



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 9, 2022

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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United Conservative: 21

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

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Frey
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Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Dang
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 9, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and to her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Akesh Aheer. I would invite you to all participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to welcome our anthem singer today, sitting in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Akesh Aheer, a student of music. His recent accomplishments include singing at provincials after having won scholarships at the local festival. Along with being an award-winning singer, Mr. Aheer is also the son of the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. Hon. members, please join me in thanking him.

Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some very, very special guests of the hon. the Member for Morinville-St. Albert, the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. Please join me in welcoming Kevin and Gail Nally, the parents of the hon. member. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

We also have this afternoon a school at the Legislature, a group joining us from the constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Uncas school.

Last but not least, joining us in the galleries today is Sierra Garner, a constituent of the Member for Lethbridge-West.

I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, 2022 has been a year of records or at least for record gas prices, which hit a new record it seems every few weeks. Our rising gasoline prices increase the cost of living by 1.4 per cent alone. While the increase in gas prices has been driven by an increase in commodity prices, they do not have to be as high as they are. That is a choice of various governments. For example, the federal government levies an excise tax, a carbon tax, and a GST

on gasoline, which together add up to more than 28 cents per litre. This is passed directly on to consumers and indirectly through increased transportation costs, which increase food prices.

The federal government decided in April to increase gasoline and food prices more by increasing their carbon tax. This was a deliberate move by the federal government to increase the cost of living for Albertans and all Canadians. The federal government could have helped. After all, here in Alberta the provincial gasoline tax has been removed for as long as oil prices remain high. This tax relief, according to University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe, was passed directly through to Albertans and continues to be passed through weeks after it began.

A simple look at national gas prices will tell you that something is very different and cheaper in Alberta. The price in Halifax is \$1.91; the price in Toronto, \$1.94; the price in Victoria, \$2.10; and leading the country in the most cost imposed is Vancouver at \$2.14. Meanwhile gasoline in Alberta is \$1.54 in Edmonton and \$1.59 in Calgary.

Clearly, there's a difference between Alberta and the rest of Canada, and that difference is that while other governments brought in taxes, resulting in increasing costs of living and punishing their constituents who need the fuel to drive vehicles to work, Alberta removed taxes and costs from all constituents.

Children's Health Care

Ms Pancholi: Sick children being forced to line up outside the children's hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton because there's no room for them to even sit and rest in the emergency room, a six-year-old being cut off from access to an insulin pump he needs to live, the lowest vaccination rate for children over five in the country, emergency room closures throughout rural Alberta, 43,000 residents and climbing in Lethbridge without a doctor: this is what health care chaos caused by the UCP looks like, and I barely cracked the surface.

Emergency room physicians, heroes during the pandemic, say that things are as bad now as they've ever been. They don't recall a time when it took 90 minutes just to triage a sick child. Ninety minutes. As a parent this is a nightmare. This is heartbreaking. It's cruel, and it's a crisis. Yet Albertans get nothing but talking points from the government, a Premier too embroiled in trying to save his own job to care, a Health minister that won't even take the phone calls of parents fearing for their child's life.

Albertans deserve so much better. Alberta's children deserve so much better. They deserve a government that will put public health care first, that will properly fund emergency rooms, that will ensure ambulances don't have to wait in line with their critical patients onboard, that will recruit new doctors and end the fighting with front-line heroes. They deserve a government that knows that, yes, public health care matters. It's part of being Canadian. It's how we take care of each other and, most importantly, how we as a community take care of our children.

I promise Alberta's children and their parents this: Alberta's NDP hears each and every one of you. We hear the pain and the fear in your voice. We're listening, we're acting, and if we have the privilege of forming the next government, we will be there for you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Economic Recovery and Women

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is booming. In 2021 Alberta beat the national average in real gross domestic product

growth, coming in at 5.1 per cent. Alberta quickly recovered postpandemic to its original position in Canada as the economic workhorse of this country, and people around the country and the world are noticing.

Within the last quarter of 2021 Alberta led large provinces in international and interprovincial immigration. The spike in GDP and immigration to this province is due to new investments from Amazon, Northern Petrochemical, Dow Chemical, Telus, and Pace Canada, just to name a few. These investments have shown that Alberta is the place to do business, and I am excited to see what this new outlook has in store.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that while this government has achieved all of this, they have still managed to balance the budget and increase funding for programs that Albertans value most. This is the Alberta advantage.

While this is great news, our government also recognizes the systemic barriers that women face in the workforce, and that is why our government has created an extra \$1 million bursary to assist women in their pursuit of careers in STEM and the trades. This government has also begun negotiations and has been working very hard to reduce licensed daycare fees to help working parents enter and stay in the workforce and participate in this economy.

Mr. Speaker, this government's efforts to reduce barriers for women are working. In March of 2022 the unemployment rate for women was 6.7 per cent, with an employment rate of 60.7 per cent. ATB reported that female workers in Alberta experienced a more pronounced labour market recovery postpandemic than male workers. Employment rates for women in Alberta have led the nation for five consecutive months. Under this government all Albertans, no matter their gender, will have an opportunity to participate fully in this economy.

Thank you.

1:40

Health Care System

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, just over three years ago columnist Don Braid wrote some prophetic words. He said that the UCP's plans for cuts to health care would guarantee "a return to the chaos of the Progressive Conservative years, and maybe worse." That prediction has sadly, tragically come true. Last week Braid spoke with Dr. Paul Parks, head of AMA's section of emergency medicine, on the dire state of our health care system under the UCP. "Albertans are dying," he says, because they can't access care.

We know some of these people have very serious outcomes and even deaths . . . The idea of a patient seeing the right person in the right place at the right time has completely fallen apart . . . We are desperate, just desperate for Albertans to understand how bad this is . . . There's a strong feeling among medical professionals that the troubles will only get worse because they have spread into so many corners of health care.

This, Mr. Speaker, is not just seasonal pressure like the Health minister likes to blandly claim. It didn't have to be this way. This government isn't a victim of circumstance. It repeatedly ignored warnings and made choices that led us directly here. As Dr. Parks says, "There is only one government making decisions and its policies are devastating."

You know what else Don Braid wrote back in 2019? "The NDP calmed down the system, made significant improvements and provided stability for health planners, professionals and workers." Keith Gerein wrote: "Alberta's health system has enjoyed one of its most uninterrupted periods of stability under the NDP's reign." But, as Braid wrote: "A new bunch of UCP politicians arrived in 2019, claiming to know exactly what was needed for health care. This is what we got." Chaos, Mr. Speaker, three years of mismanagement,

bullying, and utter incompetence, and Albertans left to pay the price.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that if we want to save our health care system, Alberta needs a new government, and the Alberta NDP is ready.

Camrose County Fire Services Safety Training

Ms Lovely: Thank you to the fire chief of the Camrose county volunteer fire service for inviting me to participate as a casualty in a safety training scenario which took place with the firefighting team, Wildrose safety training, and EMS. We gathered in a field at Silver Creek Paintball, close to New Norway, with a school bus turned on its side and a car placed in a collision position head-on with the bus.

There was a team of us gathered inside the bus, posing with various injuries. The Wildrose safety team outlined characters for each one of us to play, reviewing injuries and behaviour that they wanted us to exhibit so as to best provide learning experience for the volunteer firefighters. My character had two fingers severed, a head injury, confusion, memory loss, and a tendency to wander. One casualty was lodged in between the bus seats. Another had her arms stuck under the bus with the hands severed off. An additional casualty suffered the loss of an ear. With lifelike props and theatre makeup the team provided a very real scenario.

The volunteer firefighters were provided a call and sent to the scene, not knowing what they would find. The next two hours resulted in this dedicated team helping each casualty one by one. We were brought to a safe spot beside the bus, and the driver of the car was extracted, with the roof being removed and the driver carefully extracted on a body board.

Co-ordination and planning went into creating this scenario so as to provide valuable training for each of these volunteers. It was an honour for me to be asked to participate, and I came away from the exercise with tremendous respect for the time and commitment each one of these volunteers provides to their community. This participation means time away from family and work. It also puts them in places of danger to themselves in order to protect the safety and well-being of others.

This same team recently celebrated the grand opening of their new Camrose county regional fire services hall #2 with a barbecue and fundraiser. At the end of the event the alarm went off. They jumped into action.

Thank you for all you do. You are valued and appreciated.

Government Record

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been subjected to this government's boasting about their economic wizardry for months. It's embarrassing, and it's unbecoming and part of why no one trusts the UCP. The price of oil went up – that's it – otherwise, they'd still be running the highest deficit in Alberta history given how they've been happy to waste billions of the public's money. But while the Premier, his Finance minister, and the rest of the UCP liquor cabinet are popping champagne corks on the sky palace, Albertans don't buy it because they aren't feeling it, and that's why it's so disrespectful.

People are struggling because of the cost-of-living crisis that the UCP created, a full billion taken out of Albertans' pockets because of the hikes to personal income tax. They lifted the caps on utility rates. They've done nothing at all when rates skyrocketed and families were forced to choose between gas and groceries and keeping the lights on. The minister even declared in this House that the preferred UCP plan to help those Albertans was to do "nothing."

Electricity bills, natural gas, insurance premiums, income tax, student fees: Albertans are paying more and getting less. We have lineups outside of emergency rooms. Forty thousand of my fellow southern Albertans don't have a family doctor. And did they create jobs? No. Calgary's unemployment is still the highest of any Canadian major city, but still the government forks out money for private flights for the Premier and his friends, the fanciest hotels, millions for his secret war room, and time and again, over and over again, justifying a billion for a nonexistent pipeline. That's why this is the least trusted Premier in Canada, only able to hold on to his job by putting his thumb on the scale of an internal UCP process.

This is a party and a government that does not have respect for our tax dollars, our health care, or trimming waste in government. Albertans are asking for a government they can trust and that has respect for our province and the hard-working folks who build it every day. Whether it's in 12 weeks or 12 months, Alberta's NDP is ready to restore respect for Albertans yet again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Exercise Maple Resolve 2022 at CFB Wainwright

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many here know of Wainwright as the location of the 3rd Canadian Division support base detachment for the Canadian military. This is one of the busiest army bases in Canada. Over 600 military personnel drawn from all over Canada, many with their families, are stationed here for training. The role of the detachment is to provide extensive training to military individuals to prepare for active duty. Throughout the year military personnel are trained in a variety of military activities, primarily in-field exercises, live firing, and unit tactical operations.

Every spring, in May, the exercise Maple Resolve begins. This is a multinational exercise, involving 3,500 U.S. and Canadian troops as well as personnel from Great Britain, Australia, and France. This annual exercise identifies interoperability issues between the forces, allowing the partner nations to overcome them during training. This is not only sensible but acts as a force multiplier. It teaches individuals in the military across the world how to interact with army forces and to allow forces and units to operate together.

I'm reminded of this quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." The important activity of CFB Wainwright and the Maple Resolve exercise is part of that vigilance. I ask everyone here to join with me in paying tribute to our Canadian Armed Forces and to remain mindful of the important training that takes place year in and year out in humble Wainwright.

Government Record

Mr. Loewen: Democracy. It's a word we all know. It's a word we all use, maybe too casually, but let's dig into it. Democracy in Greek means "rule by the people." It must be stressed that this means all people. Of course, we have many elements of majority rule in our political system; for instance, we govern ourselves in this Legislature by majority vote. We allow the party that wins the most seats to govern. We have conducted referendums on various topics that respect the will of the majority.

However, democracy is the rule by the people, all people, and that's why we also have mechanisms to include the minority. For example, we possess rights and civil liberties like free assembly, religious freedom, and even free speech for unpopular opinions. We believe in the rule of law, with the understanding that the system must always be fair and just to all people. We believe in the role of

opposition and the rights of elected representatives to challenge government power, holding them to account.

However, I am troubled that this Premier does not seem to understand that he is a servant of the people. We have seen civil liberties trampled. We have seen corrupt practices that undermine our faith in fairness and the rule of law. We have seen critical and dissenting voices treated with contempt and mockery. The government seems to have little use for the people or the public's right to oversee their own government's increasing power. The Premier's so-called big tent seems just about big enough to fit his own ego and nothing else.

A government that forgets its place under the people is one that rapidly grows out of touch. Ralph Klein spoke about the dangers of dome disease and the temptation of government officials to become more obsessed with their own tight groups of insiders, ignoring the regular people outside these walls. Not everyone will agree with every decision, but the people have stopped trusting that the decisions of this government are being made for the right reason. They ultimately question whether we have true rule by the people or rule by a small group of elites and well-connected insiders.

The will of the people may be temporarily ignored, but it cannot be suppressed forever. Their demands for good governance, honesty from their MLAs, and the end of corruption will be met one way or another, either by this group or their replacements.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Children's Health Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect to see lineups of children at amusement parks, not outside their hospitals. Today the crisis in health care has reached ERs at both the Stollery and Alberta Children's hospital: packed waiting rooms, families waiting up to 16 hours, lineups of children going out the door. This UCP's mismanagement of the pandemic pushed our hospitals to the brink, and now it's our children who are paying the price. To the Premier: does he accept any responsibility for this crisis, and what is he doing to fix it? Be specific.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's regrettable but not unprecedented that we see acute pressures in our health care system. That's the case right now, and it's in part because we do have 1,000 people in hospital with COVID; thankfully, only about 45 in ICUs with COVID at this point, in addition to two years of stress on our health care workforce. That's why Alberta's government has added roughly \$2 billion to the baseline budget for Alberta Health Services. We have 100 more doctors working in the system now than a year ago, 1,800 more nurses, and 1,300 more EMS personnel. We fully expect AHS to use those resources to address these pressure points.

Ms Notley: Well, it's not working, Mr. Speaker. Quote: ER doctors are the canary down the coal mine of health care; well, the canary has keeled over and died. That's Dr. Paul Parks in Medicine Hat. Quote: every funded bed is occupied. That's Dr. Eddy Lang in Calgary. Quote: the biggest worry is that a child dies. That's Dr. Shazma Mithani, who works at the Stollery children's hospital in Edmonton. Why doesn't the Premier take out his earplugs and listen to these doctors and realize he needs to do more because doing the same is not working?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that there is inadequate capacity in our health care system, which is why we are funding and implementing a plan to increase that capacity. My

question for her is: why did she leave government after four years with the second-highest per capita health expenditures in Canada but the lowest per capita number of ICU beds with longer wait times both for surgeries and diagnostics? Why did she for four years oversee one of the most expensive systems with inadequate results?

Ms Notley: I left government with zero children standing in lineups outside of emergency rooms, Mr. Speaker.

Now, part of the problem is that children are experiencing high levels of COVID-19. Doctors provide several explanations for that, including the fact that Alberta has the lowest vaccination rate among children aged five to 11 in the country. Now, this UCP government claimed that in-school vaccinations don't work, but provinces that put vaccines in schools have vaccinated up to 20 per cent more children in their province. Just how long do the lineups at the ER have to get before this Premier reverses his . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we encourage all eligible Albertans over the age of 12 to get the protection of vaccines. They're safe and effective, and the opposition is right. They are kids. Their parents are responsible for their health care decisions, so I find it regrettable that the NDP leader is attacking parents who have chosen not to get the vaccination for their kids. We support the choices that parents make for their minor children, but perhaps, like the Ontario NDP, she wants to throw unvaccinated kids out of our schools. We think that would be irresponsible.

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

Ms Notley: An irresponsible misstatement of the facts by that Premier.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile Albertans struggling to pay their utility bills are waiting and waiting and waiting. That's because when it comes to Albertans getting their electricity rebates, the UCP is speaking out of both sides of their mouth. The minister claimed June or July, but last week this government quietly passed regulations giving power producers until December 31. They rejected our deadline for the end of May, and now Albertans are discovering it will be sometime in the next seven months. To the Premier: is it any wonder Albertans don't trust him or his government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we recognize the very significant cost pressures on people with inflation, with carbon taxes, with energy inflation, that the NDP has been calling for. They imposed the largest tax increase in the history of Alberta, their job-killing carbon tax. They cheered on Mr. Trudeau's plan to raise it by 25 per cent on April 1. They want to quadruple it. Meanwhile this Conservative government suspended the collection of Alberta's fuel tax, a \$1.3 billion annualized savings, together with the gas rebate and electricity rebate, about \$2 billion of support on an annual basis.

Ms Notley: They promised June; now it's December.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, the same goes for the Premier's fake natural gas rebate. He announced it in February at a price his own budget said would never be triggered. Lo and behold, prices in April shot through the roof. Yesterday it was \$8.29. The minister recently claimed they were talking about expanding the eligibility period to cover these spikes, but information online now says it's still October. So, Premier, clear this up. Will your natural gas rebates

cover the spikes Albertans are experiencing this spring, or are you making them wait again?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, when she said that the consumer protection on the natural gas price was above what was projected in the budget, that's the whole point. We were preparing Albertans for a potential increase in that price. It triggers at \$6.50. We've been averaging gas prices in the last month of about \$7.50, so that relief will be forthcoming together with the 13-cent-a-litre savings on the fuel tax and the electricity rebate, by far the largest consumer support of any government, provincial or federal, in the Dominion.

Ms Notley: Clearly, Albertans are still waiting for an answer on whether they are eligible now or not.

You know, meanwhile this Premier didn't hesitate to tax inflation. One call from the insurance lobby and, poof, the cap on premiums was gone. Tuition hikes every year, like clockwork. When the Premier sped up his billion-dollar handout to big, profitable corporations, it took him just two days, but when it's hundreds of thousands of struggling families, he makes them wait months, and he won't give them a clear black-and-white answer. Can the Premier explain why there is such a big difference about who it is he shows up to work on behalf of?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP is phony about a lot of things, but they're not phonier than – the phoniest issue for them is the cost of living, because they brought in a tax whose entire purpose is to increase the cost of living on Albertans. Their carbon tax . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, their carbon tax is costing average Alberta families \$600 a year now, but that's not enough. They want to quadruple it. They want it to cost Alberta families over \$2,000 a year. They want to dig into people's pockets. We won't let them.

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

Diabetes Treatment Coverage

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, just this morning I stood with over 20 Albertans, some with diabetes, others family of people with diabetes, who were infuriated with this government's plan to cancel the insulin pump therapy program. The minister has created uncertainty and chaos in the lives of Albertans who depend on these pumps and their families. People do not know how they will pay for their pump once these changes are put into place. To the Premier. Simple question: will the UCP stop this chaos, restore peace of mind for those who rely on an insulin pump by committing now to not make any further changes without comprehensive consultation with Albertans who depend on the pumps, including those in the gallery . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we all know that diabetes is a serious health issue for many Albertans, and that's why we've taken measures to actually increase access to support, particularly for lower income people and children with diabetes. We're making changes to provide Albertans with the newest technologies to better manage diabetes to maintain and improve their health and well-being. In phase 1 of the plan we provided expanded coverage for diabetes test strips and other diabetes supplies. In phase 2 we expanded coverage for continuous glucose monitors for kids under the age of 18 under supplementary health benefits.

Mr. Shepherd: Empty talking points, Mr. Speaker, while Albertans with diabetes watch this Premier. Six-year-old Conor is sitting up in the gallery today. His dad, Jason, shared with us that, quote, the fact that Conor has an insulin pump means he can safely go to school with minimal support and still be safe. Their family's care plan is built on Conor having the pump going into grade 1. If he doesn't, Jason or his wife may have to leave their job, find one with more flexibility to give Conor the care he needs during the day while he's at school. What does the Premier have to say to these families or those in similar situations who planned on having a pump but now fear losing it? Where are the details?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we estimate that more than 1,500 children will benefit from this expanded coverage that I've mentioned, saving parents about \$4,200 annually. Phase 3 of the plan will allow us to cover a new generation of insulin pumps to better support diabetic Albertans, and this involves transferring insulin pump benefits from the insulin pump therapy program to government-sponsored health benefit programs like Blue Cross nongroup coverage as of August 1. We expect that the vast majority of 4,000 Albertans receiving pumps and supplies at no cost in this program will continue to receive coverage.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, if that's what they expect, then they've done the work. Show it to the families. Let's see the plan. The people in the gallery today are just the tip of the iceberg. Both Lisa Hart and her daughter live with type 1 diabetes. After the UCP's announcement to cancel the program, they're worried that they may have to pay thousands out of pocket to keep their pumps. That'll be on top of other costs that they pay, including potential premiums, copays associated with private insurance, costs that are not associated with the current program. Can this Premier simply admit that he's made a mistake, apologize, commit to halting this cancellation and not moving one step further until he actually consults with these Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're having consultations, and I should note that about 30 per cent, or 1,300 people, are already enrolled in government plans, and about 500 low-income Albertans will continue to receive coverage at no cost after the transition. About 60 per cent of those involved in the insulin pump therapy program do have private coverage already. Nongroup coverage costs about \$63 per month for a single Albertan, plus a copayment, but seniors will only have to pay a fee of 30 per cent for a claim of up to \$25. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Alberta School Councils' Association

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta schools council has seen almost all of its funding cut over the past year. ASCA provides critical advocacy support for 1,500 school councils and more than 50,000 parent volunteers. Under the UCP this vital organization funding has gone from \$650,000 in 2020 to nearly zero this spring. What is the Premier afraid of? Why is he undermining this organization that acts as representatives for thousands of diverse parent voices?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Great question. I've been a long supporter of the Alberta School Councils' Association and school councils in general. That's why I've allocated... [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: That's why, Mr. Speaker, I've allocated a million dollars to go to school councils. That's \$500 for every school council to engage with their parents. Additionally, on top of that, I started up the parent advisory council. Also, I've provided a grant to the Alberta school council to do their much-needed work.

Ms Hoffman: The Alberta School Councils' Association offers critical training and education to help school councils do their work in a meaningful way and ensure that their school community has diverse representation. Yet this is another attack on public education. Many parents involved in ASCA feel that this cruel cut is happening because the UCP is vengeful. Parents throughout Alberta have been voicing their frustration with the UCP's COVID mismanagement and this government's discredited Dumpster-fire curriculum. Will the Premier tell students, staff, and families why the UCP wants to bankrupt parent advocacy and why they won't work with democratically elected parents?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I've worked with the Alberta school council. In fact, the member opposite probably doesn't know that when I was a trustee, I actually received the friend of the Alberta School Councils' award because of my advocacy work on behalf of parents, because I believe in the... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe in the advocacy of parents. I fully support it, and that's why we continue to work with the Alberta school councils. We provided them a grant for this year to work on learning disruptions. We will continue to provide grants to them when they put them forward.

Ms Hoffman: The Alberta School Councils' Association celebrated their 90th anniversary the year the current Education minister was appointed, but under the UCP they seem dead set on shutting down ASCA and silencing elected parents who advocate for Alberta students. This is clearly a move to undermine the role of democratically elected parent volunteers. Mr. Speaker, since the current Education minister refuses to answer the actual question, I have a declaration. I've put it in writing to the President of ASCA: under an NDP government we will absolutely restore the \$650,000 a year that they get to do their important work, because we stand with parents while the minister sits beside the Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More and more empty promises from the other side, empty promises that they never follow through on. That's what we heard. That's what I heard when I was a trustee. Therefore, I can assure you that we continue... [interjections]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we do not fund any other association for operating costs. In the past that's what we were doing with the Alberta School Councils' Association. We are now treating them like every other association, like the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School

Superintendents, et cetera. We provide them grant funding to do specific project work.

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

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The floods of 2013 caused billions of dollars in damage, forced dozens of communities to declare states of emergency, and took the lives of five people. It even forced the quick evacuation of the youth shelter I managed, destroying much of the youths' belongings and displacing these youth. In the years since this natural disaster Alberta's government has worked tirelessly with all levels of government, stakeholders, and landowners to develop plans for SR 1, the Springbank off-stream reservoir. To the Minister of Transportation: can you tell us about this historic announcement that was made last week on the banks of the Elbow and the Bow rivers?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we must never forget the destruction and chaos, and we must never forget those who perished. Last Thursday the Premier, fellow cabinet members, and I announced the start of construction on this once-in-a-generation project. Vinci Construction won the contract to build a dry reservoir that will divert flood waters from the Elbow River during extreme flood events. It has taken many years of collaboration, and I'm truly grateful to all of our stakeholders for their input to get us to this milestone.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that a project of this scale and magnitude is not cheap and given that costs have increased dramatically since 2017's forecast of \$432 million and given that during last week's announcement the Premier said that this new total would be \$744 million, to the minister: can she tell us why this project, with its escalating cost, is an important use of taxpayer dollars?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the new total is reflected in Budget 2022. Since the original approved budget in 2017 costs have skyrocketed for construction, materials, utility and pipeline relocation, and land purchases. It's important to note that the federal government is contributing 168 and a half million dollars to this project. Without flood mitigation Alberta risks losing billions of dollars when the next major flood hits. When SR 1 is operational in a few years, it will protect lives, property, businesses, and the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for her efforts. Given that, as the minister mentioned, Vinci Construction won the contract to construct SR 1 and given that with the reservoir mapped out, crews are currently moving dirt to build the dry dam and given that part of the agreement includes work that will be done by First Nations and Métis nations in the region, to the minister: can you talk about how government engaged with Indigenous communities throughout this process?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, for many years Alberta's government engaged in discussion and conducted site visits with Treaty 6 First Nations, Treaty 7 First Nations, and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3. Alberta Transportation signed 31 agreements for various work for Indigenous contractors,

from excavation and site preparation to road and bridge construction. A community liaison was also established to work with Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to address any concerns they may have had with the project.

Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase

Mr. Sabir: Bill 81 is bad for Alberta. Those aren't just my opinions; those are the opinions of at least four UCP caucus members, three of whom voted against this bill and one who filed a complaint with Elections Alberta citing concerns about membership purchases in the UCP leadership race. These are very serious concerns that require the full action of Alberta's government to ensure that the democratic traditions in Alberta are upheld and maintained. Will the minister agree to work with the opposition to immediately reverse the section of Bill 81 that allows the bulk purchasing of memberships without . . .

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

2:10

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say right away that that particular member is mistaken and is misinforming the general public. There is absolutely nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk membership. What we have in Bill 81 right now is still similar to the provision that we had prior in section 25. I'm happy to report that the Chief Electoral Officer has confirmed in a revised bulletin that there is nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk members without the consent of Albertans.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul was prevented by this government from being able to introduce his amendment to prevent someone from buying party memberships without individual consent and given that 4,000 memberships bought on six credit cards show that this type of accountability, blocked by the UCP, needs to be looked into, will the Minister of Justice agree to take the amendment from his colleague, turn it into a government bill, pass it by tomorrow, and end this unethical practice?

Mr. Madu: You know, I mean, let me say that one more time: there is nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk membership without the consent of party members. The process that we have right now is the process that we had prior to Bill 81. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, they are heckling because they are not interested in facts or the truth. They just want to misinform the general public. We will ensure that we don't allow the NDP to misinform Albertans on Bill 81. I am happy to have brought in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Given that it appears the minister has not read the bill and given that Elections Alberta has confirmed that they are investigating the alleged bulk membership purchases and given that the last time they were investigated by Elections Alberta, they rushed to fire the Election Commissioner, showing the true colours of the Premier and the former Justice minister, will the four Justice ministers stand and promise that the election officer job is safe while this investigation is ongoing, or is accountability still a four-letter word for this government?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what that particular member is talking about. There is no . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You can see that they are heckling because they are not interested in facts and the substance of the issue. They are only interested in misinformation and disinformation. There is no threat whatsoever to the job of the Chief Electoral Officer. Let me repeat that once again: our party's, the United Conservative Party's, regulation requires consent before you can pick up a party membership, unlike the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, in April the UCP government declared victory on gasoline prices after they cut the provincial fuel tax, but now we see gasoline prices back on the rise and close to the same levels they were before the UCP cut the fuel tax. In the end Albertans are no further ahead than they were a month ago, and experts are saying that gas could go even higher as the war on Ukraine continues and summer driving season approaches. What is this government going to do to provide relief at the pumps for Albertans? Or is the Premier not aware of these increases since he can't even fill up his own gas tank?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that question ridiculous. Has that member read the newspaper? Has he looked at other provinces' fuel rates? Alberta is by far and away the lowest cost jurisdiction for gasoline, for diesel fuel. Why? Because we have an efficient system but, more importantly, because we suspended the fuel tax in this province. We're providing real relief for Albertans, more protection than any other province.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that the UCP said that the savings from the fuel tax would be passed on to Albertans and given that we have asked for an independent review to ensure this is the case but the UCP continues to refuse to provide any kind of transparency or accountability and given that fuel prices are back on the rise as Albertans already struggle to make ends meet, will this government finally agree to an independent review to ensure that all of the rebate is being passed on to Albertans? If not, why are they so scared of transparency?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I find that question ridiculous. We monitored gasoline prices when we suspended the fuel tax, and they dropped almost across the board by 13 cents a litre. There are a lot of factors that go into the price of retail gasoline and diesel, including WTI prices, refining margins – many factors – but one thing I can say for sure today: Alberta has the lowest gasoline costs of any province in this country.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that Albertans are falling further behind under this UCP government – in fact, wages are failing to keep up with inflation, and Alberta has the slowest wage growth across the country – and given that the UCP is making a bad situation worse by piling on additional costs – income taxes, property taxes, tuition, utilities, and auto insurance have all increased drastically due to this government – and given that fuel prices are back on the rise but the UCP is doing nothing to provide transparency, why is this government okay with these rising costs as Albertans struggle to pay for basic necessities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that affordability is an issue, and that's why we're providing real relief, almost \$2 billion of annualized relief. I find it really odd, the members opposite raising the issue of affordability, being the members, when they were in government, that brought in the largest tax increase in this province's history. They brought in the carbon tax. It increased costs for everything from fuel to groceries to utilities. It affected every family, every business, every senior.

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

Lobbyists Act

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has an all-too-cozy relationship between senior officials and its favoured lobbyists. When the Conservative Party of Canada was first elected in 2006, its top priority was the Federal Accountability Act, which included measures to close a revolving door between the PMO and lobbying. Sixteen years later Alberta still has some of the most lax lobbying rules in Confederation. Provincially the cooling-off periods are just one year and can be waived upon request instead of Harper's five years. To the Premier: why are cooling-off periods important federally but not for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations has risen.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for his hard work on this file. The Alberta Lobbyists Act regulates lobbying activities in Alberta, and it balances free and open access to government with public transparency and accountability with respect to who is going to access it and to seek influence in government.

Mr. Barnes: Given that it shocked Albertans to see UCP members on a UCP-dominated committee block any substantive changes to the Lobbyists Act, voting down at least a dozen recommendations, including some straight from our Ethics Commissioner, and given that a proper ban on family members lobbying immediate family members is long overdue as there is currently nothing in the Lobbyists Act to prevent a lobbyist from orchestrating a deal with a staffer family member and given the perception that at least one contract has been awarded in such a scenario, Mr. Premier, are you keeping this obvious loophole open?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations has risen.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you for the question. Unfortunately, many of the recommendations that were presented were unclear and, if adopted, would have created mountains of burdensome red tape. Others already exist, like recommending a cooling-off period for former government staff.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the entire purpose of lobbying rules and regulations is to prevent special interests from exerting undue influence denied to regular Albertans and given that there is currently nothing within the Lobbyists Act to prevent UCP provincial board members from lobbying the government and given that there is currently a registered lobbyist sitting on the UCP's provincial board and given that the leadership review's returning officer is also a registered lobbyist, can the Premier tell us: if all the lobbyists he meets with work for the UCP, who is working for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Alberta lobbyist registry is a free online registration system which lobbyists must use to register their lobbying activities in Alberta to be in compliance with the Alberta Lobbyists Act. All registrations are searchable and viewable by the public free of charge at any time. Also, ultimately, Alberta's Lobbyists Act is one of the most stringent in the country, and I believe the committee felt that these recommendations were not going to be helpful to improve it.

2:20 Live Events Industry Support

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, the events industry, artists, theatres, and venues were hit hard by the pandemic. They were the first industry to close their doors and limit their audiences and performances, because of public health orders, and the last to open. Many took on debt and had to lay off staff just to survive the pandemic. Many are struggling to get back on their feet, and they are looking to this government for support to be able to recover. The stabilize program was meant to help, but I've heard concerns that many are still waiting for support. Can the minister confirm that every cent of the stabilize program has gone out the door?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We fully recognize that the live events industry, everything from rodeos to music to theatre, was definitely hard hit, first to close and last to open. The stabilize program has come to an end. The money, to my knowledge, has gone out. I'd also like to add that we've actually increased the budget this year for arts and culture. There will actually be more money available this year than there was last year.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Given that for many this funding came late, which meant additional pressures for them as they waited for the government to catch up to the commitment that they made to them, and given that artists and the events industry pivoted their projects, platforms, and services in response to the pandemic without initial help from the government for far too long and given that the stabilize program didn't help artists or spaces with these retroactive costs, which they asked for, can the minister explain why so many were forced to wait for this essential funding? Has he apologized to those who were forced to stress because this government was unable to live up to their commitments?

Mr. Orr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't accept the implication of that question. While I realize that everybody in this province struggled and was under stress, the reality is that we worked very hard with the entire industry to try and help them out, and we received a lot of input of them. As I said earlier, this coming year there will be even more money available than there was last year.

Ms Goehring: Given that I have heard from venues in the live experience industry about the pressures that they are experiencing as a result of inflation and the cost-of-living crisis the UCP created and given that skyrocketing utility bills, higher costs are compounding with debt many of these organizations had to take out to survive the pandemic, raising concern for many that they might not be sustainable, and given that the rebates that this government promised but won't deliver for months aren't enough for many, what supports will the minister roll out to help the industry survive this latest crisis? Will it be to tell them that they're on their own again?

Mr. Orr: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the NDP would have done – they would have had every live event completely shut down, completely locked down, and everybody told to stay home – we made a point of making sure that they could be open, that they could continue to have business. I'd like to tell you that Alberta is open for business. When I talk to the live events industry now, they are booked solid. When Alberta thrives, culture thrives. Things are looking up in Alberta, and they're going to continue to look up.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Funding

Member Loyola: The Minister of Infrastructure is making an egregious mistake of pursuing the P3 model for the \$2 billion Edmonton south hospital. Other provinces, like Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba, have had bad experiences with P3 projects. Even the previous Alberta Conservative government knew P3s were a mistake. The only apparent reason that this minister is pursuing the P3 is to consider this government's mission to funnel public funding into the hands of private corporations. To the minister: will he now give Albertans a clear and unequivocal answer that he will not waste \$2 billion of public taxpayer funding on pursuing a P3 model?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I cannot go against the will of Albertans, who have voted for our campaign commitment to aggressively pursue public-private partnerships where it makes sense, where our taxpayers get the best benefit. In this particular case we haven't decided what the procurement method is yet.

Member Loyola: Given that the minister seems to ignore the past failure of P3 projects in Alberta and given that the Bessie Nichols school was a P3 program that was a disaster and cost the taxpayers millions more than the traditional model and given that private contractors weren't allowing school administrators to even control the thermostat on the coldest days and that there were incidents of student injury, is this minister really okay with sick patients forced to bundle up on cold days or willing to make doctors, nurses, and health care aides work around failed and potentially dangerous infrastructure just so your government can get more public funds into the pockets of profitable corporations?

Mr. Panda: To that particular member "profit" is a word that I don't know if he understands what it is. He hates that word, "profit," but that's a different subject, Mr. Speaker.

Let me correct him. The experience of P3s in the previous government was validated by the Auditor General when they determined the value for Albertans. There were some things to be fixed in delivering schools, for example, which we are working on. But the hospital project, if we go through P3s, will still be safe.

Member Loyola: Given that the city of Edmonton tried this risky P3 experiment for the valley line LRT and given that this risky experiment has resulted in years of delays and cost millions more than anticipated and given that the previous mayor has called for the province to stop forcing more P3 projects down their throats, to the minister: will you finally listen to the city of Edmonton and commit to not forcing municipalities to accept projects built on your ideological P3 agenda and just finally get the Edmonton south hospital built?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we'll work with the city of Edmonton. If they have any concerns about P3s, we'll address them. And we'll definitely continue the work on this Edmonton hospital. But when the member opposite is talking about ideology, theirs was the risky

ideology, which Albertans are still trying to recover from after four years of their risky ideological policies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East is next.

Oil and Gas Export

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is making rapid progress in its economic recovery plan. The unemployment rate is the lowest since the government took office. Alberta now tops the rest of the country in overall employment rate. The energy sector provides more economic opportunities. Oil and gas production from Alberta's oil sands extraction continues to increase, higher than it was in 2019. To the minister: what plans are in place to ensure that Alberta's energy supply continues to reach both Canadian and international markets?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for that question. As the world moves to weed out Russian oil and gas, it also has highlighted the shortage of supply and it's exposed the weaknesses in energy security. It's also shown that the world will continue to use oil and gas for decades, even in a world that's transitioning towards net zero. The question is: where will that supply come from? Every single barrel of oil that we leave in the ground here will come out of the ground somewhere else, and we believe that energy should come from Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that's why we are accelerating our efforts in North American energy security.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta still has more capacity to increase its energy export to other countries and within Canada and that that is likely to increase the revenue flow in the province's economic recovery plan and given that Alberta's ethically produced oil is the solution and substitute for Russia's conflict oil, what is the minister doing in terms of investment in energy infrastructure to increase Alberta's oil and gas exportation nationally and globally?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We sit on top of the third-largest reserves of oil in the world, and on this side of the House we treat our oil and gas industry like a strategic asset, something to be proud of and support, not something to demonize. That's why our government supports all forms of egress. North, south, east, west: we've supported every single pipeline proposed, and our export market always has been and continues to be North America and the United States. That's why we have been working with Senator Joe Manchin, the proud Democrat from West Virginia, on energy security.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta still requires more investment in the energy sector to increase the supply and, further, given that there are higher prospects for Alberta's energy in the global markets in the short and long term, to the minister: what are the efforts that have been taken and timelines put in place to remove antienergy legislation that deprives Alberta's energy supply from reaching global and regional markets?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the history, the very sad history, of cancelled and vetoed pipelines at the hands of the Trudeau government, supported by the NDP governments. The history of vetoes and pipeline cancellations will go down as one of the biggest mistakes that this country has made in its history, but we have an opportunity to reset as the world grapples with energy security. We have an opportunity to reset energy policy, one that includes challenging bills C-69 and C-48, creating efficient and predictable regulatory processes, eliminating red tape, and working on North American energy security.

2:30

Antiracism Initiatives in Education

Mr. Deol: Recently the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights led workshops across the province where parents, teachers, school board trustees, and community members shared ideas on how to curb racism in academic settings. Those workshops resulted in a final report and calls to action. It is clear that across school districts and areas of the province it is up to each individual school board to look to address racism. Can the Minister of Education explain why there is no guidance from the ministry on developing antiracism policies? Racism isn't reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a great question. It's something we're all very concerned about. School authorities do develop their policies. It is incumbent on school authorities to make sure that they have strong, safe, welcoming, caring school policies. Many of them go to extra lengths, particularly to combat racism right across the whole school authority, divisions right across this province. Again, we're working with school authorities because they are the ones that are putting in place policies and implementing them.

Mr. Deol: Given that school boards are trying to address this issue in the face of ever-decreasing funding from the province and given that there are no clear guidelines, goals, timelines, or targeted funding in the Ministry of Education to combat racism and given that the Action Alberta report recommends stable funding for antiracism initiatives in education and given that under the UCP there are currently no grants open or available to support antiracism, will the minister commit today to ensuring that all school districts have access to consistent funding to address racism within the education system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, school authorities are looking to make sure that they have strong policies in this area, but beyond that, we're addressing it in the curriculum for the first time ever. We are ensuring that our curriculum is focused on: every student is welcomed regardless of where they come from, regardless of... [interjections] It's very hard to actually give you great answers, because the opposition continues to heckle on something that is such an important issue. Antiracism is everybody's responsibility, including our schools.

Mr. Deol: Given that many Indigenous and racialized Albertans have repeatedly said that they do not see themselves reflected in the education system and given that in order to address racism, we need to increase the diversity of educators and given that we need to focus not only on hiring more Indigenous and racialized Albertans but that we also need to focus on recruiting and training more diverse educators, can the Minister of Education explain what work has been undertaken with the Minister of Advanced Education to

address this issue in the education system and what benchmarks the government is targeting to increase the diversity of educators?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is actually an issue that all of us agree on. I think my one request to the members opposite is to support the curriculum, because – guess what? – for the first time in our history the K to 6 draft curriculum actually addressed racism and included minority, cultural, religious groups in that same curriculum that the members opposite are opposed to.

Legal Aid Alberta Contract

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this government talks a big game about supporting the rule of law, but as Albertans have come to see, it's all just empty words. Legal aid ensures that all Albertans can get fair access to the justice system. However, under the UCP it is under attack. Only days ago it was reported that dozens of lawyers were removed from the legal aid roster for refusing to sign a new contract that was described by a 25-year veteran of legal aid as, quote, terrible. Why has the Justice minister failed to protect the justice system by allowing this crisis to develop on his watch?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We continue to fund and work with Legal Aid Alberta so that Albertans can access legal aid. Legal aid is key to ensuring access to justice, and the legal aid program is integral to the administration of justice by supporting some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Sabir: Given that Deborah Hatch, a lawyer who has worked with legal aid for over 25 years, when asked about the prospect of losing so many senior lawyers from legal aid, has stated, quote, I would be very, very, deeply concerned for what that means for the state of justice in Alberta, end quote, and given that the Justice minister has already done untold damage to our health system with his war on doctors, can the minister explain why it seems that wherever he goes, things get worse for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations is rising.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Alberta's government's pandemic response has led our justice system and legal aid to innovate. They now offer a balance of remote, digital, and in-person legal aid services to ensure Albertans have safe access to justice. Continued partnerships, including the one between this government and legal aid in Alberta, help ensure fairness in the justice system, which benefits all Albertans. We will continue to support Albertans by keeping legal aid part of an accessible justice system. Since 2014 the Alberta government has increased legal aid funding by \$29 million.

Mr. Sabir: Given that in a shocking revelation Deborah then stated that she was told by someone she described as being in a position of power that she might be supported to become a Queen's Counsel if she toned down her public concern about the legal aid contract and given that previously a former NDP staff member was denied a QC while all of the eligible people who support the current government got theirs and given that these instances raise serious ethical concerns – and I hope the Justice minister takes them

seriously and will work to address them – can the minister tell this House what he is going to do to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration is rising.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am actually shocked by that question. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is a lawyer by training, and the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall knows that there is a process for the designation of QCs. There is an independent committee, that's made up of judges both from the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench and members of the Law Society, that vets applications before making recommendations to the Minister of Justice. That member should be ashamed of himself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the pandemic getting further into the rear-view mirror, we now have an inflationary mess caused by the Trudeau government's spending and tax-raising antics. This cost rising has been hard on families throughout Lesser Slave Lake between the struggle of powering and heating their homes and the rising cost of fuel to get around. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: what steps have been taken to ease these costs, that continue to rise for my constituents and all Albertans?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We recognize the burden that the increase in utilities and other costs is having on Albertans, and that's why we're bringing in short-term supports to help Albertans while we do the longer term work to lower prices. We are bringing in the natural gas rebate, the electricity rebate, and, of course, the 13 cents a litre that we paused at the pump. That's \$2 billion worth of supports, by far the most generous in the country. We have demonstrated that we will always have Albertans' backs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, and thank you to the minister. Given that the rebates are greatly needed right away as many people continue to struggle with these costs and given that I have also received concern from my constituents in Lesser Slave Lake about how soon they will see this relief because of the continual fact-twisting antics of the NDP to spread false information, to the same minister: how will these rebates be applied to the bills of those living throughout Lesser Slave Lake? This may be hard for the NDP to listen to, but how soon will we see them applied? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. the associate minister is the only one with the call.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Despite the NDP's best efforts to slow down the passage of this bill – and that's right; you can't make this stuff up. The NDP actually voted to slow down passage of this bill, an absolute outrage at a time when Albertans need these supports. We moved at speed to get the legislation through the Legislature. We moved at speed to write the regulations . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. associate minister.

2:40

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We got royal assent on April 29, we wrote the regulations in under three days, and then we got the rules to the retailers, and they're moving at speed as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister. Given that these rebates will help in the short term and provide much-needed relief to those throughout Alberta and given that these increased costs will still be part of their future bills, which some worry about when the rebates end, to the same minister: what else is the government doing to improve the electricity costs for all Albertans?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I don't have a conversation with either the Premier or cabinet about electricity that doesn't start or end with: how do we lower prices for all Albertans? We know that the path forward for cheaper prices is through increased choice and more competition. That's why we've introduced Bill 22, which is about modernizing the electricity grid and increasing generation options for Albertans. They broke the electricity grid, and we're going to fix it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this 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 Cardston-Siksika.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2015 conservatives split the vote between two conservative parties, that led to 28 constituencies going to the NDP and giving them 54 seats in the Legislature, allowing them to form a majority government that, thankfully, only lasted one term.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans will never forget the way they were treated by the NDP government. They couldn't trust them then, and they can't trust them in the future. Parents will never forget the way choice for their children's education was robbed. Albertans will never forget the NDP's carbon tax, driving billions of dollars out of our province and putting thousands of people out of work.

It is for these reasons that Albertans will never elect an NDP government again. As we approach a monumental moment for conservatives in Alberta, we must ask ourselves: how important is unity? Mr. Speaker, under the current Premier Alberta has faced a triple black swan event: negative oil prices, a recession, and a global pandemic. I don't think a single member in this House ran for office expecting to face such extreme circumstances, but in a way that only Albertans can, we rose to the challenge and overcame.

As made clear in the last election, Albertans want a conservative government, which is why they must stay united, ensuring that the NDP, who are untrustworthy, never sit on this side of the House again. It is true that you can't make everyone happy in government. If you want proof, just ask the NDP Twitter mob. But I am proud of the government's fiscal management, the countless investments

brought back to Alberta, the jobs created, infrastructure built, industry diversification and growth – it goes on, Mr. Speaker – and a balanced budget, something the NDP could never figure out. Now, with over 90 per cent of our campaign promises having already been fulfilled by this government despite the exceptional challenges we've faced, we continue to move forward.

The province is better off with the UCP, and Albertans know it. That is why the United Conservatives will win the election in 2023, and I'm excited to see that happen under the current Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my questions earlier today I referred to a letter that I sent to the president of the Alberta School Councils' Association, Brandi Rai, notifying the ASCA that if the NDP is re-elected, we will restore funding for Alberta school councils.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2021, the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta annual report 2020-21.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a gold star for everyone. This is two days in a row with no points of order, and as such we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 202

Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by stating that it is an honour to be here in the Legislature to speak to second reading of my private member's bill.

The right and the opportunity for private members to independently bring forward legislation is vital to the proper functioning of our Assembly. Unfortunately, Bill 202, which was the second private member's bill for this session, is finally seeing second reading after nine weeks in session.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I have often stated in the Chamber that each and every MLA's first duty is to represent the families and communities of our constituencies, and bringing forward private members' bills is essential. However, I want to add that Bill 202 isn't solely supported by the good people of the central Peace. In fact, this bill is a direct result of a province-wide consultation process. In addition to gathering input online and through social media, I have personally visited dozens of communities over the past six months. In each and every community

people have expressed deep concerns about Alberta's pandemic management during the repeatedly declared, rescinded, then redeclared public health emergencies.

This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone here today. I know that each and every one of us has received hundreds of phone calls and e-mails about pandemic management over the past two years. More than any other issue over the past decade this one has impacted the lives of every single Albertan from every corner of our province. As the pandemic unfolded on a week-to-week and even day-to-day basis, this government took contradictory positions on a variety of measures, swinging from the open for good to directly infringing on constitutionally protected rights.

In addition, the scattershot directives resulted in a confusing and contradictory mix of restrictions that failed common-sense tests for many Albertans. Here's one example with which many of us are familiar. At one point some smaller church services' attendance was allowed to proceed while funerals were not allowed with the same numbers. There clearly is no scientific argument for such nonsense, and none was ever offered.

By seeking to enforce such contradictory directives, the government did more harm than good when it came to overall compliance with pandemic measures. When MLAs, myself included, attempted to speak up and explain the situation to government, more often than not we were dismissed out of hand and even vilified for daring to speak out on behalf of our constituents. This wasn't helpful or necessary, and it just dumped gas on the fire as greater numbers of Albertans started to question the lack of checks and balances in place to prevent authoritarian government overreach.

I should note that this government was warned about this issue beforehand. These concerns were raised as part of a legislative review of Alberta's Public Health Act. The report issued following the review specifically noted that the Public Health Act should be amended to enhance transparency and democratic accountability. Speaking to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee on August 27, 2020, the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, stated:

[Recognizing that] there need to be checks and balances, there need to be assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way, I would advocate that tools not be taken out but, rather, if additional checks and balances are needed, that those be put in.

As I've stated previously, the committee's report called for three key measures: first, that an order declaring a state of public health emergency under section 52.1 cannot lapse and subsequently be reinstalled without the approval of the Legislative Assembly; secondly, that ministerial orders issued under section 52.1 cannot be renewed without the approval of the Legislative Assembly; thirdly, that sunset clauses be included under section 52.1 to ensure that health orders are reviewed in a timely manner to ensure that they are removed when no longer necessary. All three of these are reasonable recommendations widely supported in communities across our province, and all three have been ignored.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that democracy matters more during an emergency situation, not less. A government that is unwilling to debate, defend, or alter its public health restrictions cannot complain when compliance drops or misinformation spreads. The moral authority needed to navigate a crisis, any crisis, is not granted by law but by public will. This is exactly why, for example, the federal government requires a vote of the House of Commons and the Senate to ratify use of its Emergencies Act. You may remember that earlier this year, when the Prime Minister chose to invoke the Emergencies Act, it was widely seen as authoritarian overreach. In

fact, the members of the Assembly here in Alberta adopted Motion 10, which condemned the invocation of the Emergencies Act and declared, in part, that it "infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians." In the run-up to the Senate vote on ratifying the Emergencies Act, it became clear that the federal government could not clearly demonstrate its case for maintaining the Emergencies Act, and the state of emergency was lifted.

2:50

In my consultations with Albertans I can tell you that people here find it clearly hypocritical that the Alberta government chose to repeatedly declare public health emergencies without a single ratification vote, yet criticized the federal government on its use of the federal Emergencies Act. The bottom line is this: Albertans want checks and balances added to the Public Health Act to ensure that there is greater accountability and transparency during declared public health emergencies.

Furthermore, Albertans want to make it clear, to this government in particular, that democratic oversight of pandemic management and other emergencies is not something to be avoided or disregarded. It is something to be embraced, and with good reason. The moral authority necessary to govern during difficult times is derived directly from free and fair votes. The very word "democracy" itself comes from two root words, "dēmos," meaning people, and "kratos," meaning rule. I believe we can do a much better job respecting our democratic traditions while protecting public health. To make this happen, changes are necessary, but here's the good news: we can fix this.

Bill 202 provides MLAs with additional oversight powers during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 the Assembly's essential role in debating and voting on extensions of public health states of emergency will be strengthened. Future ministers of Health will be prevented from circumventing the Assembly by allowing a state of emergency to lapse only to declare a new state of emergency without seeking the Assembly's approval. In addition, Bill 202 proposes that a new section be added to the Public Health Act. This new section provides a framework by which the Assembly may opt to review, revoke, or amend some public health measures during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 any two members of the Assembly may file a written request with the minister to initiate the Assembly's oversight process. This process must be carried out "within 2 sitting days." It must include a debate of "at least 2 hours," and a vote must follow the debate.

Now, I've heard from some who oppose this bill, who fear that it would weaken the powers of the medical officers of health at the wrong time. This is demonstrably false. Bill 202 doesn't include a single word that alters the powers of the medical officers of health in any way, nor does it impede officers of health from issuing such orders as they see fit, when they see fit. Rather, Bill 202 simply provides the Assembly with the ability to ratify and adjust such orders following debate. Why anybody would seek to minimize or avoid such debate is beyond me. Debate is the beating heart of our parliamentary tradition. Frankly, if the government can't provide the scientific data to convince the majority of 87 MLAs to ratify health orders, how can it convince the public of the necessity to comply with these same orders? In short, it can't. Furthermore, it is self-evident that the democratic oversight won't weaken pandemic management. If anything it will improve public compliance with health orders, making severe restrictions that infringe on constitutionally protected rights unnecessary.

Finally, Bill 202 includes some simple and straightforward transparency measures. First, under Bill 202 medical officers of

health will continue to be able to issue isolation and quarantine orders as well as exemptions to these orders. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature in a timely fashion to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked. Bill 202 applies to general orders only and not to orders that may allow private citizens to be identified.

Secondly, under Bill 202 cabinet will continue to be able to issue orders that may be necessary to protect public health, including the emergency closure of specific facilities. In addition, for example, the government may request that the Lieutenant Governor delay an election. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders.

Finally, under Bill 202 the Minister of Health may declare a public health state of emergency in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Bill 202 requires that such declarations be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of such declarations, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked.

Why are these changes needed? The fact is that during the recent COVID-19 pandemic elected officials and the public grew frustrated and concerned regarding the emergency powers being exercised by the government and public health officials. These three measures are necessary to provide clarity to legislators and the public alike. In addition, these changes are needed to combat misinformation.

There are those, like the federal government, who believe the answer is to veer towards authoritarianism and restrict free expression; however, I am not one of those people. The fact is that restricting speech will only make things worse. The answer, rather, is to provide clear and accurate information in a timely manner. The more we can proactively do to promptly address Albertans' concerns and reduce unnecessary public frustrations, the better.

I also believe the government has a role to play in minimizing panic.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

For clarity, I just want to ensure for the record that it's your intention to be moving second reading. Correct?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Yes. All right.

Are there any other members looking to join debate?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of Health was actually in Calgary to announce a new \$2 million program which aims to improve the identification of potential donors, support families considering consent at a really difficult time, and save more lives. The specialists in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, otherwise known as SEND program, will see 22 specialist physicians co-ordinating organ donation and transplantation opportunities. This program goes hand in hand with a private member's bill we have on the docket, Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, introduced to this Chamber by the Member for Highwood. I think that given the timing of this announcement, it would be prudent to move to debate on second reading of this bill; therefore, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 205 Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: I see that the hon. Member for Highwood has risen.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading on my private member's bill, Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, and to take time to tell today a couple of stories that have really ignited my passion for building a much stronger organ and tissue donation system here in the province of Alberta.

The story of Dan and Jennifer Woolfsmith's daughter is both heartbreaking and inspiring and important to share. Mackenzy, their daughter, was just 22 months old when she suffered a devastating injury and was declared brain-dead.

As a parent this is the worst possible news you could ever receive. But due to the circumstances of Mackenzy's death there was a chance of organ donation. Organ donation was something that the Woolfsmiths found clarity in. They knew that their daughter would have wanted to help others, and organ donation was one way to do that. However, there was a moment in the process when Mackenzy was almost disqualified as a donor.

As I have mentioned in earlier speeches, only 1 to 2 per cent of individuals who signed up to be donors can qualify to donate. To donate one's organs, there normally must be neurological determination of death, also referred to as brain death, which means that the brain has permanently lost all function and a diagnosis of death using neurological criteria has been determined. But in order to donate once brain death has occurred, an individual has to stay on life support, meaning that in the case of Mackenzy, her organs had to continue to work until the surgeries were complete. That is why identification of donors early on in the process is so critically important, to ensure there are no missed donor opportunities and that the viability of organs for donation is preserved.

Mackenzy was ultimately able to save the lives of four other children and give the gift of life. There are many people who are awaiting organ donation right now whose opportunities for transplant have been missed because of delay, causing a loss of viability, something that was thankfully missed in the case of Mackenzy and those four other children that she saved.

As many of my colleagues know, these individuals' lives are significantly worse of organ failure, those who continue to wait for organ and tissue transplantation. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, there are 4,500 Canadians currently waiting for a transplant, and in Alberta alone that number is almost 700.

Mr. Speaker, there is currently a seven-year wait time for a liver transplant. We know that for those who are living with liver failure, life is extremely hard. This life is filled with blood tests, imaging tests, surgical examinations, medications, and constant trips to the hospital for liver dialysis, which is time away from their families. This is completely time consuming and physically and emotionally draining for these individuals. The seven-year wait time to receive a liver is a direct result of there being so few donors and donor opportunities right now.

3:00

The sad reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we know that organ transplants save lives. For most organs patient survival is greater than 80 per cent after five years. Take Helen Determan's story. She was the third patient to ever receive a liver transplant in Edmonton back in 1989. She was told that she had five years to live afterwards, but luckily she received the gift of life, which completely changed

her life. Helen went on to travel globally as she represented Canada in the World Transplant Games. Helen recently passed away, just recently, but she is a symbol of resiliency, strength, and determination, and she will always be remembered. It is my goal to be able to hear more stories like this and like Helen's as the years go on.

That is exactly the intent of why I've brought to this Assembly Bill 205, which I move second reading of today, to improve this system by spreading awareness and education on organ and tissue donations, by having specialized professionals speaking with families like the Woolfsmiths to encourage organ and tissue donation, and by improving agency guidelines so that we can have annual reviews and reports.

All of these steps are crucial to build a stronger system of organ and tissue donation in the province of Alberta. We need to work hard to pass this legislation so that the wait-lists can start to decline and so that more Albertans can live their best lives possible free from constant assessments, medications, and worries, more time that they can spend with their families.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am compelled to rise once again in support of Bill 205. Organ donation is more important than many of us realize. It saves lives and significantly improves the quality of life for many people. In fact, as the hon. member shared, there are currently somewhere around 700 Albertans on transplant wait-lists. Bill 205 will put in place three vital recommendations to build a strong foundation for a significantly better human tissue and organ donation system here in Alberta. First, it will implement a mandatory referral process; second, it will improve agency guidelines; and third, it will improve education and awareness.

To go back to the first and maybe the most important, the change to mandatory referral, a change from our current law of only mandatory consideration, mandatory referral is the legal requirement for health care professionals to report all patients who may become potential donors to their organ donation organization. This requirement is an essential building block of a highly functioning organ and tissue donation and transplantation system because it supports the timely identification, referral, and assessment of potential donors. Notifying the ODD reduces the effect of clinical bias or lack of knowledge regarding donations, which has been identified as a leading cause of nonreferral cases.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to mention that mandatory referral is independent of the consent model and does not affect how families are approached to discuss consent to donate. Registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not necessarily mean you will automatically become an organ donor. The pathway to become an organ donor is complex since individuals must die in circumstances where donation is possible. Contrary to common assumptions, those circumstances are rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of those patients is the only way they can become actual donors. However, failure to identify those possible donors is the single largest factor explaining the differences in deceased donation rates here nationally versus internationally.

Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified, ODDs are not notified, or referrals are received too late. Missed donor opportunities also arise when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify

the ODD. In cases of late or nonreferral life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility for donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their family towards donation from even being considered.

Mandatory referral ensures that every family and individual is given the opportunity to include donation in their end-of-life care if they so desire. The patient's medical suitability for donation is assessed earlier by clinicians who are experts in donation and transplantation. This may reduce delays for the hospital and ensure that availability of supporting infrastructure, for example, an operating room, is made available. Assessment of donation suitability can occur in all instances with the timely identification of potential organ donors, helping avoid missed donation opportunities. It ensures that a potential donor is maintained on life support, which is essential for the usability of those organs.

Family discussions can be planned for when suitability for donation has been determined, which gives families the right information at the right time. This reduces uncertainty and disappointment on occasions when families are approached too soon or are later told that their loved one is not actually eligible to be a donor.

In the second part amendments to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions submitted directly to the minister. Since mandatory referral is only effective if there is a way to review those referrals, this is a critical part of the bill to verify that a stronger system of donation is continued in the future.

Third, or last, the education component of Bill 205 expands the information provided to Albertans to ensure that they have access to the most current and up-to-date information, education, and awareness.

This bill is an excellent piece of legislation brought to modernize and strengthen Alberta's tissue and organ donation system. It is brought forward to help the system be better and save lives. I commend the Member for Highwood for bringing this bill forward. I hope that all in this Chamber will continue to support this bill so that we can see it made law and help those throughout Alberta and possibly even across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Next, hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague did a beautiful job in describing the bill, and I don't have a lot more to add to that other than some personal anecdotes. I don't know – for those of you who remember my maiden speech when I was first elected in the opposition, I spoke about Jaydon Sommerfeld, who was actually killed in a car accident traversing across the highway from Chestermere high school. That's a very dangerous piece of highway out in my riding. Jaydon was one of the best friends to my son Sehran, and Sehran was at school the day we lost Jaydon.

As a result of that entire tragedy, his parents were able to save eight lives with Jaydon. Jaydon, at the tender age of 16, had actually signed to donate his organs and tissues and was such a blessing to so many. To this day – I just saw his mom the other day – it's still hard to not embrace each other and cry. For any of us who love a child in any capacity, whether they're yours or you're an auntie, uncle, or whatever, some mentor to these children, the impact that these kiddos have on our lives is humongous, especially when we lose them so young.

Also, Morgan Krieger was a student of mine and of my girlfriend. She was a voice student, a beautiful young woman, had type 1 diabetes, and passed away while she was at school out east. Her parents had to fly out. They're watching this debate, actually, very closely because it's very important to them, as you can

imagine. She would have celebrated her 24th birthday on May 6. My son, who you saw singing in the Legislature today, was very good friends with Morghan. They sang together on a regular basis.

Morghan's mom actually got to go to Halifax, the Stanfield airport, to meet with Monique, who was the recipient of Morghan's heart. She felt her daughter's heart beating very, very strong in the chest of Monique. It is a story that, when you think about what that would feel like or even the strength of her mom and dad and their son to be able to meet with Monique and to feel that heart beat strong and what it meant to that family – and many of Morghan's organs and tissues were also donated. The lives not only of the people that they've saved but the contributions even to the family to be able to participate in such a meaningful way – and I want to thank our wonderful MLA for Highwood for bringing this forward and continuing to have the discussion.

3:10

I will end with something that is related. I think it's really important. These private members' bills are an absolute blessing in this Legislature. We might not always completely agree on how that legislation should come to be, but private members' legislation has been a staple in this space since, really, like, 1993. Ralph Klein fought very, very hard along with the opposition to make sure that private members' legislation was able to be discussed and to be able to participate fully. Quite often private members' legislation is based on the needs of constituents, is based on being able to elevate legislation, and whether or not we agree with that legislation, the ability to debate that legislation is purely about democracy in this House. That democracy cannot be suppressed, should not be suppressed, and should be considered a privilege by each one of us who holds space in this place.

I have been very, very blessed to have three of my bills come to the floor as a private member, and in fact one of them was incorporated by the government, which is the FGM bill, which hopefully will still come back to the floor.

I just want to say how grateful I am that legislation from the private members is here, and I would ask that as we debate this very important piece of legislation, as we come forward on this legislation, we understand the privilege of that and that we continue to elevate discussions of private members' bills, that we debate them fulsomely in this house, that they make it to the floor, that we honour our responsibility and, in particular, Ralph Klein, who made the decision along with the leaders of the opposition at that time to be able to bring forward legislation that comes from private members. There's been a huge history in this Legislature of drafting that legislation, the importance of drafting that legislation, and the very robust debate that comes out of that legislation.

We can debate, we can amend, we can even vote against it should we choose to at the end of the day, but this is a bill that shows the importance and the work that the MLA for Highwood has done to bring this bill to the floor. I have two people in my own personal life that are watching this bill. They're watching how it's coming forward, and it will impact their lives in ways that we can't even imagine. So with my privilege and standing here, I ask that we always consider that the MLA for Highwood is having the privilege of debating his bill on this floor and that we always take that privilege very seriously and that we do not suppress democracy and that we continue to allow these bills to hold space in this place.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation

(Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Before I begin, I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for her comments regarding the importance of the private members' legislation process.

Indeed, I would like to congratulate the Member for Highwood for being given the opportunity to bring his bill to the floor, an opportunity that has been systematically and, I do believe, intentionally denied by members of this government to almost every single bill brought forward by an opposition member. That is a disgraceful record for this government. As the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore noted, it is highly outside the normal practice of this House. It is an affront to democracy. That's it. The poor behaviour and lack of ethics of his colleagues or, I suppose, that member, if he supports this system, do not impinge on the quality of his bill. Certainly, unlike members of government, I'm quite happy to consider a bill that is brought forward by the other party in this House.

Now, Bill 205 focuses on the question of organ donation. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that all of us in the Alberta NDP caucus strongly support organ donation and steps that can be taken to help improve donor participation rates in Alberta. That is always a good thing to do. Certainly, in my role as the critic for Health I've had the opportunity to speak with many Albertans about their experiences going through the transplant system, sometimes about challenges they've faced or delays, because certainly we recognize that there can be a limited number of organs available. There are a number of things that have to be considered in determining whether someone is eligible for a transplant, so it is a complex system. Certainly, I could understand how fraught that is for the individuals that are caught in that when they know the difference in their life that receiving that transplant organ could make.

Certainly, I support efforts to try to find ways that we can streamline and improve this system and indeed allow for more individuals to be inspired to step up and participate as a donor when possible. We know that organ donation saves lives, and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is inspiring. I think we are all inspired by and grateful to those who make that choice to be an organ donor.

Indeed, we've had the opportunity to hear from many stakeholders about the importance of considering mandatory referrals, and we support that proposal in this legislation. Now, as has been laid out, the bill lays out the system for mandatory referrals. Currently a medical practitioner has to consider if someone's organs are suitable for donation after they die. If we pass Bill 205, it would make it mandatory for a medical practitioner to then share that information if someone is judged to be imminent for death. This will provide more opportunities to ensure that every potential organ that could go to potentially save a life will have the opportunity to be used, and that, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely a good thing.

The bill makes a number of administrative changes, creates a board of directors for the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation Agency, gives it more responsibilities and capabilities. Again, Mr. Speaker, that seems to me to be reasonable. It makes sense that we would review the systems we have, find more efficient ways to optimize them, find ways that we can make sure they are working for the benefit of Albertans, and I appreciate that the member has done, to my understanding, some considerable consultation on how to achieve that and talked with a number of advocates in this area to bring forward the ideas in this bill.

The bill makes it clear that people can express refusal to have their organs donated, and people who have registered to donate their organs can also change their position after the fact. That, too, Mr. Speaker, is appropriate. We want to make sure that individuals have a clear choice. Certainly, it should be up to an individual to determine what is done with their body. The bill allows donors to determine if they want to donate their entire body or just specific organs or tissues

and what purposes those can be used for. I appreciate the thought that has been put into this bill.

Now, certainly, we will be interested to see how this might interact with the announcement from the government today regarding the new specialist in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, or SEND, program, by which we will now have 22 specialist physicians across the province of Alberta who will help to co-ordinate organ donation and transplantation opportunities, specialists who should be available 24/7 to improve the identification of potential donors and support families who are considering consent at a difficult time, hopefully save more lives. Again, that's practical and reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

I applaud the government for looking for a real and tangible way that we can improve this system and that in this particular case they appear to have actually worked collaboratively with physicians and experts in the health care field to achieve this, because tragically that has not been the general record of this government. Even as we speak, our emergency rooms across the province are in crisis because this government chose to go to war with some of these very physicians, because of repeated decisions to push our health care system to the absolute limits in the midst of a global pandemic and to continue to try to find ways to grind down particular physicians or health care workers and again now push those very workers to the absolute limits with extreme, mandated overtime to try to keep up with the implications of the chaos this government has sown in the health care system.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, certainly, it is important work for this government to look at how we can improve our systems. These are important steps to improve the organ donation and transplantation system, but let's remember that that system lives within a larger ecosystem in the midst of health care, an ecosystem which this government chose to tromp into, sow disorder, attempt to bully and overturn in an attempt to force through their particular ideology and change. That affects the ability for these physicians, for these individuals to continue to provide this important and life-saving care. Because of decisions of this government we saw tens of thousands of surgeries that were cancelled and delayed in the midst of the pandemic. We are still dealing with that backlog now, and indeed in many jurisdictions we are seeing serious implications. Indeed, in the Red Deer regional hospital last night I confirmed that there was no doctor of internal medicine available or no doctor to perform cardiology. None. That is because of repeated decisions by this government.

Now, of course, that isn't the individual direct decision of the Member for Highwood, and certainly it's his decision whether he supports government policies, but in this particular case the bill that he has brought forward is a thoughtful one. Indeed, despite the incredible damage – I'd say the most damage that's ever been done to a public health care system by a sitting government in the history of this province – that does not negate the value of this bill and does not negate the potential good it could do should we have a government in the province of Alberta that finally brings some stability back to our health care system.

As I was saying, we look forward to learning a bit more about how the SEND program is going to work, how that will interact with a new mandatory referral system in the province of Alberta, and it is my hope that the government will follow the lead of the Member for Highwood in terms of the thoughtful consideration he has put into this bill, in terms of how this legislation is potentially integrated should it pass this House.

I thank the Member for Highwood for bringing this forward, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise in this House to speak on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. On behalf of my constituents I would like to extend gratitude and my thank yous to the Member for Highwood for putting together such a thoughtful piece of legislation and something that I hope that the entire House can get behind.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, with over 700 Albertans currently on transplant lists I think that we can all agree that this is a very important issue. Many of us in this Assembly will know of somebody who is waiting for some type of transplant, or maybe we have a loved one who's waiting for a transplant. That could be a close family member or a friend, or perhaps it might be a constituent who's waiting for the good news that one day they'll be receiving a new heart or a kidney or something like that.

Regardless of the circumstances, though, this bill is good news for Alberta, I think, and it will ensure that this government is doing more to help improve the process of donating organs or tissue. Just a month ago, Mr. Speaker, on April 7 we recognized Green Shirt Day. Of course, this is a day that honoured one of the young Humboldt Broncos hockey players that passed away as a result of the traumatic accident that happened in April 2018. I actually had the pleasure of reading the book by one of the surviving members of the crash, Kaleb Dahlgren. It's called *Crossroads*. It's an excellent book, very well written. A smart young man put together a book of his life and how he got there and also detailed some of the ways in which he recovered from the crash and spoke very highly of organ donation.

Of course, Logan Boulet was a defenceman for the Humboldt Broncos, and it's with great respect to his life and to his family that we celebrate and honour him for his choice to donate his organs after tragically passing away due to his injuries. But because of the choice that Logan had made, six other people were able to live because of life-saving organ transplants, and although he was only 21 years old when he passed away tragically, he recognized and understood how this selfless act of donating is one of the most heroic things that a person could do.

Because of this, I think everyone can say that the awareness was definitely raised, and more and more people have now registered to become organ and tissue donors. In fact, Mr. Speaker, of course, when everyone heard of the Humboldt Broncos crash, it really rocked us all, I think, to our core, and to see that tragic loss of life, especially these young men who had so much potential and were going to do such great things, I'm sure, with all their families – I know that I was inspired by the selflessness of Logan Boulet.

Actually, I went to the registry that week and registered as an organ donor myself. Now there's a little heart on my driver's licence that says that I am a donor. I'm very proud of that because I think it's just a way that the Logan Boulet effect, as they call it, really touched everyone, even people in this Chamber, and it continues to inspire thousands of Canadians every day to register as organ and tissue donors. It's estimated that almost 150,000 Canadians registered as organ and tissue donors just weeks after this tragic crash, which is truly impressive, of course.

As I've said before, Alberta has a long list of individuals who are waiting for a new organ or new tissue, and, if passed, this bill will shorten that list as it will help to create more opportunities for eligible donors. With this legislation physicians will be required to refer patients to respective organ donation organizations, if they might be eligible, as soon as they're recognized, and by referring patients, Mr. Speaker, we'll be optimizing opportunities for those

who are on the wait-list and informing potential donors who might not be fully aware or understand the organ donation system as it is.

It's understandable that a physician would sometimes be hesitant to bring up organ donation to the family of a dying loved one, but it's important that we do not miss potential opportunities to save lives. I note some surveys taken from physicians who do not regularly refer patients: 59 per cent indicated their reasoning is due to their own predetermination that the patient would not be eligible. You know, of course, I respect and trust that these doctors were making the decisions as best they could, but one intention of this legislation is that it would not be up to the doctor to make that choice, and their only responsibility would then be to offer a referral.

Forty-five per cent of physicians brought up that they don't offer referrals because of the family being too upset. Of course, I mean, this is a very tragic and hard time for families. I mean, you see a loved one pass away – it could be tragically, unexpectedly, who knows what – and I'm sure that that question would be overwhelming for many. I know I haven't been in that position, and I don't really ever want to be. As we know, because of that very painful end of life and mourning, I hope that if this legislation passes, physicians will take the opportunity to simply educate families of dying loved ones about the lives that could be saved. I know that because of Logan Boulet's hard work and his dedication to helping others through organ donation, his effect will live on. The incredible thing today is that there are six people living because of just one person's choice, and that was Logan's choice.

For 39 per cent of surveyed physicians, they are concerned that the family may have a religious belief that would prevent them from donating organs or tissue. Of course, that's a very fair concern. We want to respect those people's decisions, but it's important to continue to raise the awareness of organ and tissue donors, to be able to speak up and have a discussion like we're having today, Mr. Speaker.

I will note that I didn't – you know, before the Humboldt crash and before the tragic loss of life that we saw from those young men and support staff and coaches and trainers and so on in that event, I don't really know if we really talked about organ donation nearly as much as we do now, especially not in such a public setting. It was more of a quiet conversation, so maybe this will destigmatize some of it as well and bring up opportunities for us to talk about the benefits of organ donation and kind of normalize talking about it in public places to allow more people to make that choice.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that these things that I've shared today will help more Albertans consider registering as an organ and tissue donor. As of now, over 4,500 Canadians are awaiting a transplant of some kind, and over 700 of them reside in Alberta. With the number of donors lower than neighbouring provinces, I think we can all realize how important it is to have this discussion right here at home, and it truly is giving the gift of life to register as an organ donor.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Member for Highwood. I note that he has been very passionate about this, especially in his former careers, and I know that he really cares about this and has done extensive consultation, so I think that, you know, I'm glad to hear, politics aside in this Chamber, that we're all supporting the Member for Highwood and his desire to do this for his constituents and for all Albertans. I think that many Albertans are grateful to see members of all sides of the House focus on bettering the system that we have for organ and tissue donation. I think this is a bill that's really going to save lives and impact people in a positive way.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say again that I completely support Bill 205, and I hope that other members will do the same.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join debate and follow my colleague from Brooks-Medicine Hat and likewise say that I will be supporting Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I must say also that I'm learning a deal just from my colleagues, both my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, the Member for Highwood, who talked about this, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who also talked about this earlier, and just reading through the bill and kind of seeing the care and sensitivity with which it talks about the different aspects of human tissue donation. As we know, towards the end of life can be a situation quite fraught with emotion and confusion. Anything that improves upon that situation both for the medical practitioners, doctors, who are dealing with the patient, potential donor, as well as family members is a good thing. I, too, welcome the opportunity to see improvements to this act.

I just want to also, I guess, mirror or echo the views of my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, who expressed concern with the government in its lack of genuineness around dealing with the private member's bill brought forward by opposition members, most notably Bill 204, Anti-Racism Act, something that was – we know that the city of Edmonton, both the police services and the administration, was embroiled in a situation where many members of the community were coming forward and wanting greater accountability from the authorities around tragic occurrences in the community of Edmonton that seemed to point to differential treatment of people of colour by the authorities when compared to nonracialized individuals in Edmonton. It would have been great to have that improvement, that act on the books as well. That didn't occur.

I think members of the opposition know that whenever there is an ability, an opportunity to improve acts, we should take that opportunity and bring our best recommendations forward. We do that often with amendments, and we do that often with motions arising or, indeed, referrals to try and improve things. In this case, with Bill 205, I don't think any of that's necessary.

As I was saying earlier, I strongly support organ donation, any steps that will help improve donor participation rates in Alberta. Hearing that, regrettably, only 1 to 2 per cent of potential donors and organ donations actually take place is, obviously, something that needs to and can be improved upon. I, like the previous speakers, believe that if there's any opportunity to improve the lives of those 700 Albertans who are waiting for organs, we should take that opportunity, and this House is doing that today around improvements to the mandatory referral process, around improvements to accountabilities and the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency.

I was reflecting on members of that agency's board of directors, and I see that one of the expertise points, that a director will be appointed who has expertise in the area of clinical ethics, is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because this area, as many people before me have talked about, is fraught with potential challenges. An individual with expertise in clinical ethics is a good requirement to make sure that some of the challenges, some of the ethical concerns that are related to donations and people donating are sorted through with a skill set that perhaps not everybody has.

I note also that other directors have to have expertise in the area of organ and tissue donation. That's pretty understandable. Another one has to have expertise in nonprofit organizations who are dealing

in this organ and tissue donation area. Then the fourth person has to have a connection to the regional health authority. It seems like a comprehensive board of directors. That looks like it's new in this act because it's not amending anything. I give kudos to the thoughtfulness of bringing that forward.

I think the last thing that I want to focus on and say, of course, is to focus once again on these end-of-life conversations about organ donation, making sure that they happen sooner and establish a quicker process. Clarifying this is in everyone's best interest, recognizing that it doesn't override a person's consent. They can still decide for themselves not to consent to organ donation. But once they have made that decision, then that is an area that needs to be clearly understood in terms of who does what when.

With those things said, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and listen to other parts of the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second reading and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to also give my thanks to the Member for Highwood for bringing forward this bill. Many of the members of this Assembly will recall a private member's bill that was brought forward on organ donation a couple of sessions ago. I've lost track of time a little bit now. At that time, you know, there were some questions about some of the provisions of that bill although in spirit I think all members were very much united on the idea of promoting organ donation and increasing the likelihood of organ donation by making it more available. More information would be out there.

Now, as I recall, the previous – and I think it was also Bill 205, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-South East – had a sort of opt-out provision for organ donation so that it was presumed that all individuals were organ donors unless they specifically opted out. I understand that there were some concerns around that, and some consultation was done. I think other members of the Assembly have spoken to the consultation that the Member for Highwood did, and that's the result, that we see a new private member's bill which basically requires a physician to do a mandatory referral for organ donation even before somebody has passed away, so having that opportunity for education and engagement with a family or an individual who is close to passing about the benefits of organ donation.

3:40

I understand, of course, that there are a number of other administrative measures in here that are very important. Again, I seem to sense, obviously, a consensus amongst members of supporting the importance of this bill, of increasing organ donation. I do want to make a couple of small comments during my time here.

Again, I think this is a good example of how important a private member's bill, legislation, is. We've heard members of the government speak of that and how important it is that individual members have the opportunity to bring forward concerns from their constituents in a private member's bill. I do feel that it's important to note that the privilege of a private member's bill coming forward, which has been a long-standing tradition of this House and of many Houses across the country, has been undermined significantly under this current government. Not one single private member's bill brought forward by an opposition member has made it to this floor for debate. We should highlight that, Mr. Speaker, that some of our

basic democratic principles have been undermined significantly and continue to be.

But I, just like many of my colleagues, will stand in support of private members' bills that we believe are serving the public good and would seek to serve our constituents' needs. Therefore, I am happy to support Bill 205 as well as many other private members' bills that have come before this House.

In particular, on organ donation, this is something that I think we've all kind of shared some stories perhaps of – well, there are the statistics of how many people could benefit from organ donation, how many Albertans are waiting on lists, but I think that many of us in this House actually have very personal stories of individuals that we know, and I'd like to highlight that now.

First, I'd like to mention that my father was an organ donor when he passed away in 1994. He was an organ donor, and I'm very happy that while that was a loss for us, other families and other individuals got to benefit as a result of my father's passing. When you're trying to look for silver linings in losing a loved one, that is one that I know my family felt some solace from. Certainly, I know the importance of individuals agreeing to be an organ donor. My dad was a proud organ donor, actually. He had signed his card, and he had talked to us about it, and that was back when the licences were those old paper ones, and nobody asked you when you got your licence whether or not that was something that you wanted to do, but he had signed it well before he ever knew that he would be a donor himself.

Certainly, that's something that in our household we did talk about, the benefits of organ donation and the opportunity not only to contribute to another family's or individual's well-being but as an act of giving. I am so glad that we have made some changes even since that time to encourage individuals to become organ donors, lots of public education campaigns, but also, yes, when I most recently renewed my driver's licence, I was informed by the registry agent about the importance of organ donation, and I'm proud to have signed that on my driver's licence as well.

I also feel compelled to speak about some of my constituents, Mr. Speaker. One constituent who is very close to my heart is a young man – he's not quite six yet; I'm not sure if he's turned six yet – George Kemp and his parents, Lindsey and Randy Kemp. George has been the recipient of two heart donations in his very short, young life. I know that I myself and, of course, his family are incredibly grateful that he did receive those heart donations because that is why he is here with us today. You know, with the first donation, sadly, his body was rejecting it, and it wasn't working out well. I know that his family lived in anguish for many months, thinking that the chances of getting a heart donation once seemed unlikely, so to get a second donation seemed incredibly unlikely. George lived at the Stollery hospital for, I believe, almost nine months. I'm sure Lindsey will correct me if she's watching this. I'll let her know to correct me. But it was well over six months, I know for sure.

He lived at the Stollery waiting for that second donation of a heart. Of course, when a child receives a heart as a donation, it's only because another child has passed, and what a big, generous gift by that family, to go through such incredible loss and then to have donated. That's why George is here. Of course, during this pandemic I know his family was deeply concerned, given his immunocompromised state, about safety. You know, Lindsey and I spoke many times and she wrote to me many times about her concerns about George, who had gone through so much to be able to go to school, to be able to be a normal kindergartner going to school, then feeling unsafe at school. There were some anguishing decisions for Lindsey and for Randy about what to do. They wanted

George, who had grown up, essentially, in a children's hospital, to spend more time socializing, but then the pandemic hit, and they didn't feel that school was safe. I know that that put an enormous amount of stress on them.

I am grateful to the families who agreed to donate their child's organs and a chance, through grief, to really continue another life. I hope, actually – I don't know, but I hope – that that brings them some comfort as well.

I also want to talk about a very special constituent of mine, Anne Halpin, who is an incredibly brilliant woman. She's the one who first talked to me, when I was thinking of running for office, about the importance of that lab that we were going to build as the NDP. I'm going to get all of her credentials wrong, but she is an incredibly brilliant laboratory scientist who cares very deeply about that. She's also a woman who walks the talk, because she's long been an advocate of organ donation and she recently signed up to be a living donor of a kidney. I understand that due to some challenges that transplant did not take place, but she is still indicating that she is willing to donate a kidney as a living donor, and I think that speaks to exactly who she is.

There are so many Albertans who inspire, and I want to speak about one more, who is a young man named Mason. He's actually a year younger than my son, so he's eight years old, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora knows this family very well. Their mom, Tamara, is a close friend as well as their dad, Clifton. Mason went to daycare with my son. He has kidney challenges, kidney troubles, and he was diagnosed young with that. He has been told that before the age of 18 he will likely require a kidney transplant. I know his mom had hoped to be that donor at some point, but due to her own health conditions she may not be in a situation to be able to do that, which is probably the part that has been most devastating for her.

This is all to say that these are very real lives that are impacted by the need for organ donation. There are some very real lives impacted by being an organ donor. It's incredibly important. Let me take this opportunity to once again encourage Albertans to sign up and to be organ donors, to speak to their family members about their wishes, and to have those conversations openly. I think that so much of the reason why we don't have more donors is because, you know, the conversation isn't had until the family is going through a very difficult time, the imminent death or the death of a loved one. That can be an incredibly traumatic time. There are high emotions, and at that time it might be too difficult to have those conversations.

I think that sometimes it may be difficult to make decisions around organ donation at such a difficult time, so part of the reason why I think we're having this discussion, that the Member for Highwood brought this bill forward, and why we've been supportive in this House is that we're encouraging individuals and Albertans to really speak openly about organ donation, because not only does it save a life, but you could really give a life.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to second reading of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to start, as many have this afternoon, by thanking my colleague the hon. Member for Highwood for his tremendous work and the time he's dedicated in consulting with Albertans and bringing this bill forward.

It's my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 205 will dramatically impact life for many Albertans, most notably the 700 Albertans who are waiting for a life-saving transplant and their families. While

almost 90 per cent of Canadians say that they support organ donation, approximately 32 per cent have actually registered their intent to donate. Unfortunately, of that number, a very small number, approximately 1.2 per cent, of people that pass away are considered viable for organ donation in Alberta for various reasons. Therefore, the more people that understand and choose to register and the better the notification system to the organ donation organization, the more lives will be saved, and that really is the intent and the heart of this bill.

At this point in time there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their lives. As I mentioned already, of those 4,500, 700 of them are Albertans, Mr. Speaker. These numbers directly represent the urgency and the need for donors and a clear process or a clearer process here in Alberta.

3:50

It's troublesome that Alberta has fallen behind other jurisdictions in terms of our rate of successful donation, which is costing Albertans on the transplant wait-list their lives. I was inspired by the member opposite, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and her story of that little boy. Think about being the mom of that child waiting for not one but two hearts. As she mentioned so eloquently, one organ donation can save up to eight lives, and a tissue donation can improve the quality of life for up to 75 other people.

As I mentioned already, the intent of this bill is to establish a mandatory referral process and increase donor opportunities throughout the province. Bill 205 will improve the information provided to individuals within Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ and tissue donation. Unfortunately, consent to donate is of little value if potential donors are not properly identified and referred to donor specialists in a timely fashion, and as the member opposite also mentioned, I think that quite often what happens is that you're in a crisis. You're having to make some very tragic decisions in the middle of a tragic situation in your immediate family, and for most people, that's not the time to be considering what you want to do. I appreciate the thoughtfulness in this bill to educate Albertans and give them that information up front, long before it's a crisis situation, to make an informed decision outside of that window of crisis.

Mr. Speaker, an opt-in program with the clarifications made in this bill will serve to benefit Albertans, the hundreds that are currently in need of organ and tissue donation as well as those who will need one in the future. Accidents and tragic diagnoses are unpredictable, and Bill 205 addresses the time sensitivity of these urgent needs as they arise. We need to think of those that are waiting for transplants, transplants that, as I've said already, will either improve, extend, or save their lives.

This morning the Member for Highwood was present with the Minister of Health to announce the specialist in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, or SEND, initiative, that is being given \$2 million. This program will allow 22 specialist physicians to co-ordinate organ donation and transplantation opportunities across the province, and I think that's incredible. The services under SEND will be available 24/7 in order to improve identification of potential donors, support families considering consent at an unimaginably difficult time, and ultimately save more lives of Albertans.

Prior to this program there were no dedicated donation physician positions for individual hospitals and intensive care units, but with this now in place it would provide for six SEND physicians and one program lead in Calgary; six SEND physicians and one program lead here in Edmonton; one SEND physician in Red Deer, the third-largest city in Alberta; two SEND physicians, a shared position, in

Lethbridge; two SEND physicians, again a shared position, in my home constituency of Grande Prairie, and I'm very thankful for that; one pediatric SEND physician at Alberta Children's hospital, which, I'm sure, would have been very important to the family of that little boy; two pediatric SEND physicians, again one shared position, here at the Stollery children's hospital. It's expected that the program will expand to Medicine Hat and Fort McMurray in 2023, and I just think that's remarkable. The timing of this private member's bill, coupled with that announcement, I really hope will transform our transplant and organ donation system.

The allotment of \$2 million to this initiative demonstrates its importance. It allows for intensive care units and emergency departments across the province to work together to co-ordinate a province-wide response for organ donation and transplantation opportunities. Mr. Speaker, since 2011 Alberta's donation rate has increased by 28 per cent, and that's remarkable. While this is fantastic news, hundreds are still waiting for life-saving transplants, and Alberta has lagged behind other provinces for many years with respect to organ and tissue donation. This is a reality we cannot continue, and I believe all members of this Assembly – I believe that's what I'm hearing this afternoon – are in support of changing that reality and assisting in shifting this troubling trend in service to our constituents right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I've seen first-hand how being a donor can help others, and it's only served to inspire me, and I, too, would like to share a couple of personal stories. I had the opportunity to already speak to this bill at concurrence, and I'm going to share this story again because I think it's worthy of sharing as many times as I get the opportunity.

I have a friend. Her name is Dianna Havin. She lives right here in the city of Edmonton. She's originally – at least when I met her, she was from Peace River. We first met as business owners, and we bonded over that challenge and that time in our life. But we bonded even more over the fact that we were young moms and working business owners. Dianna is a retired nurse, and she also happens to be a living donor, which is, I think, a fairly unique choice that few make. As a retired nurse Dianna has a rare blood type, and she understood, with that rare blood type, how critical it is, how challenging it would be for somebody who required a transplant who also shared that blood type to find a donor, like finding a needle in a haystack.

She understood that, Mr. Speaker. She saw a need, and she stepped up. I don't know if it was the pandemic or what in particular, but she did it during the pandemic. I think the pandemic gave all of us an opportunity to take stock of our priorities and our purpose in life. For Dianna, this was, really, a part of her process as she processed the pandemic. She saw an opportunity that she couldn't deny, and she really felt compelled, so she chose last year to donate one of her kidneys. I just wanted to thank her and her family, her husband, Mark, and their kids for their support of this choice. It's a risky choice and a scary choice, but ultimately she saved a life. That person will never know who it was who saved their life, but we know here in this Chamber that Dianna Havin is a hero and that there are many others like her. This bill, while it talks about organ donation and transplant typically upon the loss of a loved one, is another facet to transplantation and donation.

I also, again, tie back to my time as a young mom. When I first moved to Grande Prairie, I was expecting my first child, who I can't believe is going to be 25 this fall. I don't know where the years have gone, Mr. Speaker. I'm starting to sound like my grandma when I say things like that, so I will not continue on in that vein. Almost 25 years ago I moved to Grande Prairie expecting my first son, Nicolas, and I met the most wonderful group of neighbours in Grande Prairie. I will tell you that when we moved to Grande

Prairie, we were so amazed by how hospitable the community was. It was overwhelming, and this neighbourhood that we lived in for just eight short weeks – while we were waiting for the final construction on our home, we rented this place for just eight short weeks. In those eight weeks we made lifelong friendships in this little neighbourhood in Grande Prairie.

Sort of the key person: her name was Claire Newnham. She was a lovely, lovely lady, and she introduced us to all the neighbourhood. She got everybody working where they were going to make cookies for this new little pregnant lady that moved into the neighbourhood. It was quite inspiring, Mr. Speaker. We were in the middle of setting up business, and I was expecting, and we had this house under construction, a lot of things going on. We came in from a different province. But I'll get back to the point of the bill. One of the people in this neighbourhood was in desperate need of a lung transplant, a double lung transplant. She had been on the wait-list for more than a year, and she was dying. In these eight short weeks in the neighbourhood I was amazed – I have 10 seconds? Oh, wow. Okay. I was amazed that she got this lung transplant, and her life was saved.

I have so much more to say, and I'll be happy to share it in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, on behalf of my constituents. I'm happy to say that we support the position of this bill. It was not long ago, just last week, that I visited the family of a community leader who passed away last week. I just wanted to share the feelings. The family was feeling grateful to see that their family member did not only work hard and contribute to the community for a living but also for how concerned he was with education and how aware he was in that he also donated his whole body after his death, that he can still contribute to save the lives of his fellow Albertans.

4:00

I also have a story going back a few years, four or five years, where the family of the person who died anxiously wanted to donate the body of the family member since the family member had not registered herself into the registry in advance and the hassle they went through and the struggle they had. Eventually they were not able to get it onto the registry and donate the body of their loved one. I assume the changes in this bill will definitely help not only education around donations of the organs and the bodies but also will fix some of the challenges and the process that people many times feel are challenging when it comes to donating specifically not themselves, when it comes to donating the body or the organs of their family members or their loved ones.

We strongly support organ donations and steps that will help improve the donor process and the participation rates in Alberta. Organ donation saves lives, and we are so grateful for people, Albertans – I personally know a few of them – that have donated. They made their decision on this life-saving process.

We have also heard from the stakeholders the importance that, specifically proposed in this Bill 205, Albertans see the importance of mandatory referrals, and we support this proposal in the legislation.

I also wanted to thank the Member for Highwood for bringing this bill forward that will not only help people bring education and

awareness about donating their organs and bodies, but also it will help Albertans save lives.

What is happening right now: the medical practitioner must consider if someone's organs are suitable for donation after they die. We assume that if this bill passes, it would make it mandatory for medical practitioners to share this information if someone is imminent for death. The process following the information of the organs being donated remains, I think, unchanged to current practice when medical consent has not been provided, that the donation organization must seek it from the family member, spouse, adult child, parents, or their relatives.

This effectively causes the conversation about organ donation to happen sooner or establishes a quicker process. This has been advocated by Toby Boulet, who is the father of Logan Boulet, the Humboldt Bronco hockey player who died weeks after he registered to be an organ donor.

Bill 205 also makes many administrative changes, including to the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation Agency by creating a board of directors and giving it more responsibility and capability.

The bill will also make explicitly clear that people can express refusal to have their organs donated. People who have registered to donate their organs can also change their positions after changing their minds after the fact. The bill would allow a donor to determine if they want to donate their entire body or specific organs and tissue and for what purposes those parts are allowed to be used, so they can specifically mark the purposes they are donating for, either for scientific research, transplantation, or medical education.

The changes brought by the bill make addition to the powers of the agency to release and report the statistics on refused consent percentage, donor identifications, and referrals.

The bill amends section 7 of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act to oblige medical practitioners to provide donation organizations with information to allow them to determine the suitability of organ or tissue for donation, so they will be obliged to provide the information around

- (a) the age of the person;
- (b) the cause, or expected cause, of the person's death;
- (c) if death has occurred, the time of death of the person; [or]
- (d) any available past and current personal information of the person that is relevant to their medical suitability for tissue or organ transplantation.

Currently this information is shared after a donor dies. If passed, this bill requires the information to be shared if death is imminent.

Section of 9 of this bill will add section 12.5 into the act, which obliges the chair of the board of the agency to provide an annual report. That's very important. That's a very good proposal. In this legislation: a summary of the activity carried out in the preceding year; statistics on the number of donors' identifications, referrals, and consent rates; its recommendations.

Now, donors in Alberta and Canada: the information shows that in Canada in 2017 415 people withdrew from the wait-list, and 245 people died while on the wait-list; 67 of those who withdrew and 35 of those who died were Albertans. According to Alberta Health there are over 700 Albertans on the wait-list to get an organ transplant. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information the deceased donor rate in Canada increased by 42 per cent between 2009 and 2018, from 14.5 to 20.6 donors per million population, which translates to 487 deceased donors in 2009 and 700 ... [Mr. Deol's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member here. For those who are following along at home, the Member for Highwood brought forward Bill 205 – again, this is a private member's bill – Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

The biggest thing that is changing in this – I mean, we've had a donation program for a number of years. I believe the existing legislation is over 30 years old, so firstly it was in need of a revamp, and then, secondly, I'd like to thank the member and other members here for coming forward on this business. This is one of the most impactful things that we can have, I believe, on Albertans' lives.

Some of the concerns out there, some quick stats. There are over 700 Albertans out there right now waiting for transplants. Through the process the way it is sitting currently, it puts a ton of pressure on the system and organizations to react within a given time limit. Unfortunately, what's happening there is that the organs and the folks that are donating may not be receiving recipients in time, Mr. Speaker, which is obviously a real problem given the circumstances that that comes about on.

4:10

There are a few major items that are covered off here. The first one – well, there are about three major components, from what I can see reading through the bill, and we'll let the member correct me later on through debate, but the first one is to implement a mandatory referral process. In essence, what that does: instead of waiting until the fact of the individual passing and then starting the process, it compels them to start to talk to the organizations, talk to the donors themselves and to the family to start the process. Change of notification will streamline it so that it's making it more efficient. It gives an adequate timeline. Again, everything is compressed around those timelines, and it's such a stressful circumstance. That'll decrease the missed opportunities, as mentioned.

Now, it's interesting to note – you know, I've already said that there are 700 Albertans. There are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for these transplants currently. When the physicians were polled on this to see where some of the impediments were, some of the feedback that we received on this, of some of the referrals not taking place currently without this mandatory process, was: 59 per cent said that they didn't do this because they deemed the patient to be an ineligible donor, may or may not be the case; 45 per cent said due to the family being too upset, so they didn't want to intrude on these types of circumstances, obviously, and that's a consideration for the personal needs; 39 per cent believed that the family had a religious bias; 34 per cent said due to their desire to leave the hospital unit, so they didn't want to remove them there. Mandatory referral increases the probability of these very difficult conversations taking place and helps provide a mechanism, quite frankly, whether falling back on it can become a procedure that they can have those discussions.

The other one was to improve the agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for a renewal of reviews, reports, suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize misused donor opportunities and build a stronger system of donation in the future. Again, there are several organizations out there that are kind of in this wheelhouse. This is their backyard of how they deal with it. This is, again, going to help improve that that process has some consistency as well.

Improve the education and awareness: those are big deals, to understand how the process takes place and what the benefits are to that, so improve the information provided to individuals through Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ donation and tissues.

Now, again, being a father of four, hearing some of the stories in here – I mean, it is just absolutely heartbreaking that you would

think of circumstances where you have to put yourself in that consideration not only for, you know, being a parent in your prime, trying to protect your child; you've raised him since little and doing all those things. Firstly, to have something tragic happen to them: I don't think that there's anybody in here that wouldn't tear up if you put yourself in that circumstance. Secondly, being on the other end, where you have a child that is in need and you're doing all that you can and you're looking down the end of a loaded gun, so to speak, and knowing what the probable circumstances are – so to hear some of the stories that are so heartwarming, and the Member for Highwood had mentioned that part of the inspiration was from a young girl by the name of Morghan. Because her parents had the wherewithal, because they dealt with these things head-on, the impact from that was that there were seven or eight other people that have a better future, a brighter hope, and that can carry on. I mean, that's something amazing.

If all it takes is a little bit of a legislative change here in this House, is a private member to work through this, to help facilitate those types of outcomes without people being put in that circumstance at the very end of having to deal with all the other consequences, let alone that, I think that's one of the most meaningful things that we could ever do here in this House. You know, my father-in-law – God rest his soul – was a doc for 30 years, ran the hospital up in Lac La Biche for 30 years as chief of staff, and I'd asked him for some of the highlights of his career. He said: honestly, Shane, there were only two times in my life in over those 30 years of managing that I really felt that I saved somebody's life. Being a doc, most things kind of cure themselves and take care of it. Considering that we as legislators here have the potential to save hundreds of lives by tweaking some laws: that's profound.

I was, you know, reflective in the last little bit of some health concerns I had personally and wondering what impacts and what I've really done here in this House. You know, in prior life in projects there's something tangible that you can look back and see. I was searching for a couple of things, because you're looking at where you can put your stick in. This one, honestly, to the Member for Highwood: you made it real again. You've resonated with what it means and why we're elected and why we're here and some substantial changes that we can make. This, honestly, will be one of the things that I can put in – win, lose, or draw next election or otherwise – that I did something meaningful, impactful, to jump on your coattails of something that you managed to get through here as a private member, to be able to make some substantial differences in Albertans' lives and to help, as it would appear, the over 700 people that are currently waiting in this circumstance.

Now, I do know a person, an individual that was a mentor to me, ironically, who was a recipient of a liver transplant, Wayne Huddleston. I first met him up on a project at BHP, a diamond mine project, in the middle of nowhere in the Territories, and Wayne, at that time, was the lead for the millwrights, so all the big, heavy equipment that was being put together. He and Lloyd Jackson were like Mutt and Jeff up there kind of organizing this, and we had a 24/7 operation that was nonstop for just about three years. Wayne was managing all that heavy equipment going together, all the conveyor lifts and all the machines.

Well, it turns out that at that time Wayne was actually having liver failure. Here's a man that's up on a project in the middle of nowhere, still doing these projects and suffering these major circumstances. Now, in Wayne's condition he couldn't find a donor. There wasn't a donor out there. I lost touch with him for a couple of years. He ended up getting a second lease on life because his brother-in-law actually bellied up and said – well, you know, he must have liked his brother-in-law because he donated half his liver to him.

With that gift, it gave Wayne at least another 15 years' lease on life, and the next time I talked to Wayne – you know, being one of my mentors, we kept in touch. I called him up, and it was on a project down in Estevan, Saskatchewan. It was going right sideways, and I needed somebody who could understand that side of the business, who could work with the crews out there, who could get the inspection guys back together and do those things. I'm just thinking of what a massive gap there would have been out there without having Wayne around. He ended up following me around in that whole pipeline industry for another 10 years after that.

He recently passed, this last fall, unfortunately, and it was due to complications with that transplant. But I know that his family was immensely grateful, and I know that there are so many other countless people out there that he touched over the time that he was, you know, extended with us. Credit to his brother-in-law again for doing that, for being a donor, for stepping up and doing that, for putting himself through that circumstance. That gift is insurmountable.

Again, with the member here bringing together some very common-sense legislation to have that meaningful impact – and I hope that with, you know, my little bit of a speech here talking about this, folks will consider filling out those donor cards, that they'll consider that gift that's out there. We never want to talk about our own expiry dates, but, believe it or not, we are on a termination schedule, and we can only do so much with the time we have. Whether it's a gift or whether it's a consequence, we don't know when that time is up.

Again, if we can do something as impactful and meaningful here by putting legislation through, I'd challenge everybody as well to make sure that you do that next step kind of like Wayne's brother-in-law did and fill out those cards to make sure that those donations can take place, that those tissues can be there, that the medical experts that we have, that we're very fortunate to have in this province, can do their best to extend and give that longevity to someone else's life.

Without rambling on too far, I'm very much in support of this, very appreciative of the member for bringing it forward, and very happy for the good, fulsome debate that we've had and for the interests of Albertans in doing this. Again, quite frankly, seeing this legislation, if, God willing, the creek don't rise and we can all get along in here to get it passed, this will be one of those items I can talk about in the future, to say that it was worth it and I did something meaningful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? The individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by taking the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Highwood for introducing this very important bill in this House, and I also want to take an opportunity to thank some of the members in this Chamber who spoke on this bill – the Member for Grande Prairie, the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – for presenting their own personal accounts and their own experiences about this topic and this debate here this afternoon, and certainly my good friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, who gave a wonderful presentation about this particular bill. I appreciate the personal accounts that they all gave here this afternoon, and I certainly rise to also speak in favour of this bill. I'm honoured today to rise and speak about this Bill 205, namely the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, legislative reform is essential for modernizing Alberta's organ and tissue donation and transplantation system, and

I believe that that is exactly and precisely what this bill is doing. I had the pleasure of hearing the hon. Member for Highwood at the committee – that is, the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills – who gave his initial presentation on this particular bill, and he certainly provided those committee members with some of that preliminary information. I certainly appreciate the debate that is happening here, and I believe that we are making significant progress with respect to discussing this bill and, hopefully, seeing it pass through here.

Mr. Speaker, implementing a mandatory referral process means that physicians will refer patients to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is near or approaching. As my friend mentioned earlier, nobody likes to talk about these particular issues, but we need to talk about these issues, and ultimately we are all headed that way. Certainly, preparation and discussion, despite how difficult it may be at times, is something that I think is incredibly important.

Now, based on the surveys, that we assume are completed by physicians on this particular topic, those physicians have listed things like family grief, their perception of a family's religious bias, and their desire to leave the hospital unit as reasons for their decision not to address this particular topic. Certainly, I cannot speak for physicians – I'm not a physician – but I cannot even imagine how difficult it is to ask patients or their families questions about tissue and organ donation.

Prior to coming into this Chamber, I worked as a lawyer for almost a decade, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of those discussions focused on wills and estate planning. One of the most difficult discussions for young, healthy Albertans was talking about how to structure their estates, what to put in their wills, who to name as an executor, who to name as beneficiaries. These are discussions that take place, most times, with young, healthy Albertans. So certainly talking about these types of issues with people who may be facing impending death is a difficult topic, far more than the ones that I'm experienced with.

What we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill has accounted for this particular factor. As a result, discussions about donations with families who are experiencing a tragedy are conducted by specialists explicitly educated and trained in this area. Professionally trained organ donation organizations can best deal with the families and are not biased against organ donation one way or the other. This should decrease, in my view, the likelihood of overpromising and underdelivering or missing having conversations with families who wish to donate. This referral process will play a considerable role in optimization efforts and streamlining the notification process to ensure reasonable timelines for accessing potential donor viability and decreasing missed donation opportunities.

Again, I refer to some of the statements that my friends here made earlier today, and certainly I want to reiterate what my friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland mentioned just earlier today. This process will not compel anyone, but it will increase the probabilities of open and frank discussion, and that is specifically what I think the member who presented this bill intended to do. Mr. Speaker, let's pave the way for open discussion. Let's pave the way to discuss, to engage, to raise awareness. I'm all for that. I think my colleagues and, I hope, all members of this House agree with that as well.

Now, the content of this bill is really nothing new, nor is this the first time that legislation of this sort has been presented in Alberta. What's more, several jurisdictions world-wide have already implemented similar mandatory referral processes when it comes to organ and tissue donation. For example, in 2021 Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction in North America to enact a presumed consent law for organ and tissue donation. Since then the province has seen a significant increase in tissue donations and large

increases in the availability of both tissues and organs for transplants.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note for all the people watching here today that what was implemented in Nova Scotia is not necessarily being presented here in Alberta. Under Nova Scotia law people are presumed to agree to donate their organs when they pass away unless they choose to opt out, but we recognize that not everyone may be comfortable with donation, not everyone may be comfortable with that presumption that Nova Scotia law has implemented. We will ensure that each individual's wishes are honoured regardless of whether they wish to donate or not.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that it is critical to also remember that registering as an organ donor does not mean you will become an organ donor. The path to becoming a deceased organ donor is extremely complex because individuals need to die in certain circumstances where donation is even possible. Unfortunately, and contrary to some of the common misconceptions, those circumstances are relatively rare. Of the proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become organ donors. That's far lower than what I expected, and certainly the facts speak for themselves.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there have been questions about why we chose the mandatory referral process instead of taking another approach such as one similar to the law in Nova Scotia, so I want to share the findings of the 2021 International Donation and Transplantation Legislative and Policy Forum with you on the evidence-based practice of mandatory referral as explained by the experts in the fields of donation and transplant.

Mr. Speaker, when comparing the two most common models of donation, mandatory and presumed consent, what stands out most to me is that under mandatory referral, clinicians or administrators notify the organ donation organization about the potential donor for evaluation, and if deemed medically eligible, the families of eligible potential donors are then approached for their consent. On the other hand, the presumed consent model makes the assumption that all individuals have consented to donation unless they have opted out before death. I should also mention that although Nova Scotia has legislated the presumed consent model, their legislation also includes mandatory referral as well, so all donor identification practices and ethical consent models are involved in deciding to donate. Mr. Speaker, all things considered, this brings us to why mandatory referral is more beneficial to its counterpart.

This is an important bill. I hope that all members of this Chamber vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe the hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on this piece of legislation brought forward by the Member for Highwood, an important issue to all Albertans, Bill 205, the private member's bill titled Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. This afternoon, while deliberating this piece of legislation, this private member's bill, we've heard from many legislators here speaking to the bill, bringing forward personal anecdotes and stories that were very, very touching and very intimate stories of tragic circumstances and, in some cases, very happy circumstances. Those are the two sides of the coin when it comes to organ transplant. Unless it's a tissue donation or a live organ or a partial organ donation, somebody's death must occur before, in fact, the saving of a life can happen.

We heard a number of stories from families of members of this Legislature, and because of the numbers it's easy to surmise, Mr.

Speaker, that there is no family in this province that is untouched by this issue of human tissue and organ donation. It's a widespread phenomenon that there are concerns about the lack of availability of organs, and of course this piece of legislation attempts to address that. It is a private member's bill which I think is timely. It's always important to do what we can to improve the number of people whose lives can be saved or bettered by a tissue or organ donation, and I think this legislation addresses it. I strongly support the measures in Bill 205, brought forward by the Member for Highwood.

4:30

Some things that people may not be aware of are the actual sort of circumstances around which a tissue or organ may be donated. For example, Mr. Speaker, about organ donation, as I mentioned earlier, it may be that you can have a living donor. It means that the donating organ has to be free of disease and not harm the individual, but certainly there are a number of different organs that can be donated by way of live donation, and that's something that is a huge gift. I know of individuals personally who have done such a thing, and it's an amazing gift to give somebody else.

The organs themselves that may be transplanted include – of course, this would be after-death transplantation, after the death of the donor in most cases. Heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas, which many people will not be aware of, pancreas islet cells, small bowel, and the stomach are organs that can be donated. Of course, tissues that may be donated include the cornea, the sclera, which is the white of the eye, heart valves, skin, bone, tendons, and amniotic tissue.

We heard earlier today, Mr. Speaker, that there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that will save their lives. All of us have heard the tragic stories of people on dialysis, whether liver or kidney, struggling to stay alive until a donor is found. Sadly, many people die waiting on that list for a transplant. That is something, of course, this bill seeks to address and ensure that we increase the number of donors who provide that life-giving gift of a transplant of a tissue or an organ.

As I mentioned earlier, the Member for Highwood has brought this bill forward, and I give him kudos for that. Every family in this House has been affected in some way, either directly or indirectly, and every Albertan family is, and my family is no different. As I mentioned before in this House, I had a younger brother named Kevin Dach who was killed in a car accident, tragically, just after graduating from high school. He was attending Lakeland College up in Vermilion, and the wish of the family, of course, was to have his organs donated. Unfortunately, his injuries were too severe for that, and we weren't able to move forward with that. We faced as a family that traumatic decision at a very point in time where the crisis of death was imminent, and I feel for every family who has to go through that.

The measures in this legislation, Bill 205, I think, help to make the process one of – it gives it pathways, gives it some roadways for families to follow, and it normalizes and makes it very clear. Back in 1977 things weren't quite as clear. You could express your wishes, but there certainly could have been a debate among family members about donation or not, and then if there were dissenting family members, probabilitywise the physician would have felt unable to move forward. Certainly, as I said, every family is touched by this in Alberta, and we welcome measures that are going to help more Alberta families keep their loved ones alive and extend their lives and allow the wishes of many family members to proceed and make sure that an organ donation can occur when, in fact, the deceased has made those wishes known on their driver's licence or through the Alberta care system or followed online to make the wishes of themselves known.

Now, we did mention in this House a few times, with other speakers previous to me, how important, how precious the whole concept of private members' bills is to members in this House. The public may not be aware, but a member can go through three or four or more terms, a whole career, without ever having the privilege of having their name drawn to bring forward a private member's bill. That is something that many members have expressed regret over, that they never got the opportunity. This opportunity is something that I think the Member for Highwood has taken full advantage of. As we all know, from our side of the House or the government side of the House, anyone who brings forward a private member's bill and gets it to the point of the floor of the Legislature debate has put an awful lot of work into the whole process, and regardless of the subject matter of the bill the effort that it takes to get a private member's bill to this spot in this House and actually debate it here is something that the public should recognize.

What's happened recently, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature is that no opposition private members' bills have received the ability to be debated on the floor of the House. They were blocked by government members in committee, the public bills committee, who decide whether or not to allow a bill to proceed to the floor of the Legislature for debate. They were blocked not because they were in some way deficient in their content, in my humble opinion, but they were blocked because they were opposition bills and the government did not want to see any opposition bill getting debated in the Legislature simply because they came from the opposition. This is, I believe, a black stain on our democratic process here in the House. It's something I don't want to see permitted to happen over the long haul.

Right now the government of the day sees fit to completely stifle the debate that members of this House wish to bring forward as private members' bills, and I think it's something that should receive the condemnation of all legislators in this House and also the public, because when government members simply block a private member's bill because it comes from the opposition regardless of the inherent value of that piece of legislation, what they're doing is expressing that they really don't believe in giving the opposition a fair hearing just because they might have opposing views. There have been 10 – 10 – of these private members' bills, I think nine or 10, that have been actually . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The individual who did catch my eye was the hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I first want to thank the Member for Highwood for his hard work in bringing this bill forward to this House. It's important to promote organ and tissue donation because organ and tissue donation can save lives.

Currently organ and tissue donation rates in Alberta are lower than many of our neighbouring Canadian provinces and other top-performing countries. In Canada right now there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that will save their lives and even more people that are waiting for tissue transplant that will increase their quality of life. Of these Canadians on transplant wait-lists, over 700 of them are from right here in Alberta. Organ failure and organ donation impacts the lives of not just the recipients but their families as well.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 will include measures that will improve the effectiveness of organ donation and the transplant system as a whole. Organ donation is the ultimate gift of life, but there is need for improvements to the organ and tissue donation system. Bill 205

contains three major components that will improve the organ and tissue donation system. This will in turn help address the shortage of organ and tissue donors and increase the number of lives that can be saved.

4:40

The first major component contained in this bill is the implementation of a mandatory referral process. Mr. Speaker, last year the International Donation and Transplantation Legislative and Policy Forum assembled a panel of international experts in the fields of donation and transplantation to provide expert guidance on the structure of an ideal organ and tissue donation and transplantation system. The forum concluded that the mandatory referral is a key, evidence-based, best practice among global deceased organ and tissue donation and transplantation leaders.

Contrary to popular belief, registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not mean that you'll become an organ donor. The pathway to becoming a deceased organ donor is a complex one because individuals need to die in circumstances where donation is even possible, and these circumstances are rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada only approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of these patients is the only way they will become an actual donor. Failure to identify possible donors is the biggest factor in explaining differences in deceased donation rates nationally and internationally.

Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified and the appropriate organ donation organization is not notified or referrals are received too late. Missed donor opportunities also occur when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify the organ donation organization. In cases of late or nonreferral, life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility of donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their families to even be considered. A study found that reasons for physicians not referring patients to organ donation organizations are as follows: they deem the patient to be not an eligible donor; they did not due to the family being too upset; they did not due to their belief that the family had a religious bias; they did not due to their desire to leave the hospital unit.

Mandatory referral will help address these issues by increasing the chances to make sure discussions with the patient's family about donation are conducted by specialists who are educated specifically in this area. Under a mandatory referral process a physician would be required to refer a patient to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is deemed to be imminent. This is expected to play a huge part in optimization efforts. This change in notification will create a streamlined notification system that will ensure a more adequate timeline for assessing the viability of potential donors and will decrease missed opportunities. This should decrease the likelihood of overpromising and underdelivering or missing the opportunity to have the conversation with families who wish to donate. Both situations can add to the stress a family is experiencing at one of the most worst times of their life.

Mr. Speaker, we know that legal and ethical practices like mandatory referral are essential to establishing a strong donation culture. The decision on whether to donate a loved one's organs can be an extremely difficult one, especially under the umbrella of a family tragedy. This is why we need trained professionals engaging this process to provide the best support possible for Albertans. Professionally trained organ donation organizations are better able to help families and are not biased against organ donation. Consent

to donate is of little value if potential donors are not properly identified and referred to donor specialists at the right time.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second major component of this bill is that it will improve agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will also pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities. These measures will help, to conclude, to build a stronger system of donation in the future.

The third component of this bill is improved education and awareness around the donor process. This bill will improve the quality of information provided to individuals within our Alberta registries in order to better educate Albertans on the process of organ and tissue donation and its importance.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a major and necessary step forward to modernize Alberta's tissue and organ donation systems. I'm pleased to support this bill and would encourage all members of this House to do the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take an opportunity to speak to this bill also. I've supported organ donation my whole life, and I remember signing an organ donation card decades ago. In fact, I think it was maybe even before I was 18. I actually think my parents had to cosign or sign on my behalf to make sure that could happen. This morning, knowing this bill was coming up, too, I thought I would actually check my donor status, so I went online, checked the status, and, sure enough, I was registered as a donor, which I was happy to see.

I know this process in the past has been complicated, but the new online process that I think has been in place for maybe two years now I thought was relatively simple. I know it could be simpler. I know we could have processes that are far more simple to make sure that we have everybody that wants to have their organs donated if something happened to them, make sure that they are taken care of and that that process happens, so I think this is a good discussion to have.

However, the process of private members' bills: let's face it; it's been manipulated by the UCP here. After nine weeks in session we are looking at bills 202 and 205 right now, which are the second and fifth drawings in this session, and they're finally hitting the process where they could actually see second reading, which is the first opportunity in this Legislature to actually debate a private member's bill. It's taken us nine weeks to get to this process.

Now, if the government really wants private members' bills to proceed, as there seems to be anxiety for this, an anxiousness for this bill to proceed as fast as possible – if they really wanted this bill to proceed as fast as possible, they would have done away with the private members' bill committee and concurrence, that delays private members' bills and motions by weeks. Now, again, everybody is talking about urgency, but nobody is doing anything to truly move this process along faster.

Now, when I look at this bill here, Bill 205, the member who brought this bill forward asked for concurrence in this Legislature, which actually delayed this bill an extra week, asking for and having to discuss concurrence. I believe it was the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain who asked for concurrence on my Bill 202, which delayed my bill, and by pushing my bill back, that pushes Bill 205 back because it's further along on the Order Paper.

Now, this government, if they're really serious about this, could make this a government bill, and that would ensure that it's debated and passed in the fastest process possible. They could actually ask

for unanimous consent to allow these bills to pass multiple stages in the same day. They could actually collapse debate and force the vote on it today so that we could move on to the next stage of the process even faster, but I'm not convinced that the government actually wants this bill to really pass, because they're doing nothing to show that to us.

With only a couple of Mondays left, which is the only time we have member time, there's a chance that this bill, even pushed along, won't be able to pass because on the next Monday we have – there are two bills up for concurrence. We could have concurrence discussed, which would take up that Monday, too.

I just want to say that I think the most important thing to remember here is that the process has been manipulated, and it's left us in a situation where we don't get the work done that we should be getting done in this Legislature. Again, nine weeks and we're barely discussing the first two private members' bills.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Before I add my comments about this piece of legislation, I would also like to just echo what some of the other members in this place have said about private member bills. I sat through some of the comments earlier from the member for – was it Rocky View? Strathmore?

Member Irwin: Which one? Oh, Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms Renaud: Chestermere-Strathmore. The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore made it very clear how important she believed private members' bills were, that we needed to clear the way for this important legislation. You know, all of us know that we really just only have a chance to bring something forward if we essentially win a lottery. She talked about how important the different topics were and how hard different members worked to be able to do that, which I found really odd given her and other members' actions over the last nine weeks of this session. That has been to, at every turn, shut down opportunities for the opposition bills to make it to this place so that we can debate them in the fashion that we were sent here to do.

4:50

You know, another example of just the blatant hypocrisy in this place is a little bit – it should be shocking, Mr. Speaker, but sadly it isn't because we're getting used to it. In any event, it is unfortunate that the UCP MLAs are really sort of intent on eroding the democracy that we should be upholding and protecting, but they erode it almost every day that we are in this place, sadly.

To Bill 205, human tissue and organ donation, I listened with interest as some of my colleagues talked about people, whether they were constituents or people in their lives, that had been successful recipients of organs, and it was actually really quite inspiring to hear just the incredible, life-giving nature of human tissue and organ donation. I'd like to tell you about someone in my life that I knew, and this was my first introduction to somebody that did require . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the 115 minutes allotted for debate at second reading have elapsed, and that allows the Member for Highwood five minutes to close debate.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to start by thanking all my colleagues in the House today for sharing their input and their stories around such an important issue, an issue that I'm extremely passionate about, which is organ and tissue donation here in the province of Alberta. I've heard a lot about how important this is. I think we've identified how critical it is to move forward as quickly as possible with 700 Albertans awaiting either organ or tissue donation here in the province of Alberta. I think it's critical that as legislators we do everything possible to ensure that we are creating the best system possible to make sure that there are the most opportunities for that chance. We've spoken to how limited those chances are; roughly 1.2 per cent of all instances present an opportunity. We have to make sure that we maximize on those and minimize donor opportunities.

It's great to hear overall that there seems to be a general consensus in this House and support for this bill because, as I mentioned, it is important for all those people whose lives really are on the line, awaiting either organ or tissue donation. I also want to note and recognize the number of foundations, organizations, and individuals that have really supplied the input here. This is a bill by Albertans for Albertans to save Albertans. I have spent over a year working with AOG, Heart and Stroke, and Kidney Foundation. I know this morning we had the SEND presentation, and I had a chance to speak to Joyce Van Deurzen, who is an executive director with the Kidney Foundation, and was able to have really important conversations with her. Flavia Robles, as well, is an executive director with the Kidney Foundation and has been critical in the input that she's provided to me and the support for this bill, and I'm very appreciative of that.

You know, these stories, the stories that I've heard, stories around Cindy Krieger and her daughter Morghan, Dan and Jennifer Woolfsmith and their daughter Mackenzy: I think they're incredibly powerful, and they highlight how critical it is for us to move forward as quickly as possible on finally getting this legislation passed. Before I close debate, I just want to read something that was provided to me by Jennifer Woolfsmith, and I think it says a lot. She sent me an e-mail that says:

We talk about Mackenzy [her daughter] and the gift she gave openly and often in our house. Having our children, both Owen and Declan, understand all the hard work that went into this by so many as well as witness the important step forward first-hand on what would be meaningful to our whole family.

She states that

Declan asked me just the other day how Mackenzy's organs got to other kids. I was beginning to explain that the doctors did it very carefully and lovingly when he asked me if she had surgery, because one of his classmates recently had surgery and she got a lollipop for being brave. When I answered that it was indeed surgery, he replied, "I hope that Mackenzy got a thousand lollipops." Although he often cries that he misses his sister that he never had the chance to know, he also knows how incredibly meaningful the gift was that she gave.

I think all of us here today need to be brave, brave like Mackenzy and Declan and Owen, and recognize how important it is for us to move forward with this legislation. Thank you to everyone who spoke today.

With that, I close debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Irwin	Sabir
Amery	Issik	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jean	Schow
Bilous	Jones	Schulz
Ceci	LaGrange	Shepherd
Dach	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
Deol	McIver	Singh
Ellis	Nally	Stephan
Fir	Neudorf	Toor
Frey	Nicolaides	Turton
Getson	Orr	Walker
Horner	Pon	Wilson
Hunter	Renaud	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 39	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 205 read a second time]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 9(1) in order to proceed to debate on Motion Other than Government Motion 507.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Public Service

507. Mr. Neudorf moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As municipal governments increase services, they add staff. Then their labour costs grow, and inevitably municipal tax rates increase. It's important to remember that, at the end of the day, there is only one taxpayer. People have to pay their share of property taxes along with business taxes and school taxes. There are also federal and provincial personal income taxes, payroll and business taxes, fuel taxes, not to mention Justin Trudeau's carbon tax. You can also add fees as well as licences and membership costs to people and businesses, and it all adds up.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that May 24 is Tax Freedom Day in Canada? Through the research I did for Motion 507, I learned that families of two or more pay 39.1 per cent of their income to taxes. Think about it: that's almost 40 per cent of a family's budget paying various levels of government taxes.

Let me explain how this has worked in our province. Here are some facts reported by Franco Terrazzano with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on June 30, 2020, in an article titled *Alberta Municipal Gov't Labour Costs Out of Touch with Reality*. Calgary's and Edmonton's municipal budgets have labour costs of over 50 per cent of their total spend, both increasing by more than \$200 million between the years 2014 and 2018. That's each. I can confirm to the Assembly that neither of their populations increased proportionately by that much over those four years.

A statistic on pensions for the city of Calgary blew me away, Mr. Speaker. Did you know that Calgary spends more on pensions for

its employees and elected officials than every other major Canadian city? Calgary provides some of its employees not just one, not only two, but in some cases three pensions to a single employee. If that wasn't enough to make you shake your head, the council pension plan costs Calgarians more than council pensions in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Ottawa combined. Let that sink in.

Mr. Speaker, not to single out our largest metropolitan cities too much, small municipal governments are not exempt from this trend. Of those with populations between 5,000 and 30,000 people such as the municipal districts of Taber, Greenview, and Blackfalds, some of them have the fastest growing labour costs. Small towns which saw their labour costs double are the villages of Edberg, Gadsby, and Loughheed. Between 2014 and 2018 Edberg's population declined from 163 people to 146. Gadsby saw an increase of 36 to 61 citizens but not quite double. Loughheed's population increased from 256 to 267, by 11 people.

It begs the question: does it make sense to see their labour costs double in those jurisdictions during that same period of time? Overall, in Alberta municipal government labour costs increased by nearly \$837 million, or 17 per cent, which outpaces the population growth of only 5.3 per cent and is still higher even when inflation is added in at its 7 per cent rate. Setting benchmarks tied to population growth would be one simple tool to protect every single Albertan taxpayer on an annual basis year over year for as long as they are adhered to. Aside from that, it is simply good governance, exemplifying transparency, accountability, and predictability.

Mr. Speaker, I bring forward this motion today in the spirit of Daniel Webster, who said, "The Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intention." I say that to recognize the typical cycle of human society. For example, the pioneers who first settled the land, started farms, worked mines, gathered at forts, and established towns quickly focused on building schools, town halls, libraries, and hospitals, requiring staff to be hired, first to do the work and then to administer the respective institutions.

It wasn't long before there was a need to see governance and planning for towns, industrial growth, regulations and bylaws for order, policing and jails, courthouses, offices to guide fair trade and security of goods, post offices, water treatment plants and waste depots, and the growth continues. People continue to come to developed areas. Hamlets become villages, villages become towns, towns become cities, and cities become metropolises. The public service continues to grow, providing social services; help for those with disabilities, mental health, and addictions; supportive housing; the provision and connection of utilities, water, waste water, garbage, and recycling; public transit; colleges and universities; and more. These are all very good things that are needed and, in fact, often demanded by the citizenry, but all services come at a cost to the ratepayer and the taxpayer. Not only do services cost more over time due to inflation, but that cost is further augmented due to the volume as the population increases.

5:20

But the most invisible of all is the growth of scope, things that used to be done privately that are now done publicly and paid for by the public purse. To more clearly define this, Mr. Speaker, I will remind you and my colleagues in the Chamber here today of the following. Schools of all kinds – from K to 12, colleges and universities, trade schools and vocational schools – were originally established and operated privately. Just watch *Anne of Green Gables* for a trip down memory lane in this respect. Nearly all hospitals were established and operated by churches and funded by donations, and wealthy philanthropists often built wings and units that bear their names. Libraries, banks, railroads, and even resource development are other examples of industries that began privately

that now, in whole or in part, have seen government or public agencies take a hand in administration.

Again, Mr. Speaker, all these things are very important, needed, and often demanded by the people. The arguments for consistency, access, affordability, transparency, and fairness are all valid. Due to time, relative comfort, and wealth, we see more and more of society expecting these things. My goal today is not to wage war on those ideals or have that debate but merely to warn of the dangers therein and, more specifically, to provide a comprehensive way of keeping that invisible exponential growth in check, to shine a light on the pitfalls of trying to, quote, unquote, keep up with the Joneses, or, more appropriately, to warn of the cost of small towns wanting to be mid-sized cities and mid-sized cities trying to be metro cities.

I take some wisdom from history, particularly from many of the founding fathers of the United States and the writers of their Constitution. Thomas Jefferson said:

A wise & frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, & shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government; & this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

In essence, good government must be restrained, held in check, and not allowed to grow without deep and careful consideration.

James Madison said it this way:

The powers of the federal government are enumerated; it can only operate in certain cases; it has legislative powers on defined and [united] objects, beyond which it cannot extend its jurisdiction.

The key words: “enumerated” and “defined,” which mean to establish the number of or to mention one by one, making these powers clear, defined, limited, beyond which it cannot extend its jurisdiction. It requires an incredible amount of self-discipline to exact that self-control and not extend the jurisdiction of government, the highest authority of the land. Depending on your beliefs, that may be debatable, but government is definitely the largest and most powerful. Therefore, it begs the question: who or what controls that apex predator unless it controls itself?

This principle is so important, so powerful, so invisible that those founding fathers and legendary leaders almost all spoke to it in one way or another. As Thomas Paine said: government is best which governs least.

I humbly ask all members in this Chamber to please support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Motion Other than Government Motion 507 are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the wonderful Member for Lethbridge-East, who brought forward this motion. I’m going to read it into the record again just because my folks may not be watching his feed.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

In layman’s terms on that, typically on project sites or in private industry we kind of look at that ratio, so management to services ratio. One of the other things that helps us drive that in the process of how many people you need to do things is looking at the physical processes themselves.

In a former life I used to go in as a consultant to a lot of organizations and look for efficiencies. One of the things that freaked a lot of people

out: when you go in as an outside person and you start lifting up the hood, so to speak, and looking at what their processes do and what the efficiencies are, typically they’re concerned that there are going to be layoffs. What I’ve found most times in that consideration is that it actually increases throughput. So when you start looking at efficiencies within the system or you have some type of metrics or something to guide by, typically those departments become more productive, and hence the throughput and the services increase.

Now, in the government context, some are rock stars; some aren’t. Like, it depends on which department. When I was a first-time candidate, I was actually down in Yuma, of all places, because we’ve got lots of snowbirds down there. I went down for an air show and ended up talking to a bunch of folks from my own constituency, ironically. One of the individuals there, Wendy, took me over – she grabbed another person that she knew that was from Edmonton. He was retired out of the Transportation department. He was around right during that time when Ralph Klein and everybody were looking at cutbacks. You know, regardless of history lessons or otherwise, essentially everything became so darned bloated at the time. The government couldn’t borrow cash; they had to have some drastic measures to look at cutbacks.

Now, this gentleman was recruited from an engineering company to come over to Transportation at the time. He gets there just as these cutbacks are taking place. He was divulging to me some of the context, that the department was very much upset. They were very concerned about how this was going to work. He said: quite frankly, after the first year of going through those changes, the attitudes increased; the workplace satisfaction went up. He said that the throughputs went just through the roof. They were doing more than less and very happy with it.

It’s counterintuitive. It may seem to some that when you don’t have so many people around, the morale actually goes up. Again, it’s job satisfaction, getting those throughputs, concentrating on which items. In governments at all levels I think it behooves us to not have some type of metric to tie the number of people we have with throughputs.

Now, the other thing is that I really like the concept of tying it to the population as kind of a starting point. But, again, depending on the services and the systems that each one of these departments is offering, it may be because it’s cumbersome till you get more people. Also, another thing: it’s counterintuitive. Because we have computers, sometimes it takes more people to do work where we were all sold on how it was supposed to be less labour intensive. So there has to be some tongue in cheek there.

What I am going to do is talk about some of the items that the member pointed out: 39 per cent of our tax dollars go to some level, way, shape, or form of government in this country. Thirty-nine per cent. So we’re pushing almost 40 per cent of our tax dollars going to pay for services that we may or may not tap into, that we may or may not have an input into, that we may or may not see in the first place, which is just wild.

The fact that the pension plans – and this one jumped right off the page. The pensions from Calgary – and I’ve got to find it here; it just blew me away. Edmonton, Vancouver, and Ottawa combined pale in comparison to the pensions paid out by Calgary for the public service. Like, folks in Calgary, if you’re listening to this, the pucker factor, for me, is pretty high in hearing about it. The fact that you guys are living the dream is another one. So you can see, when some of these things don’t have checks and balances in place, how that compounding tax effect just keeps taking place.

I do have some rock stars out in my area. I’m going to give some plugs out to the county of Parkland, the county of Lac Ste. Anne, the county of Sturgeon, the counties of Yellowhead and Westlock. I’m very fortunate to work with those folks. When I first started

talking about this, coming in as newly elected, Mr. Speaker, all fired up about our platform commitments, looking for efficiencies, red tape reductions, and all those things, they were already doing it. So before we even got here, those counties were already looking at efficiencies internally. The collaboration that they were looking at between them: when it comes to firefighting services, when they're looking at the Villeneuve landing network, as an example, they were utilizing their own business development groups between those organizations.

When they were looking at landing a manufacturing company, XCMG, that produces industrial equipment – they were competing between here and Texas and us – those groups came together utilizing their existing resources in an efficient manner to try to land these projects, to try to land these companies and organizations.

So those are the types of things that can happen when those departments are lean and mean and working on doing that.

The other thing that really pushed Parkland to be very efficient, I would hazard to say, was the premature phase-out of the coal mines. Again, you've heard me speak about that a few times, that they lost 25 per cent of their revenues on the front end because of that. So they needed to find innovative ways to make sure that they were turning over tax revenue, and they had to develop what assets they have. That meant building permits. That meant building out the Acheson industrial park to do that, and the way they had to do that was to get very lean and mean within their approval process. Unfortunately, when you look at processes, some of the impediments become personnel themselves. If they can't get on with the new program, then they have to go.

5:30

Now, the Alberta government itself: I would like to give credit to the Minister of Finance. He's in behind the scenes and through all the other ministries as well over the last few budgets. I heard the Member for Lethbridge-West – sorry. I'm trying not to laugh, but it does strike me as odd. The only reason, she felt, that we balanced the budget was that the price of oil went up. Well, I'm here to tell you that that isn't quite the case. Budgets don't balance themselves, and just because the price of oil, the old Texas tea, goes up doesn't make it all happen. In behind the scenes there were lots of efficiencies looked at through an attrition process, through all the hires that have taken place and not backfilling those positions, looking for efficiencies in your own backyard before you put more burden on the taxpayers to ask for more.

The other one that comes with that is that once you have some of these metrics tied into place, you can have incentive plans or incentive packages or performance metrics that people can now achieve, being these departments and organizations. If they can do more with less, they're happy about it. They actually start to achieve these goals. Once they understand what the rule of the game is, rather than building fiefdoms or having these convoluted processes, once they're efficient, everything starts to fall into place because now you're benefiting from an improved process. You're getting people to work together. You're also looking at the right culture to come into place. Sometimes it's very awkward to have someone from the outside come in and take a look at what you're doing but also to have those bookends and put it in place.

It's a sobering thought when we think that some of this has just happened and grown over the years. Again coming back to that engineer that was with – now he's retired at this point and packaged out down in Yuma. When he was talking about that department, he said: we did all these cuts, and everything took place. He says that, quite frankly, when he left, it had ballooned and popped right back up to that again. Again, there wasn't that need or that necessity, and it's not until sometimes we have a crisis, whether it's a cash crunch or anything else, that we have to look at these.

From the Member for Lethbridge-West for being one of the grown-ups in the room looking at – Lethbridge-East; I apologize. East, west: west is the best; east is the least, or the other way around in that case. From the Member for Lethbridge-East being the grown-up in the room and understanding that it's not the price of oil: it comes down to little steps that you can take along the place, and if you don't have performance metrics in place, then you're only rising to the lowest level of performance in the first place, and the easy thing is just to hire somebody else. Where you have that intestinal fortitude, have to look inwards at what you're doing with what you have and making sure that you're spending every taxpayer dollar as if it's your last to make sure that we don't have to rely on commodity prices – there isn't a Hail Mary – and doing prudent business practices in hiring and making sure that we're held to account: that's what we've got to do to get things forward.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'd like to close my remarks, and thank you very much to the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing this motion forward.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I'd like to stand briefly and lend my support to the private member's motion. I'll read it for the record as well.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, before I became a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I had the opportunity to serve as a tax lawyer in the city of Red Deer, and over the last couple of years – you know, I love the city that I live in. It's where I grew up and came back to raise my family and to start a business, and I wanted Red Deer to be the best community that it could possibly be. One of those things is that when I met with individuals and families in my community, they were concerned about the increase in their property tax rates. I started to do some investigations as a public service, and I formed with some other members in the community an organization called the Red Deer Taxpayers' Association. Actually, you can go online and look it up. It's in the public domain there.

One of the things that we measured is that over a period of a number of years we looked at and compared the combined rate of population and inflation growth and compared that to the operation expenses of the municipality. Just looking at the website, it's really interesting. I think it was mentioned that we talk about compounding impact and a municipality that spends above population and inflation growth every single year: it's quite extraordinary, actually, what that compounding impact can result in.

As it related to the city of Red Deer, just looking, there was a measurement done over a 15-year period where you had a combined population and inflation growth of about 72 per cent, and during that time operating expenses went up over 215 per cent. When you look at kind of the compounding impact, if you kind of compare, if they had just kept their spending in line with inflation and population growth versus what their actual spending is, you see this large area, this large growing difference from the compounding impact. In the city's case, over a 15-year period to 2018 that difference had compounded to over \$125 million in a year. It was almost double of what their budget had been had they just kept their spending in line with population growth. So over a 15-year period the compounding impact almost doubled, in fact, their operating

expenses versus if they had just kept it in line with population and inflation growth.

But one of the things that I think is really good about this as well is that it's not only important that we do the analysis to have that accountability, but it's just as important that we report it and let the public know the truth. In our communities we want to encourage all of the communities that we live in to be the best that we can be. Certainly, when we report and when we're accountable to the public in the communities that we live in on how we're doing, then that strengthens democracy. It changes culture. The more that the truth is known, the stronger culture you have in government.

With that, I really appreciate this wonderful motion, and I look forward to supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the call.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to briefly address this motion before us. You know, I come at it from both being a public servant in Calgary for eight years and then getting elected to city council for 15 years. In those times there certainly was – long-service employees would get a contribution at the end of their service to the city of Calgary, but that's changed. That has been eliminated, and I don't think the mover of the motion reflected that in what he was saying. He was talking about things that were in the past and done in the past in Calgary, and the way the new council is going forward is very much having set a time limit on that kind of contribution to long-service employees, people who had spent 25 years plus with the city of Calgary, and they were retiring and they did get a contribution. That is not what employees signing up today will be achieving, will be getting. So there is some old news in what the mover was talking about, and the new news is the city's actions going forward.

You know, I was just wondering about this establishing benchmarks for new hiring based on population and population growth. Mr. Speaker, that's how I understand municipalities, for the most part, look at hiring. They look at hiring as a lagging effect of their population growth. They look at hiring. They look at business processes first to see if they can address the service, perhaps, that citizens are asking for, and they, in a lagging way, will then go to build their staff complement up once their population or population percentage goes up.

5:40

It used to be said around the council table: constituents never ask for less service; they always ask for more service. That's the dilemma that many municipalities find themselves in. Constituents aren't happy with less garbage collection, less roadway work done; they want more. In many councils that I was a part of, the times didn't afford us to increase property taxes, so we had to do a lot more with less, or the workers had to do a lot more with less.

The other point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, just listening to the information that came from the mover, is that while being a city employee, I went through two or three organizational reviews where the management was tasked by the city government of the day to look at: is the city in the right business? I was in the community and social services area: is the city in the business properly of addressing the needs of citizens, and can we change it? We very much got changed a couple of times from doing direct counselling work with constituents who would be either referred or come to our doors to doing community development work, not individual work but group work. Then the city moved out of daycare, child care services to just kind of monitoring or regulating child care services.

So the entire time of my entire profession of being both a city employee as well as on the governance of city council, I knew the municipality to be involved with and active in always deciding the kind of work it should be doing on behalf of the citizens. I knew it to hire in a lagging way, where if the population grew, then down the road the number of employees for the city would grow.

The other thing I guess I wonder is: where will the benchmarks, how will the benchmarks be established? Will they be truly benchmarks amongst peers – I'm talking about other governments, other municipalities, other departments, and other public agencies – or will they be benchmarks between apples and oranges? Like, that wasn't really made clear by the mover.

The last thing I guess I'll just say is that, you know, this government has done, in my estimation and the estimation of probably many people in Alberta, many things to increase the size of government in ways that didn't benefit the population in Alberta. For instance, the whole war room grew – I don't know – maybe 15 to 20 people that are either government or they're an agency of government, and I don't see the value for money there, Mr. Speaker. So this government has done many things to increase the size of the public service in ways that have provided no value, in my estimation and the estimation of many Albertans who are critical of the work of the war room and other places.

I will sit down and listen to the rest of the debate, Mr. Speaker, but just wanted to get on the record that municipalities, for one, have done a lot of this work already. I'm not aware that the mover has spoken to any of the municipal agencies, whether it's RMA or Alberta Municipalities, to share what their views are, in fact, of the motion he's bringing forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Of course, our caucus supports this motion, but the remarks we heard earlier completely skipped over the departments and public agencies and went straight to attacking municipalities, which are also independent bodies duly elected by their constituents and should have every right to manage their affairs as they see fit, and the data that was used also was not up to date with respect to municipalities.

When we talk about the government departments and public agencies – like, for instance, we can look at an example from Education. We can look at Alberta Health Services. One thing for sure that we do firmly believe is that we do need a strong public service. There is a strong role for public service, and we think that services that government provides, government departments provide, government agencies provide should keep up with population growth and inflation, those kind of parameters. Instead of, I guess, poking at and talking about what municipalities do, government should look at their departments first. They should mind their business first.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

For instance, Alberta's student population has grown every year. There are more kids in the classroom than there were in 2019, than there were in 2020. Instead of adding more teachers, instead of taking into account population growth, that this motion says that government should, what we see in the government budget, in their own documents,

is that there are 954 fewer teachers in our classrooms now. There are more students in our classroom, and instead of keeping pace with the student population growth, government is slashing teachers. It's slashing public service from that school system, exactly the opposite of what this motion is asking government to do. Those are facts coming from their own budget documents, that they have fewer teachers now.

That only happened because the government was pushing through its ideological agenda of cutting public services, slashing services, so that they can give corporate handouts to the wealthiest in this country. On one hand corporations got \$4.7 billion dollars from this government, but education is seeing a cut. We're seeing a cut even to, like, supports for individuals with disabilities. They deindexed AISH. They also changed the schedule for supplemental benefits. They're denying those benefits as well. They didn't do anything to make sure that our education system keeps pace with the growing number of students. So, certainly, this is a good motion, and government should look into what they did to education.

5:50

The second thing with respect to education: early on in the pandemic the government fired 20,000 staff from the Education department via a tweet. Those were education assistants. Those were people who were making sure that students who are coming through our education system have the supports that they need. Twenty thousand staff from the education system, and over the same period we saw an increase in the growth of our student population.

Similarly, when we take the example of health care, the government may say whatever they choose to about spending more on health care, but every day what we are hearing is that because of this government's mismanagement our health system is not keeping pace with the population growth. We are seeing ER rooms getting shut down every day. We are seeing services cut every day. Government certainly didn't care when they were slashing the health budget, when they went to war with doctors. They didn't make sure that services that government is providing keep pace with the growing population needs. The record that we have so far is that this government did not make sure that our services keep pace with the population growth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

On top, the motion talks about some kind of transparent benchmark. This is the government that has not shared a thing about a \$120 million entity known as the war room and exempted that entity from FOIP. What kind of benchmark is the Member for Lethbridge-East talking about? I would be interested in knowing: why doesn't he support some kind of benchmark for the war room that's spending \$30 million every day? We don't know how many employees they have. We don't know what kind of budget they have. We don't know where they are spending money. We don't know who they are contracting out their advertisement to. We don't know where they steal their logos and how much they pay for that. I hope that member will agree with me that we need some kind of benchmark there as well.

We have Invest Alberta. Up until last week that was not FOIPable. That's a government agency. No wonder that this government got an award from the Association of Journalists, a code of silence award in secrecy. That's the record of this government.

So they can bring forward this feel-good motion, but their actions are completely opposite of what this motion is saying. We will certainly support it, and should we become government, we will make sure that the public service keeps pace with the population growth and inflation. We will make sure that there is a benchmark and that entities like the war room are not exempt from FOIP and other laws that make such entities transparent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with just a few short minutes left in our debate this afternoon. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 507, brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East, and I just wanted to thank the member for his diligence and his work in general as an MLA and certainly on this motion. I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank the members of the public service that I have had the pleasure of working with in my time in office. I've had many, including members of the Legislative Assembly offices, that you would be well aware of, Mr. Speaker, and also municipal leaders across the province. We seem to have sort of focused the discussion today on municipalities, but I don't think that was the intent of the motion. It was broader in focus than that.

However, since we've talked about it – and I've heard members opposite thank the member and suggest that they would support the motion, which is great to hear, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank the municipal leaders across Alberta that I've had the pleasure of knowing and working with and particularly – and I don't want to play favourites here, because I am a rural MLA – the rural municipal leaders that I've had the pleasure of meeting, because many of them have the practice of doing more with less for the duration of their careers because of where they live. It's just a fact of their geography. I just wanted to thank them for their creativity, for their ideas, for their ability to do more with less, for their commitment to do so, and for their commitment to rightsizing government on behalf of Alberta taxpayers, which I think goes to the heart of this motion.

I wanted to talk a little bit about this. I realize that my time is very brief, but I thought I would start with a quote from our friend Benjamin Franklin, his famous words in a letter that he penned to – and I'm going to probably say this name wrong – Jean-Baptiste Le Roy. I'm assuming it's a French name, but anyway we'll see how that goes. It was penned in 1789, which was shocking for me to read. And the famous words are: in this world nothing can be said to be certain except for death and taxes. Sadly, those words remain true to this very day. I think the heart of this motion is really about limiting the tax burden to the people, and I would fully support the intent of that in any opportunity that I would have to do so.

There are so many things that I could talk about. One of the things I believe the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, you know: are we going to compare apples to apples? Well, with respect to municipal governments, which is what he was talking about, this government did put together a tool that municipal leaders can use. I apologize, Mr. Speaker; I can't remember the proper title. It became coined as the municipal report card and that stuck in my brain, so I can't think of what it actually is called, but it provides municipal leaders right across Alberta the opportunity to go onto the site, that's populated every year by Alberta's public service, and provide them with the ability to compare and benchmark themselves against municipalities of similar size.

It's really important, the apples-to-apples conversation, because built into that software, built into that system are flags. For example, if I was a municipal leader in Grande Prairie, the amazing, wonderful constituency and city of Grande Prairie, and I wanted to compare my budgets and my staffing levels to that of Calgary, the system would flag me that this is not a great comparator because of the differential in size. I think that there are already tools in place that have been put in place by this government to allow municipal leaders to benchmark themselves. This is just another way to look at this.

I believe that any time you want to create great public policy, there should be guardrails in place. I can say as a former member

of Executive Council that one of the things that's challenging are the silos that exist in government. So to have an overarching motion that says that we're going to look at the public service as a whole instead of just the pieces, I think, is really valuable and important.

I can also say that there are times when things bloat because technology shifts but the organizations don't shift in response, and some positions do become unnecessary or redundant. That's just a reality in any organization. When that happens, if there's no way to benchmark ourselves, if there's no guardrail in place, if there's no anchor to look at that, that will remain unchecked. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to the taxpayers to ensure that we're doing the very best with the dollars that we take from them and also to ensure that we take the fewest dollars possible from them to provide the best service.

That goes back to my time in rural Alberta with those municipal leaders there, who I believe really understand that concept and

really work diligently to make sure that that happens. I think we could learn a lot of lessons from rural Alberta. I probably sound a little bit biased.

I think I have about one or two minutes left. I just wanted to talk a little bit about the situation when there is a bloated labour pool. There are a number of inefficiencies that are inherent culturally in a bloated labour pool. Other members of this Assembly have spoken about that this afternoon. I know that the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland spoke about that from his industrial experience, and I can speak about that from my time in restaurant.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time for debate has now passed, and pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	1201
Introduction of Guests	1201
Members' Statements	
Gasoline Prices	1201
Children's Health Care	1201
Economic Recovery and Women	1201
Health Care System	1202
Camrose County Fire Services Safety Training.....	1202
Government Record.....	1202, 1203
Exercise Maple Resolve 2022 at CFB Wainwright	1203
Premier's Leadership.....	1211
Oral Question Period	
Children's Health Care	1203
Utility Rebate Timeline	1204
Diabetes Treatment Coverage.....	1204
Alberta School Councils' Association.....	1205
Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project	1206
Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase.....	1206
Gasoline Prices	1207
Lobbyists Act	1207
Live Events Industry Support	1208
South Edmonton Hospital Construction Funding	1208
Oil and Gas Export	1209
Antiracism Initiatives in Education	1209
Legal Aid Alberta Contract	1210
Utility Costs and Rebates	1210
Tabling Returns and Reports	1211
Tablings to the Clerk	1211
Orders of the Day	1211
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 202 Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.....	1211
Bill 205 Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022	1213
Division	1226
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Public Service.....	1227

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