenmore, and my friend and seven-term city councillor Druh Farrell will be acclaimed as the candidate in Calgary-Bow. This is Team Calgary. It's one heck of a team, and it stands ready to deliver on what matters for Calgarians and Albertans. Those looking for hope, those looking for help, those wanting to take part in building a bright

future, head to albertandp.ca and get involved. We'd love to have you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Teacher Certification and Bill 15

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, teachers hold an incredibly important role in Alberta. We're lucky to have some of the best teachers and a world-class education system to ensure that every student has the opportunity for success. Approximately 46,000 teachers are part of the Alberta Teachers' Association, which has been known to strongly oppose anything related to the UCP government.

Albertans sent a clear message that they wanted change in education. Parents told us that they want choice in what their child is taught. They told us that they did not want the NDP's ideological curriculum in the classrooms. Parents want to know that those who teach their children are being held to a high standard, a standard that is clearly too high for the ATA.

In 2020 only eight teachers in Alberta faced suspension or cancellation of their teaching certificate. Given the number of complaints, it's hard to believe that this is accurate. The Alberta Teachers' Association plays a large role in the certification of teachers. In my constituency I represent many newcomers to Canada who have not been able to receive certification to teach in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, shame on the ATA and shame on the NDP for not supporting our government's solution to these issues. Parents in Alberta need to know that competent teachers are being certified in a fair and timely manner. The members opposite have chosen to side with the ATA in calling Bill 15 unnecessary. Protecting students is extremely necessary as well as certifying competent teachers. My constituents are happy to see that the UCP has consulted with Albertans on the new curriculum. Albertans are not buying into the fearmongering of the NDP, and they're certainly not buying into the lies offered by the ATA.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: I've never in my life seen a government so opposed to helping people in need, Mr. Speaker. On June 13, 2020, Calgary was hit by the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, a huge hailstorm that cost over a billion dollars in damage. People's homes, vehicles, and businesses were destroyed. For two years these residents looked for help, faced unacceptable delays in getting support from insurance, and lived with holes in their roofs during winter.

The government did nothing to support them. They exempted hail damage from the disaster recovery plan and did nothing to help plans get processed. The four UCP MLAs in northeast Calgary defended this government's refusal to help these Calgarians. Another UCP MLA, who got a \$12,000 raise, gave a statement in this House cheering on the decision to not help people recover from the fourth-largest natural disaster.

This tells you everything you need to know about this government's priorities. This Premier will defend his private jets, his disaster of a war room, the billion dollars he spent on Donald Trump. He will also stand up and tell you that investing in the people of northeast Calgary is vote-buying. But that same Premier will then shamelessly go to northeast Calgary to beg for votes so he can keep his job.

Well, Mr. Speaker, hail season is coming fast, and the silence from this government is deafening. There are still over a thousand Calgarians with damaged roofs who are scared about what will happen should another storm hit, but the UCP simply doesn't care about them and won't lift a finger to help. I want to promise them and all Albertans that no matter where you live, the Alberta NDP will be there to help you recover should the worst happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Committee to Examine Safe Supply Consultation

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the honour of sitting on the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply, where we have heard from leading experts on opioid addiction from across North America as we study the issue of so-called safe supply. This was supposed to be a bipartisan committee, but unfortunately the NDP wasn't willing to engage in the work to hear the evidence and listen to the experts.

For the benefit of the NDP and all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some expert testimony that we heard. Dr. Keith Humphreys is a former White House drug policy adviser to Presidents Obama and Bush. He was also the chair of the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis. When asked about the potential harms of public supply of addictive drugs on the community, he said:

We know for a fact – it is not hypothetical – that when we flood communities with drugs, they spread beyond the person who gets the actual prescription. There's no way to assess, and that is a weakness in safe supply studies. Because they don't admit the possibility that someone else could be harmed, they don't measure the possibility, but the fact that they chose not to . . . doesn't mean that it isn't there.

Next Dr. Nathaniel Day, a leading addiction medicine physician in Canada, had this to say:

My greatest concern with the concept of safe supply is the unintended impact that these policies have on the general public . . . increasing the supply of opioids will increase use, it will increase addiction, and it cannot help but result in increased death.

Then there was Dr. Kevin Sabet, former White House drug adviser to Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

There are not many truisms in drug policy because this issue is one that is complex, context dependent, and really intertwined with so many issues, but one truism that most scholars agree on, most experts agree on is that greater availability leads to greater problems because of greater use.

Mr. Speaker, these are the concerns being shared by leading experts in the field. Since the NDP couldn't be bothered to show up and do their job and hear from them, I guess we'll just have to give them an education in this House.

Women's U17 National Soccer Team

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Canada's women have long been a powerhouse in the world of international soccer, and this week has been no different as Canada's women's U17 team competes in the CONCACAF championship happening right now in the Dominican Republic. Canada has never finished lower than third in the tournament's history and went into this year's competition seeded second and considered strong contenders to win. One reason they're such a strong team is because four of the athletes on the roster this year are from Alberta: defenders Ireoluwa Omotayo, Nyema Ingleton and midfielders Anna Hauer along with my partner's niece Isabel Monck.

The team has had a great tournament so far. They dominated their group, defeating the Dominican Republic 10-nil and Bermuda 5-nil and battling Jamaica to a 1-1 draw. Winning their group meant they advanced to the knockout stage, where they faced Honduras on May 1. Although the game got off to a tense start, with Honduras scoring the first goal early on, the team turned things around and knocked Honduras out of the tournament with a score of 4-1. It's worthy to note that to date the leading goal scorer in the tournament is Canada's own Rosa Maalouf, who has scored nine goals in four matches so far.

The top three teams in the tournament qualify for a berth in the FIFA U17 women's World Cup taking place this October in India. Canada has a lot of work to do to win one of those spots. First, they have to beat Costa Rica in their match this afternoon. Then they have to advance to the semifinals and face the winner of the USA-Jamaica match. It's not an easy path to victory by any means, but I know that I speak on behalf of the entire Legislature when I say: we are behind you one hundred per cent; go Canada.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let me assist you in saving some money today. At approximately 1:55 there will be an alert that will check the Canada-wide emergency alert system. At 1:55 if your phone is not off – and there's some debate about airplane mode – and if you're still connected to Wi-Fi, you may be alerted. If you are alerted, the fines are double today as a result of the very generous warning that I have now provided. If you want to save yourself additional trouble, I'm certain that the pages would be more than happy to remove your device from the Assembly altogether.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Cost of Living and Wage Growth

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, inflation is at a 30-year high, 6.7 per cent, and Albertans are paying more. Now, instead of reindexing the tax code to protect Albertans' income from skyrocketing inflation, this UCP government is trying to argue that the answer to inflation is a better job with higher wages, but according to their own economic dashboard average weekly earnings rose only 1 per cent in the last 12 months in Alberta, less than half the rate enjoyed by the rest of Canadians. When will this government stop the excuses and stop the tax on inflation?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordability is an issue, and that's why this government is taking action. That's why we are moving forward with an electricity rebate. That's why we suspended the fuel tax. That's why we're bringing in a price-protection mechanism for natural gas consumers. But it's more than that. We're positioning this economy for disproportionate investment attraction and growth, creating more opportunities for Albertans. Our plan is working.

Ms Notley: The Premier's record on private-sector wages is to drive them down, cutting overtime, cutting holiday pay, cutting youth wages. We used to lead the country in our rate of wage growth, and now Alberta is behind. Earnings are up 3 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; 4 per cent in B.C. and Quebec; 5 per cent in the Maritimes; Alberta, 1 per cent. To the Premier: if the

UCP's answer to sky-high inflation is higher wages, why is Alberta's wage growth tied for the lowest in Canada?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's right. The Leader of the Opposition is correct. We used to lead the nation in wage growth until the NDP took office in 2015. Their policies drove out billions of dollars of investment. Tens of thousands of Albertans lost their jobs. That had a profound impact on the economy in this province, had a profound impact on opportunities for Albertans. This government is turning that around.

Ms Notley: A lot of passion; not a lot of facts, Mr. Speaker.

Wages in the private sector are stagnating, and that's especially true for industries that employ mostly women: arts and culture down 10 per cent; health care and social services down 3 per cent; educational services down 2 per cent; same with accommodation and food services. These Albertans are earning less even as inflation climbs higher, all under this Premier. Mr. Speaker, when the Premier claims the swagger is back, is he just mostly talking about men?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're taking real action on the affordability issues. We're also positioning this province to create more opportunities for Albertans. As I've travelled the province corner to corner, as I visit with employers, there's one common denominator across regions, across sectors: employers are looking for staff. There's never been a better time for Albertans to step out and get their first job, for Albertans to step out and get a better job, for Albertans to step out and find a career that didn't even exist when members opposite were in government.

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

Women's Reproductive Rights

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to ambivalence about issues facing women, yesterday Albertans saw a shameful display from a UCP government that is so afraid of discussing women's reproductive rights, they cannot even say the word "abortion." The Premier was simply asked to stand up for the millions of women in this province who are deeply worried about their right to choose. Instead of answering, he offered a series of excuses ranging from the untrue to the utterly laughable. Yesterday politicians across Canada stood up and spoke out on behalf of the women in their provinces and in their country. Why won't this Premier?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, women's rights in Alberta are unchanged today. They were there yesterday, they were there three weeks ago, and I have to tell you that a U.S. court decision is about the U.S. of A, not Canada. Women's rights have not changed in this province. I'll tell you what: we support our publicly funded health care system, and access to abortion is part of that system.

Ms Notley: You know, this government claims that politicians don't comment on judicial decisions of other jurisdictions, except that's utter nonsense. This Premier does it all the time, and moreover this issue matters to Albertans. Americans could be coming north to exercise their rights, and the toxic extremism that is targeting these fundamental rights has already started leaking into Canada. Alberta women and gender-diverse folks need their leaders to stand up and passionately declare that their reproductive health

rights will be protected. Why won't this Premier or someone in this government do that?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, it is clear. Women's rights, access to abortion are protected in this country under Canadian law. Nothing has changed. Not yesterday, not the day before, not today.

Ms Notley: That's inspiring, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier tries to argue that this is a federal issue. It's not. Access is controlled entirely by the provinces, which is why B.C.'s Premier had no issue coming out yesterday and stating his clear position to protect a woman's right to access abortion services. This is also an issue of health care, which falls squarely on this Legislature. What is the problem here? Why can't someone in this government stand up, condemn the attack on reproductive services that we are seeing south of the border, impacting all of North America, and commit to forever protecting them here?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, women's access to abortion services in Alberta has not changed one ought, not yesterday, not the day before, not today. Women continue to have access to health care services clear across this province, but I'll tell you what. There is a disparity between rural and urban, and you know why? Because when the opposition was in government, they actually directed capital from rural areas into urban areas. So if they have a problem with access to services . . .

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

Women's Reproductive Rights and Bill 17

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, words matter. Albertans are looking for leadership here given what we've seen in the United States over the past two days. We have an opportunity to make a real difference right here, right now. Bill 17 provides job-protected bereavement leave for miscarriages and stillbirths but does not explicitly state abortion as a form of pregnancy loss. It should. The minister indicated yesterday that he would be open to amendments. I want the Premier to be explicit. Will he stand and tell this House that Bill 17 will be amended to provide job-protected leave for abortion? Say the words. They matter.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17 honours all Albertans who have suffered the loss of a pregnancy. This side of the government is committed to that. Yesterday I indicated before the floor of this Assembly that there will be an amendment, and that amendment is coming.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, will any man on that side of the House utter the words "abortion," "reproductive rights," "women"?

We have so much more we can do to support access to health care regardless of where they live. Currently getting an abortion in rural Alberta is nearly impossible. That needs to change. We need to expand access. Does the Premier agree that we should expand critical abortion services in rural Alberta? What specific steps is he going to take to make that happen as soon as possible?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, women's health services are available across this province, and it is true that abortion services are largely available in urban centres. I've got to tell you: part of the reason for that, the disparity, is because those members across, when they were in government, diverted health

care capital from rural Alberta into the urban centres. Like it or not, that's the truth.

2:00

Member Irwin: Wow.

We have an opportunity to make such a difference. This Legislature could have yesterday provided reassurance to so many Albertans who are frightened, who are devastated by an anticipated ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court that could overturn Roe versus Wade. We could have had a debate in this House. We could have had people from all sides, men and women, stand and speak in support of reproductive rights and access to health care. The Premier? He wouldn't even say the word "abortion." Will he stand in this House and categorically state that abortion is a medically essential health care procedure and that he supports reproductive rights for all Albertans?

Ms Issik: As I've said many times, Mr. Speaker, reproductive rights in this province have not changed at all, period.

Speaking of periods, let's talk about women's health care. I hope that the opposition across will participate with me next week on very important women's health issues, including menstruation, menopause, and other critical issues that affect women's health. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

School-based Mental Health Supports

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, there is a mental health crisis in our schools. The UCP's gross mishandling of the pandemic and failure to support students, staff, and families have made a difficult time even worse. The pandemic is still affecting our schools, and staff and students are still getting sick. In a letter to Calgary families a principal said that a spike in student and staff absenteeism meant day-to-day decisions were being made on whether a class would go ahead or not. This pressure and uncertainty causes stress for students, staff, and families. Will the Premier explain to these families, who are begging for more support, why his government is failing them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do acknowledge that COVID has been very, very difficult on all students and families, teachers, the whole system, and the whole community, all Albertans in general. We as a province have spent more than any other province, \$53 million, towards those programs. Additionally, we've had supports in our schools, and we continue to have those supports. It is why we've allocated another \$110 million over and above the \$700 million that we've added to Education for mental health and wellness supports for our students.

Ms Hoffman: Nonstop stress and anxiety faced by students and staff in schools is negatively impacting their ability to learn and work. Some Calgary parents report that very often in their child's elementary school they'll be notified late one afternoon that it's moving online the next day. Kids have already been through so much in the past two years, and they deserve stability and support from their government. Will the minister explain why the UCP has failed to provide students and staff the support they need to end the stress and anxiety of these uncertain times?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, we continue to hear fear from the opposition. They continue to put misinformation out. In fact, we have zero schools that have gone online. I have had zero

schools from Calgary school division in the last . . . [An electronic device sounded] It wasn't me.

We've had zero schools in the last number of months from Calgary going online, but we continue to monitor the situation. Again, we prioritize the safety of our students and staff.

Ms Hoffman: In March 2020 the UCP laid off more than 20,000 educational assistants and support staff at a time when they were needed more than ever. Supporting students in their learning can be a demanding job at any time, let alone during the past two years under this UCP government. May 2 through 8 is Mental Health Awareness Week, and this year's theme is empathy, which, of course, is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Why won't the Education minister demonstrate some empathy for the students and staff who are really struggling right now? Will the UCP take the mental health of students seriously and put a counsellor in every Alberta school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we take the mental health and wellness of our students and our staff members very, very seriously. It's why we've added additional dollars. It's why we had a billion dollars' worth of supports and dollars added to our education system through COVID. It's why we continue to add more resources. We are doing everything we possibly can. We have to work as a community. When the members opposite talk about hiring these individuals, they're talking about 2,200 individuals. That's, like, 13,000 nonexistent teachers they wanted to hire. They weren't there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I would like to thank the hon. member who fessed up to their significant crime and will be making a \$100 donation, as I understand it, to humane animal rescue and the Calm society. Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Artificial Intelligence Lab

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation recently released the Alberta technology and innovation strategy, which will position the province as a technology and innovation hub. Just yesterday, in support of this strategy, the Minister of Service Alberta announced that we are investing in the province's first public-sector artificial intelligence lab. Alberta continues to be at the forefront of technology and innovation in Canada, and this new AI lab is positioned to diversify our economy and accelerate economic growth. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will this investment make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've said it before; I'll say it again. Technology is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry, and it must be the future of government. The most exciting innovations that are transforming every industry today are data-driven innovations. In other words, these are innovations built with artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies. That's why I'm so excited about yesterday's announcement to launch GovLab.ai, an AI lab partnership between the government of Alberta, AltaML, and Mitacs. This is an exciting investment to apply more technology and innovation in everything we do to deliver better services, better outcomes, and better value for all Albertans.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that technology and innovation are essential for growth and success in all industries and given that Alberta's tech sector is already seeing record-breaking success, to the same minister: how will the AI lab encourage the attraction and retention of talent that will support this phenomenal growth?

Mr. Glubish: One of the most in-demand skill sets in Alberta and around the world today is for programmers, analysts, engineers, and executives with experience in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Alberta is already a global leader in training the best and the brightest in this space, but our investment, that we announced yesterday, in this new AI lab and our partnership with AltaML and Mitacs will create new opportunities for students and recent graduates to apply their skills and expertise to solve real-world problems with applied artificial intelligence. This will help us to retain and develop talent in Alberta, contributing to this growing momentum in this exciting space. It has never been a more exciting time to be in the tech sector.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this new artificial intelligence lab is set to be fully operational by summer of 2022, which is good news for the Edmonton capital region, including my residents of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, and given that the lab will also build a sustainable innovation practice in the province, can the same Minister of Service Alberta please explain to this House how the AI lab will work in practice?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the exciting part about this lab is that the government will be bringing the public service forward to bring real-world problems and challenges, and then the private-sector expertise from AltaML will be bringing seasoned leadership and expertise to help us tackle those problems, and Mitacs will be bringing new students and recent graduates forward to have real jobs, working with both AltaML and the government, to tackle those problems. This is a collaboration from academia, from government, and from the private sector to bring the best and brightest together to apply more technology and artificial intelligence to solve problems in creative new ways.

Invest Alberta

Mr. Bilous: The UCP's failed war room has been plagued by scandal from day one. They hired failed candidates, plagiarized logos, impersonated and attacked journalists, and gave out hefty sole-source contracts to their friends. But these are just the scandals we know about, because the UCP has hidden the war room from FOIP. Now they're at it again. It turns out they've hidden Invest Alberta from FOIP as well, an organization that has a \$25 million budget and is responsible for representing Albertans on the world stage, but we have no insight into their activities. Why isn't Invest Alberta subject to freedom of information laws?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our department just recently sent me the paperwork to make sure that Invest Alberta is subject to FOIP. It is.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Invest Alberta spent \$750,000 to sponsor Alpine Canada but is yet to produce any concrete, tangible outcomes and given that Invest Alberta is hosting lavish dinners in Lake Louise and given that the government refuses to shed light on

any of the activities or tactics of Invest Alberta – see *Hansard* from estimates – why is this government so afraid of transparency, and what are they hiding?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I love the opportunity to talk about the success of Invest Alberta. With our investment and growth fund they've attracted over a billion dollars of capital investment to diversify Alberta's economy. Unlike the no-development party on the other side, we believe in attracting investment. They were involved in bringing Mphasis and Infosys into Alberta, diversifying our province. It's an immense success.

2:10

Mr. Bilous: Given that this power to correct the situation lies directly in the minister's hands and that if the minister saw fit, he could open it up to public transparency whenever he likes and given that there's a very easy fix to all of this – all the minister has to do is sign a ministerial order designating Invest Alberta as a public body under FOIP; he's claiming that he's done it – when, Minister, did you sign that order to open them up to FOIP, and will you table it?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this is a marked day. Put this one on the calendar. The reason why: a member of the opposition actually deviated from their script. That is a big day and a big step for the members of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, if people want to FOIP Invest Alberta, they can go right ahead. We've signed off on that, normal, core stuff with a Crown corporation. Again, we want to highlight one more thing. This side of the aisle believes in attracting investment, diversifying Alberta's economy. The other side: they chase away investment. That's what they did when they were in office. We're not going to let them do that again.

The Speaker: I understand the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley may also be writing a confession note.

Francophone School Capital Funding

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton has one of the fastest growing francophone populations in the entire country, and the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord has one of the fastest growing student populations in the entire province. These students desperately need a modern high school. The current Michaëlle-Jean school is located in an old junior high building, and it's not adequate for providing the quality education that these students deserve. The Minister of Education denied the conseil scolaire the new high school that's so desperately needed. Can the Minister of Education explain why she believes francophone students don't deserve the high-quality school facilities that everyone should enjoy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we do take section 23 rights for francophone education very, very seriously. I just want to inform the member opposite that the north central francophone school authority actually has five current projects under way plus a modular starter school in Stony Plain. This means over \$91 million in building and new modernizations for francophone schools in Edmonton, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, and Legal. This is 3,900 students over 20 schools, an average of 195 students per school.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that that's cold comfort to the parents who are here today to talk about their own needed high school and given that the Supreme Court of Canada recently affirmed the responsibility of

provinces to provide francophone education when it found that British Columbia's inadequate spending on its francophone school system violated section 23 of the Charter and given that despite the minister's apparent beliefs Alberta is bound by the same rules when it comes to francophone education, will the minister live up to her constitutional obligations to provide francophone schools with equivalent funding and better schools, or do these parents have to take her to court?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have the hon. member know that we have built more schools and are building more schools for francophone communities than they ever did in the four years that they were in office. A few weeks ago – I'll also add to that – Alberta Education committed to funding a feasibility study for a capital project at l'école Boréal. Also, in case you didn't hear it earlier, we currently have fewer than 3,900 school students in this school authority attending 20 schools in their authority, with an average of 195 students per school. We do take section 23 very seriously, and we're continuing to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister hasn't addressed the need to build a new school for Michaëlle-Jean students and given that I'm joined by parents of the conseil scolaire students today and given that they've tried for months to get a meeting with this minister but have been ignored and that when I wrote to the minister to request a meeting on their behalf, she replied that she wasn't interested – Mr. Speaker, these parents have a right to have their voices heard; they're here in the gallery to meet with the minister today – will she agree to meet with these parents today after question period? Yes or no?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member opposite is talking about. I actually met with the executive of the board of the francophone Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord a week ago. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: I also met with the association for francophone parents just yesterday. As well, I continue to meet with them. In fact, we're so committed to the francophone community that we are reintroducing the francophone language branch in my department. The directorate for the francophone community was actually terminated under the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. [interjections] Order.
The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Renewable Energy Projects on Arable Land

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a platform to strengthen and grow Alberta's agriculture industry and fight for Alberta's farmers and ranchers, including their property rights. I've heard from many constituents who are concerned about agricultural land use for wind and solar farms. Land is often passed through generations with the intent of enjoying it and farming it for generations. Not only is land value a concern when new solar developments arise, but the amount of tillable land that appears to be going to waste is a growing issue. To the Minister of Energy: what can be done to encourage developers and operators of solar farms to use nonarable land for their projects?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are robust guidelines and regulations in place to conserve native grasslands and protect special areas, and renewable energy projects are only allowed on private lands. Most importantly, private landowners have full control in negotiations related to renewable energy development on their property. They will ultimately have the final say. We have and will continue to support a free-market approach.

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that energy prices are high and going up and given that solar and wind companies stand to benefit greatly from building their supply of solar and wind energy and further given that our UCP government promised Albertans that we would end the NDP's green subsidies from Alberta taxpayers, to the same minister: what is the status of taxpayer-funded subsidies for controversial green energy products in rural Alberta?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The only controversial energy project is a subsidized energy project. Our power market is market based, and industry is free to make their own business decisions without government picking winners or losers. We ended the NDP's renewable electricity program because it was clear that subsidies weren't needed. The market was going that way regardless. Alberta has seen over \$2 billion in renewable investments since we came into government, evidence our market-based approach is working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that solar farms require vast amounts of land and given that arable land right now is being used for these projects and further given that solar companies and the operator can decide to abandon this project at any given moment, to the same minister: can you please explain to Alberta's farmers and ranchers in my riding who will be liable when or if these projects are abandoned?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The AUC requires companies to ensure that sufficient funds are available at the end of a project's life to cover the cost of cleanup, but these are ultimately business decisions between the landowner and the investor, assuming, of course, there's approval from the regulator. We are supportive of the free market, and that includes market-based renewables.

Thank you.

Utility Rebates

Ms Ganley: In the lead-up to the last budget the UCP made big promises about a rebate for natural gas, but Albertans found out it was a fake. It doesn't take effect until next fall, and it doesn't even have its own funding. Then the Premier indicated that a rebate would take effect much sooner: another fake out. As the government struggles to get that support out the door, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Can the associate minister tell us: if the prices exceed the cap, will Albertans actually see a rebate in October?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking the wrong question. You see, this was the same member that was complaining about the price of electricity when she didn't know the price of electricity. Albertans deserve an Energy critic that actually knows the price of energy, so I'm going to give the hon. member a chance to redeem herself. To the hon. member, through you to her: what is the price of natural gas today? Does the critic know? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans understand how question period works even if the minister doesn't understand how it works and given that the UCP has also promised an electricity rebate and given that it was announced almost two months ago but Albertans still haven't seen a dime and given that we still haven't seen regulations despite the associate minister's bluster about them being ready when the legislation was introduced, when will the electricity rebate be delivered to Albertans? Please provide a specific month. "In due course" isn't an answer, Minister.
2:20

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, since the NDP Energy critic clearly doesn't understand the price of natural gas, I'm going to let the hon. member know: \$8.32 is what it was trading at this morning. So the trigger price for the rebate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, \$8.32 is the price of natural gas trading this morning on AECO. If the member knew that, perhaps she would know that that's almost 2 full dollars above the trigger price for the rebate and that it's absolutely within the realm of possibilities for this to be triggered in the fall.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the questions were about when Albertans will see the rebate and given that the UCP's natural gas rebate was a fake and given that their electricity rebate was promised months ago but hasn't been delivered and given that Albertans are still trying to pay off the bills that rose by hundreds of dollars under the UCP, is the associate minister so confident he can deliver these rebates to Albertans that he will stake his job on it? Will he resign if he can't deliver them on the timeline promised?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member complains about the price of electricity but doesn't know the price of electricity. Then the hon. member says that it's a fake rebate for gas, but the member does not know the price of gas in this province. This is absolutely an outrage, and here's the unbelievable part: that's the same member that voted against getting rebates to Albertans earlier. That's right. That member voted against early rebates. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Government Policies and Young Adults

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to paint a picture of Alberta's economy; the facts are just not adding up. The government brags about migration into Alberta, but their own data does not even bear that out. Despite claims, Stats Canada is reporting that last year, for the first time in 35 years, there was a net out-migration of 20- to 24-year-olds. Can the Minister of Finance tell the House how he can stand there and claim this economic strategy is working when young people are fleeing this province at rates that we have not seen since the 1980s?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, what I can say: in Q4 of 2021 Alberta led the country in terms of net interprovincial in-migration. That hasn't happened since 2015, since the NDP were in government. The reason is because there are more opportunities in Alberta. The reason is because we have a more affordable province in Alberta. The reason is because investment is pouring in by the billions, more jobs are created. There's more opportunity for all Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that facts don't lie – I wonder about other things going on here in this moment – and given that rather than addressing the problems that they created with the cost of living, making postsecondary unaffordable, and more, and given that it's reported that younger generations are leaving because they don't see a future in this province as long as the UCP is in charge, does the minister have any regrets about the brain drain that he's creating, or is he proud about driving out young people from Alberta?

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise to address the comment that postsecondary education in Alberta is unaffordable because that statement is simply not true. Tuition in Alberta is below the national average. I think all members of the Assembly can say it with me at this point. Tuition in Alberta remains very competitive. As well, to ensure that all students have access to affordable education, we are increasing supports to student assistance. We're providing \$12 million more over three years to scholarships and \$15 million over three years to new bursaries for low-income . . .

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear this government just doesn't get it or they just don't care and given that Canada West Foundation saw that the young people looking to leave Alberta are looking for a quality of life that suits them, does the Finance minister think policies of higher utility costs, higher insurance rates, higher income tax, higher tuition, higher interest payments on student loans are signalling to young people that the UCP is actually interested in the quality of their life? Will they stop trying to make life harder for young people? Let's do something to keep them here so that we can build a strong economy together. The New Democrats are here to do that.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP were in power, they increased regulatory burden. They raised taxes on businesses, on individuals, on everything that moved. They sent tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province. This government has positioned Alberta to be most competitive. It's resulting in investment attraction, job creation, and right now we have more employers looking for employees than the other way around. That's why we've invested \$600 million to reskill Albertans.

School Construction in Camrose

Ms Lovely: During constituency week the Premier visited Camrose, and we met with the Elk Island Catholic school board to celebrate in a sod-turning event to recognize the spot where their future high school will be built, starting this summer. Currently there's a wait-list for students to enter the Catholic school system in Camrose, and Our Lady of Mount Pleasant school has reached capacity. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when is this future high school scheduled to start construction, and what are the details regarding the school?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't join the Premier recently, but last year, actually, the member knows that I was there with the Premier for Chester Ronning school. Talking about this particular Catholic high school, the opening capacity of that would be 410 student spaces, and at the peak it will be 610. As regards the start of construction, we're still evaluating which type of procurement, whether it is traditional or design/bid/build or alternate financing like a P3, which gives a better bang for taxpayers' dollars. We have yet to decide.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the minister. Given that there are some concerns regarding decisions around the idea of capacity and design of the school on whether they were government ideas or they came from community consultation and given that oftentimes schools have portables added to them after a new building is constructed, community members are left wondering why a school is not built to capacity at the beginning. To the Minister of Infrastructure: are there any indications that would lead to the installation of these portables after the school's completion?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we all know that modular classrooms provide much-needed flexibility as a community's school-aged populations ebb and flow over the decades that a school is in operation. In fact, last summer, together with the Minister of Education, I visited the second-best constituency, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. A manufacturer in your riding, Mr. Speaker, who fabricates and supplies modulars – they're really great. The latest ones are the best. But that said, school boards should decide when they need new modulars. In this case we leave it . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that constructing a school is a complicated process – it involves a lot of manpower and work hours across many trades – and given that during the construction of our new Chester Ronning school in Camrose RAP students participated in the construction of the building, to the Minister of Education: will it be possible for RAP students to get experience in their desired trade with this new build in Camrose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Yes. Indeed, it's up to the school authorities to work with the contractors to enable that. I was happy to hear that Chester Ronning school did have students involved in the construction process. In fact, my old school division was one of the pioneering schools in having individual students involved in construction. This is done very safely, and it works really, really well, gives students that practical experience that they need to go on into the trades. We want to encourage the trades because we know we're going to be short in the years to come. So thank you for that great . . .

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

Avian Influenza

Mr. Dach: Alberta has more confirmed cases of the bird flu than any other province according to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. There are 23 flocks where influenza has been detected, and it's estimated that up to 600,000 birds and counting are impacted.

Across the country 58 farms or businesses have been impacted. That number is growing. This is creating great concerns for Alberta farmers and producers, who are looking to this government to show leadership, but it's been nearly a month without real public comment from the minister on this growing crisis. Can the minister of agriculture and forestry explain his silence on this issue, that is hitting Alberta harder than the rest of Canada?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to provide comment. It's not that we've been silent; it's that CFIA has taken the lead on this issue. I was in Ottawa at the start of the week, was able to speak to CFIA officials directly through the federal minister of agriculture. They're well aware of the current state of affairs in Alberta. Like you said, that 600,000 depopulated birds is moving quickly to probably 800,000. Across the country it's 1.7 million, so Alberta is seeing a large number of that. The federal monies are being triggered for depopulation and cleanup. Everything is working well.

2:30

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, producers are looking to keep their flocks alive, not help with killing them.

Given that April 12 is the last public statement this minister put out regarding the avian influenza in Alberta and given that since then we've seen 23 flocks impacted and more than 600,000 birds affected and likely more to come and given that the flu is breaching current protection protocols, what new, innovative, world-class best practices providing an extra layer of protection to actually prevent this flu is the minister contemplating?

Mr. Horner: Just so everyone is clear, this is moving through the wild populations. It started in Europe and Asia over two years ago, moved to the eastern seaboard of the United States, and then has moved into the Mississippi flyway, the central flyway, and it's getting into our migratory system. What we are doing is that we're expanding our zones where we do have confirmed contamination in barns. We're doing more dead bird testing at the surrounding farms. But you have to understand that, from starlings to hawks to owls, this is moving through all the species, and it's quite difficult to prevent.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our producers fully understand the complexity of this, and we hope that the minister will as well and will look towards new solutions that are innovative to actually prevent this flu from spreading given the serious nature of it.

Now, given that this is a very real concern for farmers and producers even though it's not a food safety concern and given that we know this government has a track record of being slow to deliver necessary supports to those who need them and given that there are concerns being faced about the cost and impact this crisis will have, can the minister list in this House all supports available to farmers and producers and when exactly they can expect to receive them?

Mr. Horner: Like I said, the supports flow through CFIA. This is their jurisdiction. The producers are compensated for any birds that need to be depopulated. They're compensated for cleanup and disposal. I can tell you that in our conversations on Monday through CFIA and the federal minister, AgriRecovery is being looked at. Those conversations are being had. That's an ad hoc program that can look to provide more benefits, but it's in ongoing conversations.

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

Budget 2022 and Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three questions about investments in Lethbridge today. Budget 2022 doesn't have any new schools for the third-largest city in Alberta even though two elementary schools and 11 modernizations are needed just to keep up with the growth of our population, some of the fastest growth in the province over the last eight years, especially on the west side. There are 13 projects ready to go that are urgently needed, and we got zero. Can the minister provide an explanation as to why the people of Lethbridge don't deserve new schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to reiterate the fact that we have a very robust gated process that all school authorities have to go through. We typically get about 400 requests a year. They go through that 10-step process. They rise to the list, and then they are funded as we move forward with them.

Mr. Speaker, we continue – in fact, last year, I do believe, not in this upcoming budget but the previous budget, there was a new Lethbridge school announced. I don't know why they continue to put fear into the public.

Ms Phillips: Given that we ask because we are sent here to represent our constituents, I will ask another minister.

Given that this government has not committed to a badly needed cardiac catheterization lab at Chinook regional hospital and given that a report from AHS found that it was warranted and that Lethbridge should have its own cardiac lab, a call echoed by Lethbridge city council and committed to by our government in 2019, will the Minister of Health provide us an update? Will he commit to this necessary hospital upgrade and provide us a timeline for the project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for the question and also thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for speaking to me on this exact same matter over a couple of weeks ago. We are doing an assessment at this point in time in terms of the needs of the facility in Lethbridge. I spoke with AHS on this. That work is ongoing, and I look forward to reporting back when it's done and it's completed. I look forward to reporting back to the House on this.

Ms Phillips: Given that the government has levelled deep cuts to the University of Lethbridge, to the tune of \$20 million over four years, and given that the university recently came through the longest faculty strike in Alberta history because of the government's cuts and given that these millions in cuts undermine our research and teaching talent attraction and the U of L's reputation as an institution, will the minister commit to reversing the cuts at the University of Lethbridge over the next few years and allow our city to attract and retain teaching and research faculty to rebuild our institution's once sterling reputation?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed to hear that the member has so little faith in the University of Lethbridge. Just recently the University of Lethbridge received international awards and accolades for its performance. I stand with them in celebrating their excellence.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing, as well, \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at all of our postsecondary institutions, including, I would imagine, many in the city of

Lethbridge as well. Stay tuned for more details and information on that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Road and Bridge Capital Projects in Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation has released a three-year highway plan as part of the provincial construction program. Within my constituency there are several repaving projects planned that are currently in the design phase: highways 44 and 18 through the town of Westlock, highways 18 and 661 from Barrhead to north of Fort Assiniboine, highway 28 from highway 63 to Waskatenau, and highway 55 east of Athabasca. To the Minister of Transportation: when can we expect the completion of the design phase on each of these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an extensive highway network that requires significant ongoing investment with a focus on safety for all Albertans. The member asked about highway 44. The design of passing lanes is anticipated to be completed by the end of this year. Design work to improve access on highway 18 is expected to get under way in about six months, and an engineering consultant was recently brought onboard for designing a paving project on highway 661, which will take about 15 months. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that two Transportation projects, the replacement of the Athabasca bridge and the repaving of highway 831 between highway 661 and the village of Boyle, are defined in the construction phase, to the same minister: have contracts been awarded for these projects, and if so, when can we expect construction to begin?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked an excellent question. I'm pleased to announce that the construction of a new bridge in Athabasca will begin this summer. Alberta-based Alberco Construction is the contractor. Again, I'm very pleased to announce that. The project to replace the old wooden plank bridge, built in 1950, will create more than 400 jobs. It is expected to be open to traffic in 2025.

As for highway 831, repaving started this week, with an expected completion of mid-October.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that highway 769 is not currently included in the provincial construction program and given that in its current state highway 769 is in need of repair due to dangerous sections of pavement and cracking throughout and given that highway 769 does not adequately accommodate the current level of traffic, including the daily commuters and the large agricultural traffic, to the same minister: has this government considered the rehabilitation and widening of highway 769?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you once again to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, I want to assure everybody who might be listening that I have received the petition from stakeholders about this particular highway. The member is correct; highway 769 is not currently on the provincial construction program list. Alberta Transportation will be, however, hiring an engineering consultant

within 12 months to complete the design activities. In the meantime pothole paving will be ongoing as part of routine highway maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government continually works to maintain our road network to ensure that our motoring public remains safe. It is a top priority.

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

2:40 **Support for Victims of Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence**

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Intimate partner and domestic violence is far too prevalent in society. In 2019 Statistics Canada conveyed that police-reported family violence against children and youth and intimate partners has increased for three consecutive years. Our government has introduced Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. To the Minister of Justice. There needs to be required training on intimate partner and domestic violence and on coercive control for the provincial courts. When will this training be considered?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her question and all of her hard work on supporting victims of domestic violence. Violence of any kind must be condemned, and intimate partner and domestic violence are no exceptions. As the member referenced, the government introduced legislation to reduce the risk of victims of sexual violence being revictimized during the trial process. This bill will foster stronger confidence in the administration of justice and encourage greater engagement in the justice system by victims. It will also embolden victims of sexual assault to report that crime, and that would be undoubtedly a positive thing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 60 per cent of cases of child domestic homicide are perpetrated by the father and that there is frequently a history of domestic violence against their partner and retaliation against their partner, to the same minister: will the government make efforts to have law enforcement agencies and courts take victims' accounts of domestic violence more seriously and prioritize proactive safety measures for children and victims?

Ms Issik: Our government is committed, Mr. Speaker, to providing comprehensive and integrated supports to victims of intimate partner violence and making sure they are safe and protected. We're working on expanding specialized domestic violence programs which give victims focused support throughout their involvement in the criminal justice process. Supports include updates to their cases, safety planning, and making sure their perspectives are heard. We've also developed tools designed to assist investigators involved in intimate partner violence cases to help them ensure victims are safe as well as supplementary family violence training for police services.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister. Given that many judges who decide the cases involving intimate partner and domestic violence need to have a background in family law and given that most judges need knowledge on violence and coercive control and how to recognize that these are occurring, to the same minister: when will

our justice system proactively place routine protection based on assertions of abuse and coercive control?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's critical that we have a justice system that ensures that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. While not every judge has a background in family law, they are actually expected to practise ongoing education and would have access to education on subjects such as intimate partner and domestic violence. This is why Bill 14 will require Provincial Court judge applicants, in order to be eligible for appointments, to complete sexual assault law and social context issues education. This legislation will also require candidates already on the appointment eligibility list to complete or promise to complete training if appointed.

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.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Alcohol and Energy Drink Regulation

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A situation has arisen in Alberta where bars and restaurants may serve energy drinks alongside alcohol while patrons do the mixing, but liquor stores cannot sell energy drinks at all. This is the doing of the Alberta gaming and liquor commission, the AGLC. It's the provincial regulatory body that oversees and enforces alcohol laws. The AGLC already allows caffeinated alcoholic beverages to be sold on liquor store shelves, some with even more caffeine than energy drinks, so why can't energy drinks also be sold at liquor stores? Caffeine is caffeine, natural or added.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is further complicated as in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, where small private liquor stores exist, energy drinks are sold but not in Alberta, the land of free enterprise and Canada's leader in private retail liquor stores. Recently Alberta made changes to allow bars and restaurants to do takeout alcohol, and this resulted in convenience stores that have food service adding cafes that serve alcohol for in-store consumption. At select 7-Elevens in Alberta you can have beer or wine with your taquitos and hot dogs, and while you're at it, you can have an energy drink, too.

We know there are risks with alcohol, and there are added risks with combining alcohol and caffeine, and I encourage Albertans to consume both responsibly. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, if you can buy beer and wine at a 7-Eleven store, where food and energy drinks are already available, why can't you buy food and energy drinks at a liquor store, too? This places Alberta liquor stores at a competitive disadvantage, and I call on the AGLC to go out and look globally as a way to modernize their regulation of alcohol and energy drinks and start allowing them to be sold in liquor stores, too.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie: I missed you there, but you do have a tabling.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a two-and-a-half-page letter from a constituent dated April 24, 2022. Her name is Anna Portocarrero, and she's very disappointed with how education is being underfunded. She has a child who is neurodiverse and is very concerned about the fact that there are zero occupational therapists and zero speech-language therapists in her particular school, where her child needs the support. There are the requisite number of copies that I table here this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are no points of order today, and as such we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 15

Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the members of this Chamber for their valuable feedback and support for Bill 15. I would also like to once again recognize the dedicated and world-class teachers we have here in Alberta, who work so hard to ensure the success of students each and every day across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we couldn't ask for better.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to take a moment to sincerely thank all stakeholders for their contributions related to this bill. We engaged with the Alberta Teachers' Association, other education system partners, and victim advocacy groups on this important legislation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 15 would reform the discipline process for all teachers and teacher leaders so that our education system is safer for our students, their families, and teachers. As this House knows, I raised seven children of my own, so I deeply understand how essential it is for parents in Alberta to have confidence that their children are safe when they go to school. Parents should expect nothing less.

Madam Speaker, we know that the vast majority of teachers do their utmost to secure the safety of the students in their care. We thank these amazing individuals who uphold the high standards of themselves and their profession. However, we know that there is a conflict of interest within the existing system. We know that the same organization that advocates for its members should not also oversee the disciplinary process. We intend to fix that. Bill 15 would improve the teaching profession's discipline process by creating the Alberta teaching profession commission. This work builds on the students first act, that transformative act which we passed last fall. This commission would oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints for the teaching profession. Bill 15 is about transparency, it's about accountability, and it's about ensuring that we have a teacher discipline process that is streamlined.

2:50

Madam Speaker, we would ensure, by creating this commissioner role, that there would be an appointed commissioner, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, who would operate at arm's length from the ministry. This would bring Alberta in line with

comparable provinces and other regulated professions such as nurses, where an arm's-length organization oversees disciplinary matters. Simply put, Bill 15 would modernize the teacher and teacher leader profession oversight process while further elevating the status of the teaching profession.

With that, Madam Speaker, I look forward to my colleagues supporting this important legislation that puts student safety first. It is an absolute privilege to be here and to hereby move third reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, an act that is long overdue.

Madam Speaker, thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 15? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 15, but before I get into the substance of my remarks, I would like to begin by saying that I have given significant thought and consideration to the content of this bill and the consequences it will have both for the teaching profession in Alberta and for the students that they educate.

When it comes to the safety of students, I will always put kids first. For that reason, I dedicate this speech to my daughter Olive. May her path through Alberta's education enrich her knowledge and fulfill her curiosity, and furthermore it is my prayer, Madam Speaker, that her experience will be made that much safer as a result of the debate we are having today and the content of this bill.

Each day we put blind faith in others, so much so that we rarely give it a first thought, let alone a second. When I board an airplane, I do so in the assumption that all the preparation work for the flight has been done in accordance with national and international standards. When I go to my dentist, I assume that all of his equipment has been sterilized and that he has completed the required education to perform the task. Even as I stand in this building, I do so assuming that the arch directly above my head was designed to withstand the forces of nature and time, and in my nonprofessional opinion I would say that it's done pretty well thus far. But should any of these aforementioned groups not maintain the standards expected of their profession, they have independent bodies that they are accountable to – and they are accountable to the public as well – and they investigate each instance of malpractice. Unfortunately, one of Alberta's largest public sectors does not, that is teachers.

When we send our kids to school, we assume they are going to a safe place free from harm and predation. That was the case for parents of students at John Ware junior high school in Calgary from 1986 to 2006. Each day they sent their daughters to school, where they would attend grade 9 science class and outdoor education with Michael Gregory. Madam Speaker, I should mention that some of the information I'm about to use and share was gathered from multiple news outlets, including the podcast *Crime Beat*, Mr. Gregory's *Dark Secret*, hosted by Nancy Hixt.

Michael Gregory was the cool teacher, the one that everybody liked. According to his victims his class was unlike any other because it was just so laid back. However, mixed with the fun, Mr. Gregory put the students in compromising situations as if to test them to see how much he could get them to do as he watched. Not surprisingly, Mr. Gregory was really beginning the grooming process that he used to initiate an inappropriate relationship with his students. This usually began by trying to relate to the students on a friendly level, giving the impression that he understood them like no one else could or would. He would make them feel safe when, really, he was the one from whom they needed protection.

Mr. Gregory then would move past relating to students in the classroom to making inappropriate comments like, "You're

beautiful,” “You’re perfect the way you are,” and “You don’t need to lose weight.” And then came outdoor education. According to one individual the outdoor education excursions were trips organized through the school where students would embark on overnight canoe trips with Michael Gregory.

However, it became apparent that these trips were not your typical camping adventure. One female victim described the trip as follows, and I quote: we are somewhere in Kananaskis; we are pulling off in our canoes, starting the trip; I am in a canoe with Mr. Gregory, and he is seated opposite me, and we are facing each other in the canoe; I look up, and three other female students, who are a lot smarter than me, were topless, and they were canoeing as if it was completely normal but without clothes on; I remember being really confused and thinking, “Well, you know, they’re really smart; they’re the absolute smartest girls in my school, and if it’s okay with them, then it must be okay with me”; then Mr. Gregory took his canoe oar and put it in my life jacket; he unzipped my life jacket, and I don’t remember how, but I wasn’t wearing a shirt underneath; so he pulls my life jacket off; for a few minutes I was topless; he was the first person to ever see my breasts topless, and I just got really uncomfortable, so I decided to put my life jacket back on.

The female victim went on to say that later that evening Mr. Gregory chose one of the girls on the trip to sleep in his tent with him. This young lady also later found out that the group had gone on other trips without her knowing, and she was devastated. It was likely because she refused the initial advance from Michael Gregory in the canoe and could be a liability to his sexual predation in the future.

The case of Michael Gregory made national headlines when he was charged by police in February 2001 with 17 counts of sexual offences against former students. These offences ranged in severity from inappropriate touching to penetrative sex. Madam Speaker, these were 14-year-old girls. Five days later Michael Gregory took his own life.

As severe and shocking as this case may be, it actually came to light 15 years prior, when students and parents at John Ware junior high school came forward with complaints about Mr. Gregory to the school administration. In May 2006 Mr. Gregory was the subject of a professional conduct hearing for alleged misconduct that took place from 1992 to 2005. He was charged with unprofessional conduct under the teaching act, one count for failing to treat students with dignity and respect and one count of unprofessional conduct for failing to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession. Gregory pleaded guilty to both charges.

A report later outlined the nature of misconduct for which Michael Gregory was being held accountable, which included abusing, demeaning, and endangering students. The committee also found that Gregory had an inappropriate relationship with two female high school students. He admitted to this unprofessional conduct. The committee found that Michael Gregory

1. . . . showed disregard for the safety, well-being and dignity of the students in his care.
2. . . . mentally and physically abused his students.
3. . . . coerced and manipulated students for his own benefit.
4. . . . attempted to conceal his wrongdoing through misuse of his authority as a teacher and program leader.

In response, Michael Gregory was suspended by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee for two years, but the suspension was to be served concurrently, which means it only lasted one year, Madam Speaker. One year.

As a parent hearing this story absolutely breaks my heart. As the father of a young girl who is already faced with an ever-evolving and complicated world, from which I hope to protect her, I am furious. Like everyone else in this Chamber, I spend a significant portion of my life removed from my family, but if I spend my time

here without making an effort to keep her safe and my other children safe and the children of this province safe despite not being close to them, then I would consider my time wasted. But, Madam Speaker, speaking to this bill is some of the best use of my time that I could ever imagine.

Now, the ATA has gone on record opposing this bill for a number of reasons. First, the ATA opposes it; they said that it’s not necessary, that the current system works fine and that changing it would require too much work on the part of the government. In response, I would say that that is incorrect, and I would echo the words of the hon. Minister of Education that the ATA’s role as a bargaining agent for teachers conflicts with its other role as a disciplinary body for its members. I have spoken to members of the ATA in my constituency, and there is an argument to be made that the system there works, and to a degree it may. But I have also heard from parents asking me a very simple and fair question, Madam Speaker: at what point does the advocate become the disciplinarian?

3:00

What is the threshold that must be met before the ATA stops defending a bad teacher and becomes the prosecution? Is it simply based on how much public backlash the ATA will receive if they don’t act or if the incident becomes public? Out of principle I cannot support a system where the advocate is also the disciplinary. That would be as if my re-election as the Member for Cardston-Siksika was solely based on the votes of members of my own caucus, not the residents of my constituency, for whom I work.

Second, I have heard that the ATA thinks that this is just a distraction from our curriculum launch. The president of the ATA, Jason Schilling, said: if we can’t trust the government to get the curriculum right, how can we trust them to get this right? In response to that gutless comment, I’ll read a few quotes from some of my constituents in response to the curriculum.

The first is from trustee Jessica Payne, and I quote: I feel like it’s a great move to have the separation between the ATA and the discipline of the teachers and increased accountability.

Assistant superintendent Rob Doig: I appreciate the listening voice of the government has been throughout the piloting of the K to 6 curriculum in our division; I appreciate that they listened to some of our views in terms of a reasonable rollout plan; it may not have been exactly what we had planned or would have picked, but at least I can say that I feel like we have been heard, that the minister and the government are making an effort to listen; our teachers are looking forward to rolling out the new curriculum, especially in language arts; I can see where the minister and curriculum implementation panel have listened to our concerns.

Trustee Ross Blackmer: I’ve never seen so much feedback ever in all my years of teaching as this curriculum has received; they are listening to everyone; whether they are taking it in is a different story, but it’s different from the “Here’s the curriculum; now teach it” mentality; there is a tremendous amount of feedback now compared to what has been done in the past.

Finally, from trustee Doug Smith: this is the most a government has ever involved teachers and everyone else in implementing a new curriculum in all my years of teaching.

Madam Speaker, the next time the ATA or the members opposite choose to diminish the importance of this curriculum and how it’s been rolled out and say that everyone is opposed to it, I’d like to refer them back to these quotes from trustees and a superintendent who would say the complete opposite, who are grateful for the way that this has been rolled out. In that same breath I will, again, give credit where it is due, to the hon. Minister of Education for all her work in piloting this program and having the courage to move forward with this bill.

What does this bill propose to change and why? First, about accountability: it would create an effective, consistent, and efficient discipline process that will oversee every teacher, principal, and superintendent across the system regardless of where they're employed or if they are a member of the ATA or not. This will be done through a new Alberta teaching profession commission, and an appointed arm's-length commissioner will oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints within the profession. This commissioner will be someone with understanding of both legal and education.

It's also timely to reinforce requirements for education system stakeholders like the Alberta Education registrar, the commissioner, the ATA, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and employers to report to police if there has been any serious harm or threat to the safety of a student. Under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act the ATA is already legally required to report to the police when there may have been serious harm or a threat to a student's safety. Unfortunately, as evidenced by recent cases, the teachers' union does not understand this duty to report.

Now, I should back up and say, Madam Speaker, that this does not reflect all members of the ATA. The ones that I have worked with personally have shown a tremendous amount of interest in making this bill as good as it can be, recognizing the challenges that we as a government face, and I want to specifically thank them for their time and communicating with me their concerns.

Lastly, it further expands the online teacher registry established under the students first act by making the following publicly available: all hearing, appeal, and minister decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence and any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner as well as hearing appeal dates.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I again would like to applaud the Minister of Education for her courage in moving forward with this bill. It is my hope and prayer that, moving forward, this bill will make Alberta schools that much safer and more transparent in the process of teacher discipline.

To the teachers, the very, very few teachers who would take advantage of their position of power and authority over students, this bill is for you. To the teachers, the vast majority of them who do such a wonderful job educating our children, this bill is also for you, to protect you. I stand in this Chamber in support of this bill wholeheartedly, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to vote in favour of Bill 15 as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 15 in third reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to everyone who took part in this debate. This is a momentous and monumental bill. I'm very grateful to everyone. I close debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned April 28: Member Ceci speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak this afternoon to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Now, it's interesting where we're at with this bill. There's been some back and forth in the Chamber in question period, where my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has asked about a few different pieces for this bill to be included and strengthened, and until we see that – there are some elements of this bill that I do support. But there are – I'll spend much of my time speaking about bereavement, the current legislation as it's written, and then I'll also talk about, again, what we would like to see and how we'd like to see it strengthened. Quite frankly, it's been rare that we've seen this in this term in the House, where ministers have accepted amendments by the opposition, but it's my hope that this bill and amendments brought forward by my colleagues will be accepted.

To start off, Madam Speaker, I do support and we support our reservists and the incredible work that they do for our country. I recognize that removing the 20-day limit on job-protected leave will bring Alberta in line with other Canadian jurisdictions and is a good change. I'm sure that later on this afternoon you'll hear from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who, of course, was our military liaison for the full four years that we were government and continues to liaise with the military and has an incredible relationship with the men and women who bravely serve. She'll also, I'm sure, comment on this.

Now, it's very important, Madam Speaker, that the grief that surrounds pregnancy loss is recognized. I do want to acknowledge that the bill does provide some dialogue around that, so I want to thank the minister, through you, Madam Speaker. We know that pregnancy loss can include instances of miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination, and we want to work to ensure that the bill is inclusive and reflective of the experiences of birthing persons, women, and parents.

Again, we're also – at the outset, Madam Speaker, we're in the process of engaging with stakeholders ourselves, recognizing that the bill is in second reading. We're reaching out to stakeholders to get a better sense of their position on the bill. So we'll get back to the minister with that, and, again, hopefully, by the time the bill gets to Committee of the Whole, we'll be able to have some amendments written but also be in a position to speak with a little more detail about the bill.

3:10

Madam Speaker, again, it's extremely important that grief and other responses that may surround pregnancy loss are recognized. I cannot speak from personal experience, but I do have friends who have experienced this loss and recognize that there's a huge range of mental, emotional, and physical health experiences that people can feel and go through. So giving Albertans time away from the workplace to process pregnancy loss is a positive step. However, the challenge, and what we're hoping that we can strengthen or provide a little more clarity on, is that the legislation as it's currently written does not include – it's not inclusive of all types of pregnancy loss.

The bill as it's currently written specifies leave when someone "has a miscarriage or stillbirth," but it does not include abortion or termination for medical reasons. Because of that, it essentially discriminates in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss that a person may experience. So our hope is that we can work with the minister to ensure that the legislation is written in a way that is broader and more inclusive and that it can include abortion and termination for medical reasons. The reason for that, Madam Speaker – and I'm sure the minister understands this quite well – is that we don't want to leave room for interpretation. I mean, I get that's why we have

lawyers, but we really want to be clear, crystal clear, in the legislation so that there aren't cases that are interpreted differently and where women and families can be denied bereavement leave if they've experienced either a termination for medical reasons or abortion.

Again, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood spoke about the difficult experience that a person and their partner and family could go through. And it's unfathomable to expect that person to have to explain in detail the situation to their boss if they've experienced pregnancy loss. It should be covered because of what they've already gone through. So we're hoping we can work with the government to amend this bill in its current state to ensure that job-protected leave will be included for an abortion or termination for medical reasons. This will, of course, protect individuals, Madam Speaker, from discrimination in the workplace. It will also show compassion and inclusion to all of those who are facing a pregnancy loss.

I know that, again, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has spoken about this and had a person who has been an advocate that the bill must include the loss of pregnancy. We want grieving individuals to feel empowered to be able to define their experience as their own. Madam Speaker, all of the experiences deserve to be included, from miscarriage and stillbirth to abortion to TFMR, or termination for medical reasons, infertility, and failed adoption, so we will work with the government to achieve this.

A similar example, if I may, Madam Speaker, is that if an employee tells their employer the devastating news that they have cancer, they're not asked: well, what kind of cancer? Their leave is not dependent on which type of cancer they have. This is a similar example, where we need to ensure that the definition of pregnancy loss is inclusive, completely inclusive, and encompasses all of the different reasons for that loss.

Again, Madam Speaker, what we're hoping to accomplish here is to empower employees so that they can receive the support and have the choice, whenever they feel safe or comfortable, to share specifics but that it's their decision. They decide when and how and if they disclose any details about the experience and the loss that they're going through.

I think, quite frankly, that's the least thing that we can do because, unfortunately, not all employers and not all people may view all losses equally. You know, again, I recognize that many employers in Alberta are incredible employers and they care about their employees and they want to do everything they can to support their employees. Absolutely, Madam Speaker. The challenge is that not all employers will view loss the same way, so, again, to make it crystal clear, defining pregnancy loss to include all those terms will ensure that it's included and that no one has to attempt to justify the cause of their pregnancy loss.

The other thing is that it'll remove an additional stress of an employee, that of: "What if my employer says no? How can I frame this so that I can have this bereavement time?" Again, I don't think it's fair to put that additional burden onto a person and their family as they're experiencing this. Madam Speaker, you know, by making the language more inclusive, it's our hope that everyone who needs this leave will be empowered and will be able to go to their employer and say, "I'm going through a pregnancy loss, and I need support," and not have to define it further than that.

I'll mention a few other questions that I have on this bill. Again, as you've probably noted, Madam Speaker, that's a very, very important piece that I'm pretty confident members of the Chamber will hear from a number of my colleagues who have similar concerns and similar comments. You know, I appreciate that the minister, during question period, indicated that he's open to this

type of amendment, so we'll see how that moves forward as we move into Committee of the Whole.

3:20

Other questions that I have for the minister. There is a section on the Labour Relations Code, Madam Speaker, that removes the July 1, 2022, end date to the legislative protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff and allows division 4 to apply to the boards of postsecondary employers, which often refer as organizations. I'm just curious who the minister consulted with on these changes that impact postsecondary faculty associations and if the minister is able to provide some detail. I'm not sure, quite frankly, how the leaders of faculty associations are determined, so if the minister is able to provide some insight on that as well, that would be welcome. Where I'm going with that question as far as how the leaders are determined is that if members of the association are unhappy with leadership, are there opportunities to change leadership and how is that conducted? Lastly on this subject, how will this change protect members' rights to have a say in their own contract negotiations, which is, I think, important, a very important topic?

I'm looking to you, Madam Speaker, if you can just advise me on how much time I have left.

The Deputy Speaker: Ten seconds. Go quick.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Wonderful. I will leave my comments there and look forward to responses from the government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I will focus my comments today on unpaid bereavement leave. I realize that this bill does deal with and address reservist leave and postsecondary institutions, but I want to focus my remarks today on bereavement leave.

In this bill there is a section that talks about:

An employee who has been employed by the same employer for at least 90 days is entitled to unpaid bereavement leave on the occurrence of any of the following:

- (a) the death of a family member;
- (b) the employee has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (c) the employee's spouse or common-law partner has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (d) a person has a miscarriage or stillbirth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

and that they would be allowed to have bereavement leave for three days in a calendar year. I think we can all understand and we all would agree in this House that this is an important piece of legislation.

I guess I would start my comments by saying that it's been my experience in life that grief is not limited. It's a very wide and encompassing thing. Grief is not limited to knowing or necessarily having a relationship with simply a family member. Grief knows and goes beyond the bounds of having a family member. Grief can and often is just as intense for the loss of the life of a person in the womb or for a person outside of the womb. Every life has value regardless of age or race or nationality or religious belief or any other defining category that we choose to use.

We do not as humans, as people have value because of where we live or where we abide. We do not have value because of our IQ or athletic ability or physical ability. Our value as people transcends our looks. In my case that's a good thing. It transcends our income.

It transcends the job that we do. It transcends our perceived value to the society. The value that we place on a person, on human life is not determined by our age or whether we are firm or infirm or whether we are wanted or not wanted. As I was growing up, I was glad that that was the case, or I'm sure that my mother would have done away with me many times. I'm not sure if she really wanted me after some of the things that I did.

We have value because we're simply human. We have value because all life, every life – every life – has intrinsic value because, I believe, we are made in the image of God. We do not have value because some court or some government or some business or some budget line has granted us value. And I believe that we all understand this. In our most intimate parts of who we are, in our innermost being, in our very souls, we know that the people in our lives, all of the people have value. And that's why grief is so powerful.

I've often said to people, as I've wrapped them in my arms and consoled them in their grief over the loss of a loved one, that I would much rather suffer the grief and the pain that comes from a loss of someone that I have loved than to have never loved them and not to have had that grief. Grief over the loss of a loved one is the result of recognizing that we are social creatures and that we value and that we recognize the loss of a life and that that loss leaves a hole in our lives.

Bill 17 recognizes the loss and the pain of the people who have died and passed on in our lives through this bereavement clause. Grief is real, and it can be paralyzing. Grief does not recognize whether that life was a part of our lives for a long time, that we knew intimately and that we had had a relationship with or whether that life was inside the womb. I support this bill as it is written. Madam Speaker, I support Bill 17 as it's written because it recognizes the grief of so many Albertans who have lost preborn children due to miscarriage or stillbirth.

Madam Speaker, my wife and I have been blessed with four children. Three of those children have grown up to be fine young men and women. I support Bill 17 and I speak to it at second reading because I know that it would have helped myself and my wife as we worked through our grief after having the loss of our little boy in the womb. This bill recognizes the grief and the pain that transcends the location of the life that was lost. Our grief was no less painful to us and the life of our son was no less valuable because he was stillborn, because he had died in the womb. His life was no less valuable or loved because the only time that we ever got to hold him was when he no longer had a beating heart or could take a breath.

3:30

Bill 17 recognizes this reality. We all know in our very souls that life, every life, is sacred. Every life has value, and every person who grieves the loss of a family member should be given the time to grieve by an employer. It seems eminently reasonable to this MLA that employers would enable grieving employees three days to start to address this grief. Trust me on this one; it's going to take longer than three days. In fact, I would argue that it's probably going to take me a lifetime.

What makes me a little sad is that sometimes when I stand up or I sit in this Legislature and I hear some of the rhetoric that goes back and forth across these desks, it would appear that this bill is destined to be made a wedge issue. It frustrates me that a bill that's supposed to be structured around addressing grief and loss of life and a recognition that all life has value could potentially be used as a wedge issue. Could we not instead set aside the realpolitik of social politics and support a bill that helps Albertans to grieve with dignity over the loss of a loved one?

I guess I'll have to wait and see. The Committee of the Whole is coming. We've been told that amendments will be there, and I guess I'll have to wait and see what those amendments are and how they're brought forward at the Committee of the Whole. I'll be listening carefully – I'll be listening carefully – to see what comments are brought forward in support of or against those amendments.

But at this stage, second reading, Bill 17 has my support. I'm grateful – I'm grateful – for the recognition that this bill brings forward for those that are grieving, have lost somebody that they love, that it recognizes that all life – all life – has value and that the grief of a life should be recognized with bereavement leave.

Bill 17 has my support. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I will soon reflect on some of the comments made by the previous speaker from Drayton Valley-Devon. I'd like to thank him for his speech. But maybe I'll start first with some of the more trivial issues within this bill just to make sure I get to them and move on before we talk to the seriously difficult pieces of the bill.

The first piece I just want to comment on is the changes in circumstances for reservists. I just want to – you know, as only one of two people in this House who has served in the reserves, I thought I would take a second to acknowledge that this is happening and that there is a change. In reality this is going to affect very few people. My time in the reserves was fairly short, and there was never a circumstance where I found myself, because I was a student at the same time, requiring leave from work in order to be able to fulfill my duties in the reserves. Usually duties were related to training rather than service in combat or anything of that nature. But if I were in that position, I would have been happy to have been able to know that I could leave and do my duty on behalf of the country and then come back and be able to continue my work. So I'm just glad to see that we've made this slight change in terms of the ability of reservists to take time away and not be limited by the act in how much they can do that.

I guess I do wonder a little bit about what might need to happen to support employers in that. Certainly, I would hate to be in a position where employers express concern about hiring people who are in the reserves, knowing that they may be called away and that they may have to hold a job for somebody temporarily, and now that it's longer, even a longer period of time, that they might be hesitant to hire someone in the reserves. I would just hope that the government will think about that when they're doing regulations, that there may be some way that the government can assist or help employers to ensure that this does not become problematic.

I recognize, again, that this is not going to happen very often in an average year, where this is even a concern at all, but since, you know, it has come up in the legislation, I would like to just make sure that the government gives some consideration to making sure that the wheels are greased and things run smoothly, not only from the position of the Canadian Armed Forces but also from the position of the employee of both the civilian work and the government work and, of course, the employer themselves. I think that fits in well, and I think this piece of change is a good addition to Bill 207, which was the Reservists' Recognition Day Act, as it was called. I think it's a nice little piece in addition to that.

Just getting that out of the way for a few minutes, I'd like to go on and also talk about the academic associations. Again, in my career as a member of a faculty at the University of Calgary I had the

opportunity to belong to an academic association at the University of Calgary at a time when the faculties did not have a right to be recognized as a union in bargaining. Thankfully, under the previous government that did change, and now people who are employed by universities have the rights that people outside the universities have, including that academics now have the right, not just nonacademic staff, to have someone represent them in bargaining situations. I appreciate that at the time the changes were made, there was a five-year window put in holding the academic associations as the interim representative bodies for negotiations because this was all new, and we needed to know whether or not that was the right place to start and whether to add some other changes.

Now, of course, we're in a place where it's been in fact established that those organizations are the bargaining unit in this bill. I think that's completely appropriate because nothing that I have heard from my university colleagues indicates it should be otherwise although they did express some concern that when this was introduced into this legislation, they were not consulted. So they're taking time also to make sure that their interests are fully protected by this legislation. It would have been good for the government to spend a little bit of time with the various associations to walk them through this, make sure that they fully understand this. I imagine there's not going to be a complex disagreement on this, so it would have been great just to have that kind of relational conversation where you're walking through what is happening and ensuring that if there is any glitch there, the people who are going to be affected by it are well informed.

3:40

Again, you know, this is not the biggest part of this legislation for me, but having involvement with both the reserves and academia, I felt it was appropriate for me to review these sections and to ensure that I didn't have any major concerns, and I guess I say now that I don't.

What I would like to talk about, of course, and what you will hear mostly from members of this House are conversations about the leave at the time of loss of a pregnancy. I think this is a very important thing for us to consider in this House because, of course, it is a very traumatic situation in the lives of everyone who has experienced it. I think we just heard quite eloquently from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon about the importance of going through grief at a time of loss and how difficult that is and how much we really need as a community to support people, and above all we should not be in any place where we consider it right for us to judge other people's grief.

As the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon indicated, grief is very wide ranging. It's experienced differently by different people, and we have no right to create a circumstance where some people's grief is acceptable and other people's grief is not or that the way they grieve or what they're grieving over is acceptable or not. I think it's very important that in this circumstance we make it very clear to all people appropriate – all the family members, all the people that are affected by this type of grief – that what we are concerned about as a society is that they get support at this very significant time, that they do not get judgment, that they don't get questions, that there's not some kind of assessment about whether or not their grief is valid or not or the reason why they have grief is valid or not. I think that that would just be a horrendous intrusion of the state in the private lives of people.

You know, in many other situations we recognize this principle that the government just does not have a role in making decisions about people's lives because it does not affect others. Of course, government always has to make rules when something you choose to do affects another person, but in the case where you are having an experience that is about yourself and who you are as a person,

then I think it is quite appropriate that we not enter into a discussion about your grief and about whether or not it is acceptable or not.

We need to make this legislation as wide as possible to avoid any potential for government interference or for employer interference. You know, as has been mentioned before, when we have other situations, if somebody comes and says, "I'm having heart surgery," we don't start to question them about what the nature of the heart surgery is or why they need heart surgery or if they engaged in activities like overeating or drinking that caused them to need heart surgery. We certainly just stay out of it. It's a conversation between a patient and their doctor, and the only thing that the employer needs to know is that, in fact, the surgery is going on and that the individual needs some time to go through that procedure and to recover from that procedure.

Sometimes it's easier for us as outsiders when it's a physical procedure that we recognize, like surgery. "Oh, I can see that, you know, you've got this cut, and you have to recover physically from it." But actually the most wounding kind of loss often isn't physical but is emotional. I know that this is an area that is so often vastly overlooked yet is so defining in people's lives.

My wife for a number of years was a social worker at the neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal Alexandra hospital and often would go back in in the evenings or overnight to be with families as they went through the process of grief around traumatic illness, children that were stillborn, or children that had died shortly after birth.

You know, in many ways there's nothing much you can do. Obviously, the medical profession did everything they possibly could to resolve the situation, but the grief itself still needs to be attended to. The sadness of the families as they lose a family member is deep, and it is really important that all of us recognize what that is like. It isn't just one or two things. It's not just a miscarriage or a stillbirth, but it's also these other things that go on all the time that people actually have significant grief reactions to. That would include abortions or TFMR or even infertility. I mean, trying to get pregnant is often very traumatic for people. They end up in the NICU because they've gone through these very difficult processes, and they lose a child yet again and they have to try all over again.

Really, just acknowledging that that is a problem, I think, is very important for us as a society. We're only asking for a few days. I mean, in reality we know that the vast majority of people will continue to grieve – well, as the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon says, for the rest of his life over loss of this. I know that in my own family there have been miscarriages and stillbirths, and that continues to be a grief for family members. But to have three days where you don't have to face other people on tasks that are irrelevant is very important, and I think we should be recognizing that for people.

One other piece that is not often talked about that is included in our recommendations for change is the situation of failed adoption. When I was at Catholic Social Services, I had the opportunity to be the supervisor of the adoptions program. You know, most of the time that was quite a joyous kind of occasion because in our particular program we were dealing primarily with newborn children who were being adopted, so people were very happy to receive a child when they thought they wouldn't after having gone through much infertility grief, finally to receive a child that they could love for the rest of their lives.

However, there were occasions where a situation happened that a child was placed for adoption, but within the 10-day period the biological mother of the child changed their mind. So they had a child come into their home, that child lived with them for up to 10 days – and I know in one situation it literally happened within an hour of the cut-off time – and they came to love this child and

expected this child would be with them forever, and then this child was taken away. Now, I don't blame the biological mother. That's a very difficult decision, and, you know, if that's the right decision for her, I think she has to do that. But I can tell you that the consequence for those parents, after waiting sometimes years for an adopted child, was very high.

I think the chance that we have here is to recognize that any loss of a child, any loss of a pregnancy, including adoption, which is a form of pregnancy in a way, that I think we need to recognize – the only way to capture all of these things is to define the legislation widely and not to specify. If we start to specify, then we decide who are the deserving and who are the undeserving, and that is not a place for us in the question of grief. We should not be putting ourselves in the place of deciding whether someone's grief is legitimate or deserving of support and response from a compassionate community.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to rise today to speak and express my support for Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First, I would like to thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for bringing this important bill forward that provides more job protection to Albertans when they need it most. This bill is proposing to make necessary changes to bereavement and reservist leave. This bill will introduce long overdue changes that will make bereavement leave more inclusive, and it will expand reservist leave, providing reservists the flexibility they need in order to complete their training. This bill also goes on to maintain the status quo for postsecondary bargaining agents.

3:50

Under the current Employment Standards Code bereavement leave is provided for employees who have worked at least 90 days for the same employer, with up to three days of unpaid leave per year when a family member dies. This bill does the much-needed next step of including those who have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth to now have access to that leave as well. It allows for three days per calendar year of job-protected leave.

This part of the bill, Madam Speaker, is similar to a private member's bill introduced in last year's session by the Member for Sherwood Park, and I believe that member had consultations with the stakeholders regarding the changes he sought to achieve. Though the private member's bill passed first reading, it did not proceed further as the session ended. I will applaud the member for his hard work and dedication on this matter, and I am delighted to see that these initiatives started by the member are being carried by Bill 17.

There is arguably no greater loss than that of a child. This bill allows for the process of inevitable grief to start to take place without any concern of job loss, and that is why this bill is so important, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, about a quarter of pregnancies end in loss. This can result in a wide range of mental and physical issues. A study published by an American journal found that a month after an early pregnancy loss 29 per cent of women experienced posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD; 24 per cent experienced anxiety; and 11 per cent experienced depression. These statistics illustrate the need to include pregnancy loss in bereavement leave. No matter the circumstances of pregnancy loss, the impact is evident and the trauma caused is not to be overlooked.

There may be leaves such as this already available for some businesses, but it is the commitment of this government to provide

this leave to all Albertans. Healing after such a loss is a process, and it will take time, but this bill makes leave available so no Albertan will need to even think about returning to work the next day after experiencing such a tragic loss. Employees are not required to provide any proof of entitlement for the leave but must give their employer as much notice as possible to take the leave. Employees may have access to more than three days of bereavement leave or may have paid bereavement leave if that is specified in their employment contract or collective agreement.

Prince Edward Island is the only province in Canada that provides bereavement leave specifically for the loss of pregnancy. However, other jurisdictions may have other leaves that allow employees to take off in situations of pregnancy loss.

This bill, Madam Speaker, also goes on to expand the leave taken by the reservists. This portion of Bill 17 was made possible with the support of stakeholders through consultations conducted by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the military liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces. I appreciate the member for his great work and contributions on this matter, including the initiatives in the reservist recognition act.

The stakeholders have indicated that reservists would have had to complete their training by using other leave options. Reservists are a vital part of our military, and they should be given a sufficient amount of leave required to complete their mandatory training. This bill would remove the 20-day cap on the use of reservists' leave for annual training, and it would allow reservists the allotted time they need to complete their training. It should not be on the reservist to figure out how they will complete their training in order to serve their country. They're courageous in their commitment to serve Canadians when disaster strikes at home or when they are called overseas for assignment. At the very least we should be able to provide them with enough leave that they are able to complete their training. Reservists should never be in a position where they're sacrificing hard-earned leave in order to meet their training requirements.

The Alberta government is proud to support our military reservists in all they do for us. It is in this bill that we acknowledge all their hard work and allow for it to continue with ease and remove a burden to them on how to cope with training days. Removing this limit on annual training days will align Alberta with most Canadian jurisdictions should this bill pass. Only British Columbia, Quebec, Yukon, New Brunswick continue to have limits on annual training for reservists.

Bill 17, Madam Speaker, also introduces changes to the Labour Relations Code. It replaces the effective date of the rights of academic staff associations to represent their members in the collective bargaining negotiations. This has been an exclusive right granted since 1981. This bill will allow for the right to continue indefinitely. The right was set to expire on July 1 of this year. These associations are the best option there is when it comes to representing their members. There is no other option that would be able to provide the same level of experience and expertise that these associations can.

The previous Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister of Advanced Education have met with different faculty associations and have heard from them that it is important to continue to give academic staff, graduate students, postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members in collective bargaining negotiations. This provision in the bill to maintain the status quo shows the commitment of our government to listen to feedback and respond effectively. It will then allow for the right to continue indefinitely, and it is what many faculty associations have been asking for since 2019. This government has listened and is now introducing these needed initiatives that will

give associations peace of mind that their exclusive right to represent their members will not be taken away.

4:00

Bill 17 is a win for all Albertans. It does what needs to be done in terms of increasing facility regarding bereavement, reservists' leave, and in maintaining the status quo for postsecondary bargaining agents. Albertans have had a tough two years. Bill 17 is a compassionate bill that acknowledges the need for time to heal in times of despair and the need to have sufficient time to train as reservists to protect our fellow citizens. It also continues to give postsecondary faculty associations the ability to represent themselves during collective bargaining, which allows for the continued strong representation they currently have.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, let me again thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for introducing this bill to this Assembly. I also express my appreciation to the Member for Sherwood Park and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for their efforts and contributions that led to the creation of this bill, and I encourage all the members in this Chamber to support this bill, that provides more job protection to Albertans in times of need.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I think that, first off, in light of the potential decisions that we are seeing in the Supreme Court of the United States, I want to start off by saying that I fully and unequivocally support the right of women to make the very personal choice in their own life to have an abortion, full stop, period.

I'm excited to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation or at least debate some of the topics that have come up so far through this debate. I think it's a very, of course, sensitive topic but an important one that we should be debating in this Legislature today and many times into the future. I think that this is a reasonable first step, but by no means do I think it's necessarily where we would hope to end up in the grand scheme of things.

I would also address, off the top, that we've heard in this discussion from, as far as I can tell, every speaker that they are in support of the changes regarding job-protected leave for our reservists and removing the 20-day limit on those to bring that in line with other Canadian jurisdictions. I think that's a good change, a reasonable change, and we should be doing everything we can to support reservists, whether they are going to training or anything else.

I would agree that it's a very important piece of legislation when it comes to ensuring that we are providing some opportunity for families, parents, expecting mothers, or otherwise to process the trauma and grief that often comes from the situations that we are discussing, whether we are talking about, as the legislation describes, miscarriages or stillbirths, whether it is the person themselves or a common-law partner as well. I fully support the decision to enshrine this in legislation, Madam Speaker.

With that being said, I also fully support the idea of strengthening what has been put forward by this government by including the idea of termination for medical reasons and abortions specifically in the legislation. As far as I can tell, it seems to be the case that there is some understanding that this would strengthen this piece of legislation, so hopefully when the time comes for us to have the opportunity to put forward amendments, the government will be receptive to the discussions that we've had already and to those amendments as they

come forward. Again, with the legislation as it currently stands, it only specifies leave when someone has a miscarriage or stillbirth and does not include abortion or a termination for medical reasons.

As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and, I'm sure, many other members as well have raised concerns, we must do everything we can in these sensitive and traumatic and overwhelming experiences to provide for those families who are dealing with this loss, showing them compassion and being as inclusive as possible when it comes to the relationship between the employee and the employer and the expectation that, I guess, we as Albertans expect for somebody who is dealing with such a sensitive situation and a traumatic situation.

I think that the member made some good points in regard to concerns around discrimination and concerns around judgment on whether that person's grief is valid based on the circumstances of their own situation. Again, we are talking about several different issues here, whether we are talking about termination for medical reasons, stillbirths, miscarriages, abortions, and so on. But we should as legislators do everything we can to ensure that when an employee is going to an employer with such traumatic news and a request for leave in this circumstance, unpaid leave for three days – I don't think that they should be asked to clarify their traumatic experiences, by any means.

You know, I think back to when I first found out that my wife was pregnant. We were so excited, elated, and went through the process, as you normally do, of waiting and watching as things progress. We found ourselves in a situation where, a few weeks into already knowing that this has happened, with a positive pregnancy test and everything, there started to be some concerning signs, cramping and spotting among other things. You start being very worried, and you look for medical support. Sometimes it's better than other times, but in this circumstance it was kind of pushed to the side until it got to a point where the pain was just completely unbearable for my wife, and it was quite clear that something was going wrong.

At this point we were finally able to get a referral for an emergency X-ray when a physician said: obviously, something is wrong here. That same day we were referred to have these ultrasounds done. At that point, after those results came back, our physician said: you need to go to the emergency room right now because you are putting yourself in a lot of harm, and it's quite clear that this isn't going to work out. At that point we found out that it was an ectopic pregnancy.

From there, obviously, things don't, by any means, get any better. First of all, talking about looking for leave when you are needing to go to the emergency department immediately: there's no time to necessarily ask for time off for that. At the same time, you didn't necessarily expect to find yourself in this situation so quickly. Among other things, after you get to see the physician, who is going through your options – and there are a number of options, one being a pill, which is not necessarily likely to work and is going to require follow-up and potentially having to go through that process again, or alternatively a medically invasive procedure, which is also more likely to be, you know, for lack of a better term, successful. But there's still a chance that you are going to have to come back – no doubt you will have to come back – and ensure that the procedure was, again, for lack of a better term, successful.

Already we're talking about the span, from that process, of many days, Madam Speaker – I would have to say above and beyond three days just for that process itself – and then, of course, the recovery from the trauma that is caused, not only emotionally, going from such a high of, you know, having all the expectations in the world of how things are going to turn out to completely grounded and devastated.

4:10

You know, again, I identify that while this legislation in itself is a good start, I hope that one day we are able to come back and have discussions about how long of a process this truly can be. But at this time I would again support the call, as members on this side of the House have, for including definitions or ensuring that things like termination for medical reasons are included in this legislation.

The idea of an ectopic pregnancy is the exact definition of what we're asking for, termination for medical reasons. I think that ectopic pregnancies are somewhat common when families are trying to have a child. I know, Madam Speaker, that in the grand scheme of things, while there was so much trauma and pain that we went through in this process – and I tell you it went above and beyond three days; it went above and beyond three weeks; it went on for some time – we were very lucky because eventually we were able to welcome our first child into the world last year. But I also recognize that many families aren't so lucky and that many families go through several miscarriages before they're, if ever, able to have a child.

With that, again, I would ask this House, I would beg of this House to include what we are asking for, as those amendments come forward, to ensure that we are strengthening this legislation to include abortions, to include termination for medical reasons.

I appreciate the indulgence of the House. You know, this was a very sensitive time for us. No doubt, the feelings that I went through were different than the feelings and trauma that my own wife went through. At this point I guess I would just say that I'm so proud and honoured to be married to such a courageous and inspiring and intelligent woman. It was a tough path. We were very lucky and privileged in our situations, here in the Legislature and in her own work, that her employers were willing to go above and beyond to support her. But not every family is so lucky. That is why we as legislators need to ensure that we are providing the strongest framework to ensure that people aren't discriminated against through this process based on the procedure or decisions that they make and that we do everything we can to support families through this very traumatic experience.

With that, I look forward to further discussions on this very important piece of legislation. I again appreciate the government bringing it forward and being willing to take some steps to strengthen what was previously in place. But, again, as a private member, Madam Speaker, I hope that we can do even better sometime in the near future.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate on Bill 17. I just want to acknowledge my friend who's the MLA for Edmonton-West Henday for sharing his very personal story. We're so glad that it worked out for him and his wife. I think that he speaks for many Albertans, you know, about the deep emotional pain, of course, with the loss or potential loss of a baby coming into your life. It really does speak to the importance of making sure that Bill 17 accurately reflects what we really want to do to support all families and be inclusive.

There are really three aspects to Bill 17, and I'm just going to go through them. Like, there are three parts that sort of focus on reservists, and on just the labour code, protections for faculty associations regarding exclusive bargaining, and then, of course, what the Member for Edmonton-West Henday shared about bereavement leave.

I'll start with the reservists, Madam Speaker. This legislation removes the limit of 20 days of leave per calendar year for the

training of reservists, and my understanding is that this is, you know, getting Alberta sort of up to speed in terms of the national sort of, I guess, the way it is done in most provinces. I just want to commend the government for doing that because I'm sure that not every type of training, not every type of activity that the reservist needs to do fits into that 20-day frame, so it's important that there be some flexibility with that. The removal of this I think is a good thing.

Let me just also thank all the reservists here in Alberta, who do work every day to support us, you know, as Albertans, as Canadians. Some of the international work that they're doing even supporting citizens of Ukraine right now: we're just very grateful for them putting themselves in harm's way, really, to support us here in our province and in our country.

I mean, I think that all members of the House think this makes sense, to remove this 20 days. You know, the minister: I know he has shown a lot of interest and oftentimes wants to be involved in debates, but if he could talk to us a little bit about how this specifically would help reservists, we'd be happy to hear some of his comments about that. Let me just say that certainly the removal of the limit of 20 days of leave per calendar year for training, so that they can keep their regular jobs, is very important. I just want the minister and the government to know that we certainly support that.

The other aspect of the bill that I'd like to talk about is about, you know, the labour relations amendment that they're doing. It removes the legislated protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff associations, graduate student associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations.

Somewhat similar but not exactly similar to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I taught at the University of Calgary also, but I never had a full-time gig. I always just was a sessional. I know that he was, of course, a full-time faculty member there. I taught at the University of Calgary and also at MacEwan University, Faculty of Social Work, for many years before being elected here to this Chamber. I even did one course for the University of Alberta, which is kind of extraordinary for a social worker.

There's no faculty of social work at the University of Alberta, which I think is a great tragedy for our province because, unfortunately, that excludes social workers oftentimes from – for example, the U of A hospital is a teaching hospital, so they have all the faculties come together and they often have collaborative professional development. When the students are in school, they're easily brought together because it's all part of the U of A. Of course, the U of A does not have a faculty of social work, and that apparently was a decision made back in the early '60s, 1960 or something, when it was decided that Calgary was going to be responsible for the entire province for the education of social workers.

4:20

Certainly, as a long-time social worker myself I've always wanted the U of A to have a faculty, and I think we have enough need and demand in our province to have students educated not only at the University of Calgary but here at U of A. But, yeah, U of C did have a satellite campus here in Edmonton, and of course that's where I taught.

Anyway, I have some, obviously, concerns and, you know, connection with faculty staff associations because of my previous work. Again, these are just some questions for the minister. How come this decision is being made to shift this? Like, what is the purpose of that? Who benefits? You know, that's always an important social policy question to any policy that comes forward. You have to ask: who benefits? It's really important. Like, is it just one specific group, or this group? It determines a lot of what people can understand from legislation. I'm just wondering if the

minister would be willing to express some of his understanding about that.

One of the things that we have heard in our consultation, ongoing regarding this part of the legislation, is that there hadn't been consultation on this. That again is sort of confusing. Why is this being brought forward? If it's being brought forward, we always want – whoever is impacted by the legislation should have a voice in it. Certainly, the disabled community talks about “nothing about us without us,” but I think all of us feel that way. If there's legislation that's going to impact us, we want to hear about that. Faculty associations, graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations are telling us that the government, the UCP, has not consulted with them about this, so that's concerning.

I mean, certainly, when the UCP was in opposition and we were in government, that was one of the things that they took great umbrage in, that they felt like a rigorous consultation process was so important, but it seems kind of strange now that they are government that they themselves don't see that as valuable and think that they can just go right ahead without actually including the voices of the people impacted by policy. I think that that's a deep concern, and I would really encourage the UCP – it's not too late. This legislation hasn't gone through. Maybe there are some amendments that need to be put forward, that they are listening to these leadership bodies of the groups that this legislation has impacted. I really encourage them to make sure that their door is open to all of these associations.

But I guess I have a deeper concern about some of the changes here, not only the consultation – of course, that's significant – but also just the UCP's continued attack on civil society organizations and certainly professional organizations specifically. You know, we just moved Bill 15 to third reading, and that's of course changing the self-governing process of the disciplinary hearings for teachers in our province. It's taking away their ability to be self-regulating, which is sort of a fundamental aspect of being a profession. That's actually part of the definition, so it's almost deprofessionalizing – well, it is deprofessionalizing the profession of teaching. Because it's important to be assessed by people who understand the work that you do, and if you're being assessed by people who are not understanding that, don't have that professional background, sometimes, certainly, poor outcomes can come from that because they don't understand the work you do. That is another attack on some of these professional associations and certainly my own professional college, the Alberta College of Social Workers.

Last spring a bill was passed in this House where the association had to split from the college. Because it's just such a small association, college, only 8,000 members, you know, it's the death knell – it could be the death of the association.

In the changes to this labour relations in Bill 17 I'm just concerned that they are continuing the attack on, sort of, professions, the civil society organizations. As I was just saying, my own professional college has just 8,000 members. The mandatory registration would continue, so social workers would need to pay fees, agree with a code of ethics, standards of practice on an annual basis, submit continuing competence, those kinds of things. But then the association, which has to do more with, you know, what the state of affairs is in our province regarding social services, what kind of supports, what kind of things our clients that we serve need, what some of the issues are in the workplace, all of those broader issues that we had come collectively together for – really, this splitting of the Alberta College of Social Workers is going to create a much weaker association, and I really am concerned that it may not continue. So then that's not a really strong advocacy voice for the profession in our province. I see that as a real attack by the UCP on professions.

Then just in terms of this issue regarding not consulting on this aspect of the bill, certainly I just want to remind members of Bill 78 in the fall, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. I heard directly from many affordable housing stakeholders that they were never consulted on that bill. They were consulted on the strategy but not the bill, and they were surprised by the legislation that came forward. Of course, there are some deep concerns about that legislation because it really looks to privatize affordable housing and certainly not look at any kind of social housing, which, of course, is the deeper subsidy housing, which the private industries are not interested in. Maybe they'll do 10 per cent below market because there may be some profit motive for them, but nobody in the private sector is going to do rent geared to income. They're not going to do that deep subsidy. What does that mean? Is the UCP abandoning that whole aspect of housing? It's really important that we have that social housing for people. You know, at times it is seniors who are on fixed incomes and need that kind of subsidized housing and support.

It's also very tragic because at this time we know that the federal government is investing significantly, but unfortunately Alberta is kind of missing in action in that regard as they leave \$187 million on the table. We could be benefiting from that in our province.

These are some reasons we need to consult and we need to really listen to those stakeholders, so I guess I'm encouraging the minister to be in contact with faculties, staff associations, graduate students' associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations so that they think that he's listening to them and understands their concerns. If legislation is being created, it needs to actually be assessed and be put before people who are impacted by that. I think that that's really important.

Then, sort of the third piece, which many of my colleagues have spoken about very eloquently, in this legislation is about the bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, which, I suppose, could potentially . . . [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] Oh. I didn't get to it.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to the current bill, Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, as was spoken at length by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, one of the concerning aspects of this proposed piece of legislation that we have in front of us right now is changes to the Labour Relations Code. It removes the July 1, 2022, end to the legislative protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff.

4:30

Now, as I've stated in the House before, I had the pleasure before being elected to this House to be the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta. One of the roles that I actually implemented was a meeting between all the associations at the university so that we could all talk about the immediate concerns, short-, medium-, and long-term goals that our associations had in relation to our representation at the University of Alberta. It was a good opportunity for us to see what the issues and concerns were that we had in common.

It was my own particular opinion at that time that especially the Postdoctoral Fellows Association would be better off being represented by the Non-Academic Staff Association. That was my opinion at the time. But, of course, things change. Things could be different now. I'm not suggesting that that should be the case. However, at that time and with the issues and concerns that

representatives of the Postdoctoral Fellows Association had and how they felt completely underrepresented – actually, many of them felt completely disrespected by the board of the University of Alberta, the administration at the University of Alberta. They felt that not only were they being underpaid and receiving next to nothing in benefits, but also the amount of work that they had to do being postdoctoral fellows was immense compared to some of the academic staff that were there at the University of Alberta.

I was president of the Non-Academic Staff Association for, I believe, a period of two and a half years. Of course, that would be too short of a time to develop a real, considerable, deep relationship between nonacademic staff and postdoctoral fellows. But that was my intention, at least to sit at the table and to continue discussing the issues. Like I mentioned at the very beginning, it was my hope that many of these postdoctoral fellows would then become members of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Of course, you know, with the name being the Non-Academic Staff Association, the postdoctoral fellows were a little bit concerned about that. The thing is that organizations grow. Associations grow in their mandate. That's one of the beautiful things about associations like the Non-Academic Staff Association, that they're truly democratic organizations, and the directors of the association are doing the will of the actual members of the association.

I mean, that's just to give you a little bit of a history on the role that I played there at the University of Alberta and how it actually applies to this piece of legislation in the fact that things can change over time. People can feel better represented by another association, or there is greater strength or bargaining power in actually joining with another association so that when going through the bargaining process, they can have more strength at the bargaining table, right? These are some of the things that would have to be considered.

But, of course, that's not up to this body in terms of legislating it. I would say that it is the direct concern of the members that are being represented. So I feel like this piece of legislation actually closes the door to a potential possibility if it was deemed desired by the actual members of these different associations and, in this particular case, the Postdoctoral Fellows Association, but the same could go for the Graduate Students' Association or even the academic staff association at the University of Alberta or at any postsecondary institution for that matter. I think that, well – that's just to give it context and framing.

Now, the part that's even more concerning about this is the fact that this government didn't even choose to actually go out and ask and consult these associations about what it is that they would want, so it almost seems as if the minister is just assuming that, you know, this is what these associations want, didn't bother to actually consult with them. Since this proposed piece of legislation has been introduced in this House, we've actually reached out to a number of stakeholders on this particular bill, and they're the ones that are telling us that they haven't been consulted, right?

Here I'm giving a concrete example of how things can change over time or how members can be better represented, and of course that's completely up to them, how they are being represented. But it would've been good for this government to actually sit down with the stakeholders whom this proposed piece of legislation would be impacting and actually ask the questions – right? – give the time to sit down with the academic staff association and the Graduate Students' Association and the Postdoctoral Fellows and ask them, well, "What are the immediate concerns that you have?" especially since – and I can't tell you how many times I've heard this, Madam Speaker, from members themselves at the University of Alberta – they feel that because of the budget cuts they're drastically being impacted.

For example, since this government has taken power, I've heard from a number of members of the Non-Academic Staff Association

that not only I used to represent but that also actually live in my constituency. You know, they reminisce about the times I used to do the work as the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Bless these members. They say, "You know what? We need you back at the university," and I say, "Well, you know, I'm trying to do the job from inside the House now" instead of doing it as the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Of course, I represent many people and constituents. For me it's an honour for a member of the Non-Academic Staff Association in my constituency to call me or write me an e-mail and tell me about what it is that they're experiencing now and the fact that they feel incredibly short-changed by this government because of the pressures that they are putting on postsecondary institutions all over this province.

It's tough because I remember when I was the president, and it was very common at that time that – of course, it was under, you know, previous Conservatives. Like, we have the new and renewed version now, but it's not so good for members of the Non-Academic Staff Association, as for many Albertans, because it's still the Conservative perspective, the Conservative ideology that they're trying to shove down people's throats, I'll say – and that's a nice way of saying it, Madam Speaker – because they refuse to listen to anybody else, right? I've said it time and again. That's what members of my constituency and members of the Non-Academic Staff Association have been telling me. Again, we're back to these antiquated policies in terms of underfunding postsecondary education and not everybody having equal access to it.

4:40

What ends up happening, Madam Speaker, is that the board of governors, the administration, the president of the University of Alberta see the economic, the financial pressures being set on them, and the first people that always get the short end of the stick are the nonacademic staff at the University of Alberta. They're the first ones to lose their jobs or get their hours cut. When it comes to bargaining, the administration wants to give them less and less benefits as time goes on.

Like that, I think that the Graduate Students' Association, the Postdoctoral Fellows Association, and especially the academic staff association go through the same, similar types of pressures being set on them. I would argue that they have a lot more in common than they have different. But, of course, this proposed piece of legislation just completely shuts the door to the possibility of one of them or even another association or group being the bargaining agent for them at the table when it comes to bargaining exactly for how they're remunerated for the work that is being done in the postsecondary system and the benefits that they receive.

A lot of the times, you know, they won't get – because of the economic conditions that we're currently under, the crisis that we're under, that was made even exponentially worse by COVID, these workers tend to have not received any pay raises for years now, and of course inflation is going up. I remember, under the previous Progressive Conservatives, being at meetings and sharing with members of the Non-Academic Staff Association that because of inflation that same box of cereal that you're buying for your child so that they can have some breakfast, the same box of cereal that you're buying yesterday, in, like, a year from now is going to get more expensive. That's exactly what's happening now.

It's a shame that this government, without consulting any of the stakeholders that this portion of the legislation is going to be impacting, didn't even bother to consult with this group to ask them why that is the case. Of course, this is going to change and effectively stop the work that they've been doing to determine who represents them and their best interests at that bargaining table, Madam Speaker. So I think that this is something that's serious

enough that this government should take a second look at it, especially since they haven't consulted with these particular stakeholders.

I'm seriously thinking about voting against this bill at this time as it stands right now. I'm hoping that members on the other side will hear the message that I'm sharing with them right now and that they will bring an amendment once this proposed piece of legislation makes it to Committee of the Whole. Of course, as we know, Madam Speaker, this government has a majority so they tend to just – again, with all due respect, this is the way that a lot of people are feeling, that they're just ramming their ideology down people's throats and not listening, not taking the time to really listen to people and what their concerns are and how they can best be represented through pieces of legislation like the one that we have in front of us.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. When I look through the legislation, there are clearly some things that can be supported. I think, right off the top, talking about removing the 20 days for reservists to have leave from their employer is incredible. I know that there are so many reservists in the province, many of whom are employed by the government of Alberta. Health is probably, I believe, the number one employer of reservists in the province, and to know that this leave is being made available is great. Being able to support reservists to do the things that they need to do to train and not go into their own personal days is a wonderful step towards showing support for the incredible work that they do within Canada domestically on missions and then internationally.

I know that when we have wildfires, when we have floods, if the community that's being impacted doesn't have capacity, the reserves are the first line of action that we call in when we're dealing with those domestic disturbances all across Canada. Recently we saw reservists deployed into several provinces during COVID to assist with the continuing care facilities. We heard reservists here in the province getting ready for potential deployment. In order to do that, they need to take time off, and the simple act of being a reservist means that you are a civilian and also part of the Canadian Armed Forces. While you have your civilian job, you want to be able to fulfill your service to the Canadian Armed Forces, and knowing that this piece of legislation is going to remove that is a wonderful, wonderful thing, and I can wholeheartedly support that piece of Bill 17.

When it comes to the rest of this legislation, specifically around section 53.983, unpaid bereavement leave, I think the sections where it defines common-law partner and parent under (a) and (b) are good. When we get to section 2(a), (b), (c), and (d), it's not clear enough. We talk about

- (a) the death of a family member;
- (b) the employee has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (c) the employee's spouse or common-law partner has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (d) a person has a miscarriage or stillbirth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Well, when we talk about pregnancy loss, there are two clear definitions that have been left out. Madam Speaker, I don't know if that was intended, but it is a glaring omission in this legislation, and it absolutely needs to be included.

We need to talk about abortion and termination for medical reasons being included because this legislation needs to be clear. It

needs to identify pregnancy loss in all its capacity. I think that when we see that there's an acknowledgement of adoptive parents, when it talks about the miscarriage or stillbirth and they would have been a parent as a result of that pregnancy, that very clearly is thinking outside of the box and not looking at biology but looking at what pregnancy means. To not define clearly abortion and termination for medical reasons is confusing, why it's omitted. I think that in order to honour all of those that experience any form of pregnancy loss, this legislation needs to be clear. We should be able to say the term "pregnancy loss" and look to the legislation and have clear definitions included under this section that identify exactly what that means so there is no room for interpretation. It needs to be very, very clear.

4:50

I think that when we're talking about pregnancy loss, it's not the why and it's not the how. A loss of pregnancy occurred, and that employee deserves the ability to access bereavement leave, period. It's our job as legislators to make sure that there is no question when it comes to the approval from that employer to be able to give it. Right now the way it reads is that if someone – like the hon. member my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday described, his heartbreaking experience with his wife and an ectopic pregnancy, that wouldn't qualify as a loss of pregnancy the way it's written in this legislation.

There's no reason to not be clear. When we look at legislation about the kinds of pregnancy loss that a person may experience, the way it's written is discriminatory. It clearly excludes abortion and termination for medical reasons, and I think that it's essential. Those legislators were able to be very clear in what pregnancy loss means. The last time I checked, Madam Speaker, those two words, "abortion" and "termination for medical reasons," are pregnancy loss.

When we hear in question period the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood ask specifically, "Will this language be included?" and we get a response that an amendment will be coming, even that message isn't clear. What will the amendment say? This is a piece of legislation that has a huge impact on those that are seeking that time off, those three days unpaid, because of the loss of a pregnancy. We don't need to be putting employees in a situation where they have to explain the type of loss. They should be able to look to the legislation and see all of the types of pregnancy loss and know that they unequivocally qualify. It's the importance of having clarity when we're talking as legislators and creating legislation that is inclusive and truly includes all the types of pregnancy loss.

I also think of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talking about the loss of a child through a failed adoption. The loss is significant. We have families that prepare, whether they're a foster to adopt family or they're approved for an adoption, and there are so many different barriers – they're not barriers but factors, perhaps – that could come into place that could cause adoption breakdown. One of them under the legislation allows the birth parent 10 days to appeal and revoke their consent. I can tell you, having worked with families who have gone through adoption, that those 10 days are excruciating. I've had parents tell me they're afraid to bond; they're afraid to love this baby in case it's not theirs.

I can tell you as a mom to three kids that when you find out that you're pregnant, you're flooded with a ton of emotion, whether it was planned or unplanned. Then to deal with the loss of a pregnancy is a significant loss to so many, whether you're the biological parent, whether you're the adoptive parent, the caregiver, the loved one. And however that pregnancy came to end, you shouldn't be required to explain to your employer. We should have it very articulate through the legislation to include those two extra definitions.

It's a positive step, for sure, that we're giving Albertans time away from the workplace. We've heard countless personal stories

of the impacts of pregnancy loss. It's something that I can tell you as a support person, as a friend, as a social worker: the grief can be absolutely unbearable. To have to explain to your employer the type of pregnancy loss shouldn't be a requirement, or to try to justify or advocate for yourself that your grief affiliated with loss of pregnancy deserves three days of bereavement leave. If it was clear in the legislation, it would be a simple conversation that there was a loss of pregnancy, period.

I think that there is a real opportunity for this government. Like, the minister had said that there would be an amendment. I truly hope that that amendment clearly articulates abortion and termination for medical reasons. It goes in line with the rest of section 53.9. It adds extra clarity to this piece of legislation, which I would hope all can agree in a time of grief and loss shouldn't be left up to the employee to explain to their employer.

Now, I know as an employer that there are conversations that you just trust are happening and that they're being honest and truthful. I can't imagine what the experience would be like for an employee to have to explain the type of pregnancy loss, knowing the stigma that comes with so much of that.

One of my very best friends suffered numerous miscarriages. She got to the point where she was even embarrassed to tell us that she was trying. Telling her employer that she had a miscarriage caused so much stress for her.

I think that when it comes to pregnancy, we need to be able to acknowledge all the types of loss that occur, be able to have it clearly articulated. Miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, TFMR, infertility, failed adoption: those are all examples of loss of pregnancy. Whether the language makes you uncomfortable or not, if we're truly trying to support Albertans in accessing unpaid bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, it simply makes sense to ensure that that's included.

I think that when we have conversations with employees and the different regulations under the labour statutes, there are conversations that just simply don't exist. When an employee comes and says, you know, "I have cancer," typically that word alone is enough for the employer to know that they need support, that they need time off. My hope is that it's the same when an employee comes to their employer and says that they've experienced a loss of pregnancy and they need time off. There shouldn't be follow-up questions. There shouldn't be: "How come? Why? What happened?"

I know that we still live in a society where there are some expectations around pregnancy. A very dear friend of mine in a public position, common law, not legally married, got pregnant and was terrified to tell her employer.

Thank you.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, at the second reading stage. I was pleased to hear that the government does intend to amend this legislation around the issue of amendments to employment standards around job-protected leave in the context of a pregnancy loss. Of course, it's not defined as such in the legislation. It's a very curious crafting of the legislation in which miscarriage and stillbirth are not defined in the act, yet they are enumerated in the act. This should have been caught at the legislative review stage of cabinet. I am shocked that it was not. It is – and this is charitable – a very sloppy way to draft legislation given the number of events that may be interpreted within miscarriage or stillbirth or not and would have to be defined as a result of some forms of litigation.

I think we heard that through the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday describing in heartbreaking detail – and I thank him for sharing that story with the people of Alberta. He did not have to, but he did. I think it was in the public interest to do so, not only because I believe it to be in the public interest that people who come to this House accurately reflect the lived experience of the people who elected us. Certainly, pregnancy loss is a lived experience for far too many people. It can be very hard on people's attachment to workforce, on relationships, on overall health and well-being for prospective parents.

But an ectopic pregnancy, because miscarriage and stillbirth are not defined in the act, wouldn't necessarily be captured. It is a loss of pregnancy, but it is not specifically a miscarriage. It is not a pregnancy that can be carried anywhere near to term. It is, in fact, dangerous for women, and it has to be dealt with via medical intervention, that can sometimes also be very painful and, depending on how it is dealt with, can take some time. This has got to be fixed in the legislation if only because it causes, just on the face of it, even on the face of what constitutes either a miscarriage or a stillbirth, a great deal of confusion.

It also seems that it imports this language because there's sort of an attempt potentially by some to only keep those grounds very, very narrow. You can see coded in this – or one can see, if one is looking quite carefully at it and the various arguments of antichoice organizations and antichoice advocates, an importation of the concept of muddying women's personhood in front of the law and the bodily autonomy of there only being one person under the law even if that person is pregnant, which is, in fact, what underlines a lot of British common-law history and then was upheld in the 1988 Morgentaler decision, when it found that the Criminal Code provisions outlining access to abortion and the provisions requiring some sort of panel that women had to appear before endangered what was called security of the person in our section 7, security of the person rights. Those infringements on those rights were not saved by section 1 of the Charter because they muddied the concept of one person being able to make decisions and have autonomy over their own health care choices.

So it appears to me that, on the face of it, the refusal to have anything more than miscarriage or stillbirth is imprecise legal language. The terms are not defined, but also there appears to be an ideological impetus here as something of a way to mollify perhaps more extreme antichoice elements within the conservative movement, who do not reflect the broad consensus of Canadian or Alberta public opinion but nevertheless hold considerable sway in certain corners of the conservative moment in this province and across the country.

It is imperative that this be amended if only to satisfy just some basic concepts of fundamental justice, and I remain quite astonished, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that this made its way through cabinet and none of the lawyers in cabinet looked at this and said: this is, on the face of it, a very problematic way to enumerate the terms for a job-protected leave and will just simply cause confusion at the level of employment standards interpretation and ultimately land us all in the courts. The courts have better things to do than to fix the Legislative Review Committee of cabinet's mistakes and deliberate oversights, quite frankly.

It's important that we put that on the record, I think, because we have not seen the amendment yet, and if and when there is an interpretation phase of this legislation, if it doesn't get fixed in the right way, then the courts will look back at the transcript of this and they will see that the province had the opportunity to insert a better definition and a better approach that conforms with women's Charter rights, or section 7 rights to security of the person, and the full gamut of our health care or what happens to us in our interactions with the health care system, whether it's medical

reasons, pregnancy loss, or other forms of pregnancy loss, and they will see that the government chose not to take that route. I mean, somebody is going to end up having to pay a whole lot of money to fix this problem, including GOA lawyers and some brave woman, I'm sure, if it doesn't get fixed within the confines of this Chamber forthwith.

Now, I want to turn my attention and the remainder of my time and comments on this bill at second reading to a completely different matter, Madam Speaker, which is the matter of postsecondary associations and the individuals that are affected by the removal of the expiration of the exclusive right of academic status associations, graduate students' associations, or postdoctoral fellows to be bargaining agents for those groups. We have heard from those affected that they were not consulted on this change, and those changes will effectively stop the work, the constitutionally protected work, that those associations have begun doing to determine who represents them in their bargaining relationship.

I will remind this House that the reason why academic staff associations, graduate students, and postdocs have the right to representation and the right to bargaining in the first place is because the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour decision in 2014 by the Supreme Court of Canada underlined that the prohibition on the right to strike for faculty and other provincially represented unions, if you will, was, in fact, unconstitutional, that freedom of association is the fundamental freedom, the Charter right that underlines the right to choose a bargaining agent and then ultimately the right to withdraw labour, and that that is, in fact, a constitutional right in this country.

5:10

At the time of drafting the legislation that the New Democrats brought in, it was communicated to us through consultation, a novel concept, that those associations wanted more time to understand the impact of the legislation, what would be expected of them as bargaining agents, and they didn't quite, I think, have the capacity at that time – I think “capacity” is the right term – to fully grapple with what it might mean to choose their own bargaining agent. That was then; this is now.

Those organizations – we're talking about relatively small groups of people affected by this change. Postdoctoral fellows are, you know, maybe a few dozen at the University of Lethbridge. Certainly, the academic staff association is larger, and the graduate student association is of reasonable size. The University of Lethbridge is still relatively small compared to U of A and U of C, obviously. But there is no question that they have had a front-row seat for what it means to be represented in a bargaining relationship and to be included in a normalized labour relations environment as a result of that Supreme Court decision in 2014.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That is because the University of Lethbridge faculty found themselves on strike after a protracted back-and-forth period of negotiations over some time, and 300-plus faculty walked a picket line for some weeks, I think just shy of two months. I could stand to be corrected on that, but I think it was around that time. Maybe it was a little bit more. I certainly felt like it was a long time as I visited the picket lines very often. One was walking distance from my house, and the other was over on the west side, up at the actual campus, where the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West also joined me to chat with faculty walking the picket line.

Nobody wanted to be there. Everybody wanted to be teaching and doing research and, you know, undertaking scientific work in the neuroscience building, in the new science building, in biological

sciences, in chemistry, in mathematics, in music education – I'm just trying to go through all of the different conversations that I had with liberal arts professors, with professors of economics and business management and all of the disciplines that the University of Lethbridge excels at. Of course, they came to find themselves walking that picket line as a result of the \$20 million of cuts over four years that have trickled down from this House into my community.

It was just such a shame to watch all of that happen given the fact that the cuts have been severe. When you pull \$20 million over four years out of a community of 100,000, that is a tremendous economic multiplier effect, and it has had an effect on businesses, small, medium, and large. It has had an effect on real estate, on families having to make decisions about whether to stay or whether to go. Certainly, meeting people on the doorstep who say: there's no way I would ever support the UCP because I just lost my job because of them. You know, canvassing in Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West, that is something I hear.

Again, concentrating those cuts so narrowly in that city certainly has tremendous effects, but all of this came about because there was a normalized bargaining relationship, which the academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows all deserve, and that's why this legislation is problematic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 17 is before the Assembly. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. It's an important piece of legislation and, for the most part, I guess, does three main things.

With respect to changes to reservists' leave we support our reservists and the important work they do for our country. Removing the 20-day limit on job-protected leave is the right thing to do, and it will certainly bring Alberta in line with other Canadian jurisdictions.

The second thing: with respect to bereavement leave I think it's critically important that grief and other responses that may surround a pregnancy loss are recognized or duly recognized. Since there are a range of emotional, mental, physical health experiences that can follow these events, those who experience that are in the best position to describe that, to share what they need. I think that giving those Albertans time away from the workplace to process that loss is certainly a positive step.

However, one concern is that it only specifies leaves when someone has a miscarriage or stillbirth, and it does not include abortion or termination for medical reasons. This bill needs to be amended to include all types of pregnancy loss so that abortion and termination for medical reasons can be included as well. We should not leave room for interpretation.

Earlier the Premier was asked about this, and the minister of labour just said that there will be amendments. He was very hesitant – in fact, all members of the UCP caucus were hesitant – to even utter the word “abortion.” As it stands now, I think this bill does not go far enough. It is not clear enough. It needs to be amended to include abortion. It needs to be amended to include termination for medical reasons. It needs to cover a range of experiences.

Many of my colleagues shared their experiences, and I thank them for that. This bill needs to do exactly that and provide for a range of experiences that come with this loss. They need to specify what loss will be covered and what loss will not be covered.

With respect to the other changes contained in this piece of legislation, the postsecondary changes, it will identify members of the staff associations and put them in legislation, recognize them in legislation as a bargaining unit.

The problem with those changes is the same as with many other steps that the government has taken. This government has an attitude that they know best, and they do not consult with relevant stakeholders when making these changes. We have heard from those impacted by these changes that they were not consulted. It's deeply concerning because this government has made a number of changes to postsecondary institutions without consulting them.

5:20

Postsecondary institutions have been on the chopping block from day one, when the UCP began government. Their funds were cut by \$700 million without any consultation with universities and postsecondary institutions. Their staff was fired. Their grants were cut. Tuition fees were raised. Interest on student loans was raised. All these things were done without consultation with the postsecondary institutions, not just without consultation but despite strong opposition from postsecondary institutions, despite evidence that we need a strong postsecondary sector to grow our economy, to diversify our economy, to be a part of the modern economy. But this government did not listen to anyone, and now they're making further changes that will impact postsecondary institutions without consulting them.

These are the reasons why, whenever this government comes close to educational institutions, postsecondary institutions, or does anything, nobody trusts them. Their goal is to keep postsecondary education out of reach of everyday Albertans and to do much damage to these institutions. As it stands now, I think there need to be substantial amendments in order for us to support this piece of legislation.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

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

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

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.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 3]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would like to add to the debate.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on referral of Bill 11 to committee and that this not be read further. I mean, I've spoken already regarding the Continuing Care Act. You know, this is described as framework legislation, so it's legislation that, really, sets a framework. It doesn't have a lot of detail in it, and therein lies the concern.

This is such a key area. Since we've just experienced some very difficult years because of COVID-19, this area in our province has had so much difficulty. We know that more than 1,600 people have died in continuing care facilities, residents of continuing care facilities, throughout our province. According to the National Institute on Ageing we've had the highest number of outbreaks in facilities in Canada here in our province. These are sad statistics.

This means that so many families have grieved lost loved ones and, I'm sure, are continuing to grieve as each sort of milestone – another birthday, another holiday like Christmas – comes up, you know, memories of that individual.

Sadly, so many of these deaths were preventable, but for a multitude of reasons I think the services that these families needed, that these residents needed were not provided. Sadly, they were put in harm's way. That's why it's so important that this bill not be read again.

One of the major things that's a huge concern, I would say, was just, you know, how the UCP really dragged their feet on that one-site work order of the chief medical officer. When they did finally bring it forward, after we had for months – I think it was two months we were calling for it, and other jurisdictions had been doing this. They finally did bring it in. But guess what? Unfortunately, there were so many exemptions to this one-site work order that, really, it still meant that it didn't have much power to mandate that workers would only work at one site. The reason that that was so important, of course, as we remember, is because oftentimes COVID was transmitted by these health care workers because they worked at multiple facilities. Sometimes they worked in other kinds of jobs. They were spreading COVID-19 amongst the residents, and that, obviously, had deadly consequences, as I've just noted, with over 1,600 residents dying here in Alberta.

Things could have been handled very much differently. The urgency and the importance of Bill 11 is key. The tragic thing is – I mean, we were hoping for some transformational legislation, quite frankly, but what we got here is, really, an administrative bill. As I said, it's framework legislation that gives very few details about what exactly is going to be transformed. The question is: will it transform our continuing care system in Alberta? Really, we know – and COVID has shone the light very brightly – that it does need to be transformed. We knew this before COVID, but of course the pandemic did really show us very clearly how much that system needs revamping.

You know, we're grindingly slowly moving forward. But I guess what I would say to the government is: where's the urgency? Where's the urgency? What does it take to see the importance of this? A pretty serious consequence has already happened, but we're told now that it's going to be still spring 2023 when any of the detail, which is going to be in regulations, will come about. I just want to express my concern about that, really, again just seeing how this UCP government has not supported seniors. Not all residents of continuing care facilities are seniors, but I would say that the large majority are. Certainly, families of those residents really feel that they can't depend on the UCP to competently manage the continuing care system, to have the best interests of their loved ones in mind.

5:30

This isn't the only area where the UCP has really, you know, abandoned seniors, I'm sad to say, because they've done other things, and I guess I just want to identify that one of the other things that they've done is that they closed the Seniors Advocate office. That was one of the first things they did when they became government. Of course, that office did tremendous work to advocate for seniors, to help them navigate provincial programs. I mean, it's a complex system. The work that the social workers, that the advocate herself did at the time made a big difference.

It was a new office that, of course, we created when we were government. I had the honour of being the Minister of Seniors and Housing at that time, and we took great pains to make sure that we had a really high-calibre, qualified individual to lead that office and, you know, just set it up, obviously, and have staff and really develop

that whole Seniors Advocate office. We chose Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who was a professor at the University of Alberta, continues to be a professor there, of course, as a specialist in seniors' services. Certainly, she was a strong advocate. I met with her on a quarterly basis, and she certainly told me many times all the ways we were failing as a government. She pushed the envelope, and that was her job. I feel like she made me a better minister because she challenged what we were doing.

Certainly, one of the things that she taught me was just about, you know, sort of being much more respectful in terms of our language. Sometimes when we talk about seniors, people will say, "Our seniors," as if they're little children or something. No, no, no. That's not very respectful. She was often critiquing how information came out from the ministry and made sure that we had respectful language.

But, sadly, as I said, when the UCP was elected, one of the first acts was to close that office. At the time the minister said it was because: oh, well, the Health Advocate can do that. Shortly after the UCP was elected, that Health Advocate position was open, and the Minister of Health at the time actually stopped the sort of recruitment process, the interviewing process, and put in a hand-picked UCP supporter, Janice Harrington, who really has no background in, certainly, health or seniors and sort of really, I think, created a question of credibility for that office.

Despite the Minister of Seniors and Housing's commitment to me, certainly, in multiple estimates that I've asked her about or even in this House, asking questions that seniors' concerns were being addressed by the Health Advocate, she has not met with the Health Advocate. I asked her that specifically in estimates, you know, again this year. Refused to answer that. I can only assume from that that she's not meeting with them. I asked the Health minister the same question because that's what the Minister of Seniors and Housing advised me to do, because she says: that's Health. That makes me question whether she actually is listening to the Health Advocate or the Health Advocate actually is doing anything to support seniors. And he told me that he didn't know if they'd been meeting. He had met with the Health Advocate regarding concerns for his Health ministry but nothing about, specifically, the seniors ministry.

Anyway, despite the Minister of Seniors and Housing saying that, yes, absolutely, seniors' concerns will be met and supported and advanced through that office, the Health Advocate, because they're just amalgamating it, so seniors will still – it's not happening. There wasn't even a report this year. You know, every year an annual report is submitted by the advocate, and there was nothing even this year, so we have no public record even of what's going on. Again, this is just an example of the UCP not advancing the concerns of seniors, not providing supports for them. In Bill 11 again we're being told, "Yes, yes, yes; it's all going to be taken care of," but again it's a delay. We won't hear anything until the spring of 2023. Again, I just feel this is a lack of urgency on the part of government, because we've been through a very difficult time, and there are things that could be done right now to make a huge difference for residents of continuing care facilities.

I guess another area where it shows we just can't trust this government, can't trust the UCP, is Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act. I think it was last spring that that bill was passed, and it took away the right of families to seek justice. So if loved ones were neglected or indeed passed away in continuing care facilities due to negligence on the part of the facility, no longer could families seek justice. Again, this is just another way the UCP is abandoning seniors and is deeply disturbing to me.

Another – well, this is sort of an overall issue with some of the continuing care system, that there are many private facilities, there's

a for-profit model. That can create difficulties, I would say, in the system because we know from research – and it's been extensive – that the best outcomes for residents of continuing care facilities, the best outcomes for the residents themselves, come from public facilities; second, nonprofit facilities; third, we know that the privates do the worst in terms of how they support seniors. We know that the private operators – when they got, you know, I think it was the federal money for COVID support, we know that a lot of that money went to shareholders. Herein lies the issue with some of the private continuing care facilities, because they're operating to make profit. It's not so much about service delivery; it's more about making profit for their shareholders.

Also, the staff are being squeezed because they're not getting the supports they need to be able to serve seniors well. We know that that is one of the most important aspects of continuing care, that staff are well supported, well trained, yet we know that most of the staff in continuing care are low-paid, precarious workers – most of them are women – and that they are often newcomers to our country. That makes it pretty volatile for everyone involved in that system because if you have workers that aren't well supported, it's hard for them to do the job that they need to.

Serving vulnerable seniors: you know, that's not easy work. That work requires training. Certainly, you have to develop a relationship with people, so if the staff are always changing, which happens oftentimes with precarious workers, then of course the health outcomes for the seniors themselves will be much diminished. You get to know seniors, and you know, perhaps, what they like or how they like things to be done, those kinds of things. If workers are always changing, they can't be supported.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, under RA1. This is not the first amendment that we have put forward. Previously in the debate we put forward an amendment to refer this piece of legislation to committee based on what we've been hearing from Albertans, and what we see in this legislation is that there's absolutely no action in this bill. We advocated, when we were requesting for it to go to committee – and I will continue to advocate like my colleagues have on this referral amendment – that this bill not proceed in the way that it's been written.

5:40

We have seen devastating outcomes for Albertans. I would say that having over 1,600 loved ones die in continuing care in Alberta is a tragedy, and it absolutely has to be a call for action. Bill 11 was a wonderful opportunity for the government to do that, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, when we look through this, it doesn't have the action that's required. I would suggest that members really consider not allowing this piece of legislation to be read a second time and that the UCP really take the time to talk to Albertans about what this act should do.

I know that throughout COVID I've had many important people in my life either working in continuing care or have loved ones in the continuing care facilities in the province, and their stories are heartbreaking. We saw the stories emerge throughout COVID when the military was called in to assist. That made the national stage, talking about the care that seniors are having in these facilities, and I think that we need to have that same kind of transparency and real action about what needs to be done. The best way to come up with solutions is to ask those that are living it, ask those that work in

those environments, ask the loved ones who have their people in those continuing care residences.

And like the Member for . . .

Mr. Bilous: West Henday.

Ms Goehring: No.

Mr. Feehan: Riverview.

Ms Goehring: . . . Edmonton-Riverview was talking about, this is their home. So when we're talking about job and safety standards and those types of things, there's a certain amount of intimacy that happens when the work that you're doing is providing care to someone in their home. I know my experience working in group care with young people: I had an incredible privilege to work in their home. First and foremost, it was an expectation of myself and my staff that we treat it as their home. Yes, this is our place of employment, but first and foremost this is where the people that we work with live.

Having that intimate relationship with people is so important, and that care can't be completed in a way that is expected if there are so many barriers that are being forced on them. When we talk about hours, when we talk about ratios, this isn't how many people can fit in a capacity, in a space, if you work at, let's say, a stadium and you're looking at how many people meet fire code. These are person-to-person ratios. These are expectations of the people providing the care and the utmost respect and quality of care that we're expecting to be provided to seniors that are living in these facilities.

We made an attempt to have this referred to committee, and that was defeated, and now we're making an attempt that it not be read a second time, that the government take the opportunity to really talk to those loved ones and have the conversation about what it was like when COVID was at its peak. What is it like now? Have there been any sort of changes or implementations that need to happen that are being missed? That information isn't relayed in this bill. We know that if we gave opportunity to speak to grieving families, there is a lot that they would say. They're coming from a place of first-hand experience of the tragedies that happened to their loved ones, and with legislation this government took away the rights of grieving families. It provides an opportunity, if we were to agree on this amendment, for the government to really get it right, to listen to those that have been impacted.

One of my dearest friends provided care for her great-aunt living in a facility. My friend worked full-time. Her husband worked full-time. Both of her kids were university students. The staff were so overwhelmed at the facility. They weren't able to actually provide the care that was required to feed her. My girlfriend said that it would take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. She was not capable of feeding herself. She needed to be assisted quite significantly, and the staff just couldn't do it, so my girlfriend and her loved ones took turns. They were there two, three times a day just making sure that her basic need of eating was taken care of.

Now, when we look at what it's been like for those that are working in these types of facilities, the stress has been absolutely unbearable for many. I know that I've had calls from physicians, from health care workers, from nurses, from aides that told me that their workplace has been filled with professionals that hide in closets crying because they're so overwhelmed with the work conditions and the workloads and the care that they're providing. So many have told me that they want to do more, they want things to change, and they need the support from government to be able to do that. I know that if I'm hearing it, members of government are hearing it, Mr. Speaker.

I think that by not moving forward with this legislation and approving and voting in support of this RA1, it really gives an opportunity to just pause it, reach out, talk to those Albertans that have so many stories to share. It's an opportunity to really get this right. We know that there are so many that have been impacted by these 1,600 Albertans that tragically passed away from COVID, that 1,600 individuals and countless others that loved them, that knew them, that are grieving. They could have some significant insight on the impacts that should be in this Continuing Care Act, the action that needs to be taken at this time. I don't understand why there's this need to get this through legislation right now when we're hearing loud and clear that it does nothing. Let's listen to those that work in the care facilities. Let's talk about some of the substantive changes that could occur.

We know that there's a mistrust from those working in health care for this government based on how they've been treated. We know that there's continuous action that has created chaos. And we've seen that this government is just simply incapable of managing a complex health care system. Let's turn to those that are the front lines, the family, the residents, and get this right. It's an opportunity to be leading in how we respond to our continuing care facilities. We want to be able to shine the light on what's going wrong. We don't want it to be hidden in some report; we want it to be talked about and fixed. The UCP claim that that's something they want to do, yet this legislation doesn't do that. I think that when we hear the UCP time and time and time again say, "It's coming in regulation; just trust us" – the record of trust that has been broken continuously from this government leads so many to believe that they can't trust the UCP. Having clear, comprehensive legislation provides an opportunity to get it right, to talk about it.

5:50

I know that one of the things that this government did early on was that they closed the Seniors Advocate office. I think of all of that missed information that really could have been shared to really make this piece of legislation a piece of action, listening to the concerns of seniors. They would have been able to report directly to the Legislature and make recommendations. But we don't have that. That's not something that this government thought was a priority. So in lieu of having that, why not talk to those living in continuing care? Why not talk to those residents that are impacted?

I know the trauma that exists around the health care workers, the residents being trapped in their private rooms without knowing what was going on with their neighbours. Hearing of tragic loss and death and sickness has an impact. When you're working in people's homes and you're establishing incredible relationships with people, the grief and loss that you're feeling through this needs to be heard. It needs to be listened to. We need to be able to show Albertans that their loss and tragedy meant something, that a government that truly cares takes action. We take information, we take experience, we listen to those that have lived this, and then we do better. I would argue that through this referral amendment that gives government that perfect opportunity to just pause what they're proposing to do, actually implement something that has real, tangible action. I would really encourage all members of this House to really think about the stories that they've been hearing and what the change could look like.

I know all of us in this Chamber know someone who's aging. If they're not currently in a facility, there are those conversations about whether or not they should be. Knowing the state that it is right now and the fear that's surrounding it, I would argue that that's a discussion that has a lot of consequence.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would really encourage all members of this House to vote in support of RA1 and just pause this legislation. Get

it right. Let's do something that has real action, not just words, something that has a true impact on those that are continuing to work in these environments, those that are continuing to live in those environments, and those that are going to be entering those environments. Seniors deserve the best possible care, and we owe it to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 are there others? The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the members for Edmonton-Riverview and St. Albert for their comments on this bill. I'd like to speak to the amendment, and I'd like to speak against the amendment. While I appreciate the comments made by the members across the way about their passion for supporting seniors and the need for us to move forward, supporting this motion, which actually stalls us in our tracks and prohibits us from taking action, is actually not the way to do that.

Mr. Speaker, if we read the motion, you know, the single largest reason why they suggest that the bill not be read a second time is because there have been insufficient consultations. I'd like to speak to that in a second. The other reason that the members opposite give are the concerns of what's not in the bill in terms of transformation. We agree that we need to transform the system, and I'll speak to that. Finally, the suggestion that the legislation does nothing, that it doesn't take action: I'd like to speak to that because, again, simply, that is not the case.

Now, on the first item in regard to consultation, Mr. Speaker, there has been significant consultation. Over the years many continuing care stakeholders have asked the Ministry of Health to review Alberta's legislation to address challenges that exist in the system. This legislation review is part of our broader commitment to transform our continuing care system, to do everything we can to ensure that Albertans have access to high-quality continuing care. Now, we engaged numerous continuing care stakeholder organizations, and we received 33 written submissions that identified issues and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, input was received through home-care and nursing care regulation review. The legislative review was also informed by advice and recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review process.

I'd like to point out that that process occurred after we had already had some experience with COVID. We were into that for a year, and we heard through part of that review feedback from over 7,000 Albertans, including residents, family members, caregivers, operators, and community organizations. We heard stories of people that were impacted by COVID living in the seniors' facilities. We heard stories of families who were impacted, and we heard suggestions and recommendations through the FBCC to be able to make changes. I'll speak in a minute on the changes that we're making. All of this we took into account when we put this

legislation into place. So, Mr. Speaker, there was sufficient consultation.

The second point I'd like to make is on the concern about what's not in the bill. Mr. Speaker, concerns were raised by the other side that, you know: we can't trust the government to take action, to put it into regulation. Well, this bill is a framework, and I'll talk a little bit about what it does. They're quite right that it sets the frame for us to be able to do the transformation, that the policies and the changes are appropriately in regulation, as they are now. What we're doing is that we're taking disparate acts, six acts, pulling them together into one to have one consistent framework so we can ensure that we can have better outcomes and better governance of the entire sector and then work with the sector over the course of the coming months to build regulations to be able to deliver on the policies.

But I can say, Mr. Speaker, that we are taking action. We are putting our money where our mouths are. In Budget 2022 we increased the funding for continuing care, community care, and home care by over \$200 million, expanding access to home care. We also as part of our budget will be building over 1,500 more spaces in continuing care this year. Plus, we've added an additional \$200 million for additional spaces over the next three years. That is commitment. That is action that we are taking.

Part of that has been informed by the facility-based continuing care review, which suggested that one of the challenges associated with COVID – some of the worst outcomes in certain continuing care facilities were not associated with whether it was private or public; it was actually more associated with whether it was old or new, the age, and whether or not there were shared accommodations or shared washrooms. We're already taking action in terms of making renovations and changes to move away from the shared accommodations in recognition of that, and we will be doing more.

Mr. Speaker, we have put our money where our mouth is. This is a first step in terms of the funding, but that's the appropriate place where this will be. As the hon. members know, when they were in government, you don't put the budget, you don't put the policy, you don't put the details in regard to the staffing in the legislation. That goes in the regulations. That goes in the policy.

I'd like to talk a little bit about what this act does do, because it does enable us to be able to build a better system. It's the foundation. It will provide for greater system accountability, Mr. Speaker. It will align continuing care accommodation services, transparency, compliance, and monitoring, and it'll help us protect the quality of care and services and residents and clients. It puts all of that in place, better administration, so I urge . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, the hon. Minister of Health will have nine minutes remaining should he choose to use it the next time this item is called for debate.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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