



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 11, 2022

Day 33

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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

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

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

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

Executive Council

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

Parliamentary Secretaries

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

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are a number of guests joining us today. When I call your name, please feel free to rise. Joining us in the galleries is Katie Cook, a volunteer from the constituency of Calgary-Shaw and a guest of the Minister of Children's Services. [some applause] We'll go till the end if we can. I appreciate your enthusiasm, and so does Ms Cook.

Also seated in the gallery are Ruth Eeles and Zachary Eeles, guests of the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. From conversation with Zach I am certain he will have your job in just a few short years.

Also joining us are five guests of the Associate Minister of Status of Women. They are here for the Women's Health Coalition, in recognition of Women's Health Week.

Finally, we have a group joining us in the gallery from Friends of Medicare. They are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

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

Members' Statements

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

Security Infrastructure Program

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to racism and hatred in Alberta, our UCP government has been very clear. We have absolutely zero tolerance for intolerance. Not just words; we have acted quickly to address rising instances of hate-motivated violence and vandalism in our communities. As part of our effort, last November we introduced the Alberta security infrastructure program, aimed at helping to protect faith-based facilities, groups, and organizations from hate-motivated attacks and racism. These grants were used to purchase security infrastructure and equipment and to provide valuable training and education. More than \$1.2 million was provided to more than a hundred faith-based organizations.

Given the strong demand we are more than doubling funding, from \$2 million to \$5 million, for this, and we can say that we stand beside all those affected by these monstrous crimes. Despite the success and popularity of this program, we knew more needed to be done. Today we are also expanding this program so that faith-based groups and organizations can be reimbursed for security upgrades made since June 1, 2021, several months before this important program was first announced. We are also removing application period deadlines to make it easier for organizations to apply for support. As a result, the \$5 million grant program for 2022-23 is now open for the entire year.

Mr. Speaker, this program is making a real impact for faith-based groups and communities who, unfortunately, may find themselves the target of violence and vandalism. We have seen Catholic churches burned down, mosques and gurdwaras vandalized with spray paint, and now we're taking a stand, side by side with our

faith leaders and communities, against this. There is no home for hatred or violence in Alberta today, and we are making that clear.

Thank you.

Bereavement Leave for Pregnancy Loss

Member Irwin: Alberta's NDP will always be a force for compassion, inclusivity, and protection of workers' rights. We have continued this fight in so many ways, including the recognition of grief, anxiety, and other responses that may surround pregnancy loss and the need for bereavement leave to be inclusive. All forms of pregnancy loss must be supported, including abortion and termination for medical reasons.

At first the UCP chose to discriminate in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss a person may experience. This did a serious injustice to folks who need compassion. We must leave no room for interpretation, and now, due to the pressure placed on this government by the NDP, stakeholders, community activists, and folks all across this province, any pregnancy that does not result in a live birth will be covered. This includes abortion and termination for medical reasons. This is a win for all Albertans.

We will always defend reproductive rights, and we've ensured that this government cannot get away with discriminating against anyone who has had an abortion and is seeking protected leave. We have guaranteed that people making the choice to terminate a pregnancy will be supported. I'm so proud of my caucus colleagues and of all those who support reproductive rights in successfully forcing the UCP to acknowledge abortion.

Alberta's NDP: we will defend reproductive rights. We will always fight this government to be inclusive and compassionate even as they've shown their unwillingness. We know that without much public pressure we cannot trust the UCP to uphold Albertans' right to health care and to safe work environments. An NDP government will move forward with the important work of making reproductive rights a priority, strengthening public health care, all while supporting workers and building a better province for all.

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

Alberta Junior Hockey League 2022 Championship

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with news, great news, in fact. In a stunning victory over my Spruce Grove Saints, the Brooks Bandits became Alberta Junior Hockey League champions for the sixth time, capturing the Inter Pipeline Cup. After a first-round bye and sweeping the Canmore Eagles, this win was well deserved. With 2,200 fans packed into the Centennial Regional Arena, Brooks Bandits forward Ryan McAllister was awarded the Alberta Junior Hockey League most valuable player and top scorer award.

But, Mr. Speaker, the good news just doesn't stop there. Bandits coach and general manager Ryan Papaioannou also has been nominated for the Canadian Junior Hockey League coaching award. In the end, my beloved Spruce Grove Saints tried their hardest but struggled to come out on top, and I applaud their efforts and congratulate them on a hard-fought season. The Bandits are a tough team, the best, in fact, so this loss was not in vain but represented a valiant effort.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's time to address the elephant in the Chamber. You might be wondering why I stand before you today wearing this stunningly beautiful Brooks Bandits jersey. I do so reluctantly; however, I must make good on a bet to my wonderful, intelligent colleague from Brooks-Medicine Hat, who's the bestest, super-duper MLA in the history of Alberta, and let me just say that

Brooks-Medicine Hat is truly the greatest constituency in the province. From its vast agricultural landscapes to its abundance of natural resources and the hard-working people, any Albertan would be lucky to live, work, and raise a family there. Did I not say also that they have the best MLA?

Throughout this experience, Mr. Speaker, I have learned my lesson the hard way. Never again will I bet against the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat or the Brooks Bandits, at least for a year. The Brooks Bandits are truly the greatest hockey team in the AJHL this season, and I hope all Albertans will join me as we cheer them on as they fight for the Centennial Cup in Estevan, Saskatchewan. Go, Bandits, go!

Thank you.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Hoffman: Alberta's current Premier is the least trusted Premier in Canada, and in case there was any question as to why Alberta's 18th Premier holds this unique distinction, let me share a couple of examples. The grassroots guarantee, the health care guarantee: both were clearly not worth the paper they were written on. The grassroots were told by the Premier that, despite what they think, he holds the pen. Public health care in Alberta is under attack because the UCP started a war with doctors and other health professionals during a pandemic.

Need some more examples? The Premier called for Albertans to take personal responsibility to follow the rules that he set, but then he had a boozy party with his favourite ministers on the roof of the sky palace, breaking those rules. The Premier says that he believes in the rule of law, but then he fires the commissioner investigating his leadership race. The Premier used to rail and rage in Ottawa about using inflation to hike personal income tax, but then he comes to Edmonton, and he changed the law so that he could tax inflation, taking a billion dollars away from Alberta families. The Premier talks about affordability, but then he lifts the cap on utilities. He promised rebates in March, but Albertans are still waiting. The Premier promised to be a servant leader, but he never told Albertans that that meant he'd be a servant to insurance lobbyists, who wanted him to lift the insurance cap and make driving a car unaffordable for many Alberta families.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Ever since the Premier climbed down from his blue truck, he's been making promises to Albertans, promises that he repeatedly breaks. Albertans need a leader and a Premier that they can trust, someone that they can rely on to stand up for their best interests and to put them first. Good news, Mr. Speaker. She's running to be your Premier in the next election. The leader of Alberta's NDP cares about you, and you can trust her to stand up for your family, for public health care and public education, to make your life more affordable, to create a diversified economy, and to keep your family as her top priority.

1:40 Lemonade Day in Northern Alberta

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment and talk about something most people like and some people have likely sold, lemonade. Specifically, I'd like to talk about the northern Alberta Lemonade Day, happening on June 18. Lemonade Day is a free and fun experiential learning program that teaches youth how to start, own, and operate their own business. Children from prekindergarten to high school learn to set goals, develop a business plan, establish a budget, seek investors, provide customer service, save for the future, and give back to the community. The main

objective of Lemonade Day is to empower youth to take ownership of their lives and become productive members of society. Along the way kids acquire skills in goal setting and problem solving, and they gain self-esteem while having fun and being creative.

Community Futures, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building an economically diverse future in our region, plans the entire process and co-ordinates multiple tasting events across northern Alberta leading up to the big day. Although the program contributes to growing kids' entrepreneurial spirit, it also focuses on giving back to the community. The program encourages the kids to spend some, save some, and share some of their profits. In 2019 the kids donated over \$9,000 to local charities of their choosing; in 2021 they donated over \$7,000. Mr. Speaker, education goes beyond the classroom, and programs like these teach our kids soft and transferable skills they will need and undoubtedly use later on.

Last year I drove across my constituency to support as many Lemonade Day entrepreneurs as I could. The day was hard on the bladder but good for the soul. Aside from being a great community activity, Lemonade Day helps youth become the business leaders, social advocates, community volunteers, and forward-thinking citizens of tomorrow, so on June 18 across northern Alberta I encourage all MLAs, all community members to get out and support the future leaders in our communities through this great initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Norma Vidal

Member Loyola: Last week the Chilean community in Alberta lost a truly dedicated community member, I would say a remarkable icon for peace and human rights. Known affectionately by many in my generation as Tia Norma, Norma Vidal was a phenomenal community organizer that participated in a number of groups, but her most notable accomplishment was that she was a truly amazing artist.

Norma came to Edmonton in 1975 as a result of the September 11, 1973, military coup in Chile. Soon after her arrival she helped to settle other refugees that were arriving for the same reason as her. In the first few years she dedicated herself to putting together an acting group for children so that they could have an outlet for expressing themselves and learn important skills of reading and reciting as well as acting. Norma also participated in folkloric music groups like the very well-known Tupac Amaru, that would share the cultural sounds and music that accompanied the human rights movement, also known as the new Chilean song.

In her later years Norma was also a pillar of the Latin-American women's association known as Amigas, through which she brought several cultural artists to Edmonton and to Alberta. Norma not only loved to act and sing, but she also enjoyed painting, drawing, and making sculptures out of stone. She illustrated a number of books and later in life also began to write her own, the latest one called *A Cocktail Party*.

Tia Norma, you will be missed, your strong and determined voice, that I remember inspired me to possess a plurality of thought and to never give up on our ideals as a community. Her voice and what she taught me will always accompany me. The whole community has lost an icon. Tia Norma, we love you, and may you always rest in power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Integrated Emergency Medical and Fire Services

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Alberta fire chiefs have been promoting an integrated emergency response model. They are educating elected officials as to the benefits of returning emergency medical services to urban municipalities as they recognize the challenges that EMS is facing today. Prior to 2008 municipalities employed an integrated model of EMS and fire services where the rescuers were trained as both paramedics skilled in advanced life support as well as firefighters skilled in hazard suppression and rescue. This gave municipalities an agile system that ensured the people responding could manage virtually any emergency.

Integrated ambulance crews inherently work with the fire crews supporting them. Not only was there a large team focused on patient treatment, but they're available to supplement EMS response. Whether they jumped on the backup ambulance or responded on a medically equipped fire truck, there was always someone available to respond to the call. This diversity within the job contributed to increased job satisfaction as it kept members mentally engaged and reduced the monotony of the job. The cost savings aren't just because you're paying one person to do two jobs, but the integrated model eliminates the need to have separate stations. There is no need to have EMS stations when you have established fire halls everywhere. The end result is over 30 per cent in savings for the taxpayer.

Ultimately, municipalities gave up EMS in 2008 because AHS offered to take over this budget item, collectively saving municipalities over \$300 million. In 2009 the EMS budget was \$329 million. Today the budget is over half a billion dollars.

Despite this infusion of money over the last decade-plus, our wait times for ambulances have increased. Code reds continue secretly as AHS stopped publicly reporting them, and rural ambulances are commonly pulled from their communities to serve in our largest urban centres. Sick time, low morale, and burnout of paramedics is inherent in this current system.

The integrated model appears to be a more cost-effective system with better employee working conditions, ultimately providing more holistic service to Albertans. This government needs to reconsider re-evaluating this integrated model of emergency response for the health and safety of Albertans.

Provincial Support for Edmonton

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton needs a partner. That was the thrust of the mayor's state-of-the-city address this week calling out the UCP for their failure to invest in and support Alberta's capital city. His Worship told those in attendance that this UCP government has made Edmonton feel as if they don't matter and called on them to work with them and, most importantly, stop holding Edmonton's economy back.

Rather than addressing these real concerns, the UCP's Minister of Municipal Affairs instead complained that Edmonton doesn't praise his government enough. It's unfortunate, but it's clear as day that the words of the mayor were lost on the UCP, and sadly it seems this government does not value or respect the contributions or the residents of Alberta's second-largest city.

That's certainly what I'm hearing from many of my constituents, neighbours, and friends. Here in the heart of our city one of the biggest challenges remains how many of our neighbours are living houseless. Over the last two years their numbers have doubled and are expected to keep growing, about 2,800 people with no permanent home.

Yet for three consecutive budgets the UCP government has repeatedly refused to partner with the city of Edmonton and the government of Canada to invest in supportive housing. With federal support consecutive councils have invested millions to build 210 new units of supportive housing and over 300 more in converted hotels. Not one dollar from this government.

This despite the fact that, as Mayor Sohi noted, tackling houselessness, mental health, addictions, and trauma is a provincial responsibility and that providing these Albertans in need with the dignity of a home, with wraparound supports will save millions in costs in health care, social services, and the justice system. That benefits us all. Instead, this government broke their promise to ensure that benefits for those with the least would rise with inflation. They attack and undermine supports for harm reduction, increasing pressure on police, hospitals, and paramedics.

Edmonton deserves better, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, housed and unhoused, deserve better. They need a partner. Edmonton is looking for a government that will work with them, and the Alberta NDP is ready to step up and be that partner.

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

Hemp Industry Development

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's low-tax, pro-business policies have positioned our province to be a global magnet for investment and innovation. Through our government's policies we are supporting economic diversification in our agriculture sector by investing in projects that will create new value-added hemp products.

In partnership with the federal government, through the emerging opportunities program, Alberta has awarded two grants totalling \$900,000 to help grow the province's hemp industry. Inca Renewtech, a globally recognized hemp manufacturing company, will receive a grant of up to \$400,000 to help fund the building of its new \$72 million hemp processing facility in Vegreville. And Blue Sky Hemp Ventures, a global leader in hemp whole plant utilization, will receive a grant of \$500,000 to advance a proposed \$75 million hemp food processing plant in Alberta.

This investment will increase demand for Alberta-grown hemp while supporting new manufacturing and processing jobs for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the Inca Renewtech investment is great news for my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. The state-of-the-art, 200,000 square foot fibre processing and composites manufacturing facility is expected to be operational in early 2024 and create 70 jobs, scaling up to about a hundred jobs by 2026. This facility will also create demand for 45,000 tonnes of hemp biomass per year, adding \$270 million in additional farm income over 25 years. This is a project that I was pleased to advocate for, and I'm thrilled that they have chosen my riding to build in.

I want to thank the minister and all my colleagues who played a role in bringing this important investment to fruition. These investments will no doubt bring new jobs to our communities and help continue to grow Alberta's economic prosperity. Our government's economic recovery plan is second to none, and this is just another example of its success. The project is a win for Alberta's clean tech sector, rural job creation, economic diversification, and my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when Albertans call 911 in an emergency, they expect the ambulance is on the way, but across the province we're seeing ambulances lined up outside of hospitals and a high volume of deep red alerts, when there are no ambulances available to respond. According to new data from AHS response times to life-threatening calls are climbing. The worst ones are now over 17 minutes, well over target, the longest wait on record, in fact, since AHS first started collecting this data. This is life and death. What is the Premier doing right now to reverse this trend he started?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Every province is seeing this kind of pressure. It's normal after two years of a pandemic. In fact, AHS has 230 more paramedics working today than they did two years ago. Budget 2022 has increased an additional \$64 million to help ease the system pressures and make sure that EMS are more responsive to their communities. Again, this is something we're seeing not just in Alberta but right across Canada.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, those new positions are casual, not full-time. A big difference, and the acting Minister of Health should know it.

Now, part of the problem is that crews are getting stuck in Calgary and Edmonton for longer. In Calgary 10 per cent of ambulances are at the ER for as long as two hours and 45 minutes, over an hour longer than AHS's own target, and the worst measure, again, since they started collecting this data. This risks Albertans' health and increases pressure on already stressed EMS crews. To the Premier: is almost three hours stuck in the ER an acceptable time to him? And if not, what's he going to do to fix it?

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

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We understand that there are pressures, but again I am reiterating the fact that we are taking steps to increase capacity. There's \$28 million for additional ground crew, ambulances, and crews in addition to sustaining funding for helicopter air ambulance service such as STARS, HALO, and HERO; \$22 million for increasing capacity in priority projects, including extension of ground ambulance contracts, supporting integrated operation centres, and interfacility transport; and an additional \$14 million for the hours of work initiative and addressing crew fatigue. All of these are helping.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if they are happening, they're not working, because these are the worst numbers ever, and they are going up.

I hear from EMS professionals every day, and they tell me they're burned out and frustrated with the incompetence of this UCP government. Today HSAA president Mike Parker called for paramedics to have three things done: one, do more to get paramedics off shift on time; two, go back to supporting safe-consumption sites and lowering overdoses; and, three, stop with casual contracts, all the casual contracts. Will the Premier commit today to acting on these reasonable, immediate, short-term, practical recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has also developed a 10-point tactical plan to address the pressures. Actions

currently under way are making real progress, starting with more ambulances on the streets in the coming months; five each in Calgary and Edmonton each year for the next two years, for a total of 20 new ambulances. Also, we have stood up the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, co-chaired by MLAs within this House, to work with stakeholders from across the EMS system and bring forward recommendations. We are expecting an interim report shortly.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, every day this Premier, this government stands up, tries to take a victory lap on health care, but here's what Albertans are seeing: in Red Deer 14 ambulances backed up in the hospital parking lot waiting to get to the ER, in Whitecourt the cancellation of obstetrics for expecting parents going on two years running, in Edmonton dangerously long wait times for children at the Stollery, and in Calgary parents lined up outside to even get their kids a seat in the waiting room at the Alberta Children's hospital. To the Premier: is this what you mean when you say Alberta is back? Back to paying for the chaos of Conservative mismanagement in health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Red Deer-North I'm extremely happy that our government is finally dealing with the issue of capacity within Red Deer. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite made a lot of empty promises. Zero – zero – work on any of those empty promises. We're adding \$1.8 billion to expand the Red Deer hospital so we have capacity to deal with not only EMS problems but also with surgical problems in Red Deer.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, what they're adding are ambulances lined up outside the hospital, parents lined up outside the hospital, because this government has crashed the health care system. The pressure on this system, on emergency rooms is called access block. It's a sign of this government's failure. Most obviously, the lack of family doctors: in Lethbridge, 30,000 with no family doctor; Bow Valley, not a single doctor accepting new patients. Registration shows 140 fewer doctors in Alberta last year that left here. Why doesn't this Premier understand that their actions are blocking more Albertans from getting health care in their communities, and that is crashing our system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll remind the members opposite: four years they did nothing for Red Deer. Zero. Zero. That's one of the reasons I ran, so that we would actually address the problems in Red Deer, and we're going to; \$1.8 billion is going to go a long way to address those issues. As far as Lethbridge is concerned, there are 14 active family medicine positions being advertised as we speak; 11 applicants have committed to the community and are awaiting their CPSA assessment. That means that there will be 11 new people coming to Lethbridge.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, did that minister run on driving doctors away from the Red Deer regional hospital? Because that's

what her government has done. Indeed, this government talks a big game, but in reality they've pushed doctors, paramedics, health care workers to the brink, crisis getting worse every day, and Albertans are tired of their excuses. Packed ERs, kids waiting outside, ambulances lined up around the block, random closures at rural hospitals, fewer doctors, longer wait times, and this government's priority on health care is to take insulin pumps away from kids. What's the excuse?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question from the members opposite, but here's the reality. COVID-19 revealed a wholly inadequate capacity in our health care system, capacity we inherited from the members opposite. We're dealing with it; \$1.8 billion in hospital refurbishing, a new hospital in Red Deer, \$1.8 billion added to Health's budget over the next three years to expand capacity to better serve Albertans.

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

Provincial Support for Edmonton

Member Ceci: "Edmonton deserves a fair deal. [Please] work with us. We are your capital city. We make outsized contributions. Please stop holding Edmonton's economy back." Those are the words of Edmonton mayor Amarjeet Sohi yesterday as he implored this UCP government to stop punishing the capital region, to stop stifling innovation, to stop behaving like the Edmonton region doesn't matter. Truer words have never been said. To the Premier: why does this government have such disrespect for Edmonton? Why is this government holding Edmonton's economy back? The mayor wants to know.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this government from day one has made sure that we focus on attracting jobs, attracting innovation, as well as attracting investment to this province. I want to know as well. Edmonton for the first time in its history – first time in its history – is in the top 50 in North America for innovation and technology. That happened under this government, not the NDP, otherwise known as the no-development party.

Member Ceci: The UCP ripped up the big-city charters. Let me quote Mayor Sohi again as he spoke to over 1,000 business leaders and community leaders yesterday at an event hosted at the Calgary Chamber. "Too often we are made to feel [like] Edmonton does not matter to the province. Please stop holding Edmonton's economy back." To the Premier. The Minister of Municipal Affairs attacked the mayor. Business leaders in the capital region disagree. They applauded the mayor. They have Edmonton's back. Why does this government treat Edmonton and the entire capital region economy with such disrespect?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's ridiculous. The reality is that we inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. We inherited a government that was spending increases of over 4 per cent per year. Instead of a \$500 million budgeted surplus, we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Order. The hon. minister has the opportunity to answer the question. I should be able to hear him.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, bottom line: we're bringing fiscal responsibility and sustainability to this province. On top of that, we're continuing to invest in Edmonton. Key investments: \$588 million in LRT projects, \$371 million assigned for the new Edmonton hospital, \$142 million . . .

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. You know, if there's one truism of this government, it's just that they don't listen. Over 1,000 business and community leaders applauded the message delivered by the mayor yesterday. All we hear are the same deflections, the same denials. Is it this Premier's message to Edmonton's business leaders that they don't understand what's going on in their backyard? Or can this Premier explain why the UCP is holding the economy back? A thousand people stood and applauded the mayor and the message. What do you have to say?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, what we have to say to people across Alberta is that we have their backs. The unemployment rate in the province of Alberta today: 5.9 per cent, something Alberta never – let me say that again: never – experienced under the NDP, not once. This government is focused on job creation, creating the best possible business environment. The business community in Edmonton can rest assured that Alberta is back. We've got the best business community, the best environment in the entire country.

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

Dene Tha' First Nation Flooding

Mr. Feehan: It is estimated that 1,100 people have been forced to evacuate from their homes in the Dene Tha' First Nation because of rising flood waters caused by heavy rain and melting snow. As of yesterday morning over 600 evacuees had been registered in High Level. Robby Didzena is a 19-year-old who stayed behind with volunteers to work to protect homes from flood damage. He told the media, quote: we are losing our homes to water, to Mother Nature; she's beating us. End quote. Can the Premier provide an update on the flooding situation and what supports are available right now to those who are forced to evacuate?

The Speaker: Correction: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member opposite for a very important question. Rainfall and snowmelt are creating flooding conditions in northwestern Alberta. I can tell you that Alberta's emergency management is in constant contact with the community. Transportation is also on the scene. The member is correct that an evacuation order has been issued for the residents of the Dene Tha' First Nation. Around 940 people have been affected by the flooding, and approximately 676 evacuees have been registered in High Level. Flood protection barriers are being set up around housing in the community, and Beaver First Nation is providing additional aid.

Mr. Feehan: Evacuees have been registered in High Level and other communities like La Crête and Rainbow Lake. For those who were forced to evacuate from the community, I can only imagine the pain, stress, and anxiety they are feeling as they wait to see when they will return home and what might need to be rebuilt after this devastating flood. Alberta needs to be there for them now and into

the future to ensure that they are supported in every way they can be. Can the Premier please tell me what he is doing to ensure that everyone forced to evacuate their homes has access to mental health or medical support needed now and in the future? Please be specific. The people need this.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do know that this is a difficult time for residents of the area. Our thoughts are, of course, with them as the flooding situation in the north is causing a tremendous impact on local highways. The water level is fluctuating, of course, due to snowmelt, but I can tell you that we are watching the situation closely, and we are there to support these residents in this community. In addition, there is also a First Nations field officer on-site assisting the emergency management team. As the member opposite likely knows, a state of local emergency has been issued due to localized flooding.

Mr. Feehan: It would be really nice if you built a berm or changed the road into the town. I spoke with the chief of the Dene Tha' First Nation this week to offer him the support of this caucus in the midst of this devastating crisis. While this community has faced flooding in the past, what is seen today is far and away worse than anything previously experienced. This likely means that the work and resources needed to rebuild and recover will be far and away larger than historically needed. Can the Premier please advise the House what specific actions his government will take to help the community prevent future natural disasters such as these?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in my first response, flood protection barriers, tiger dams are being set up around housing in the community, and Beaver First Nation is providing additional aid. We are doing everything possible to ensure people can evacuate or use the roads in a safe and timely manner. Alberta Transportation has crews on the ground working around the clock to make sure the roads are passable. Repairs are under way, and as waters levels recede, more detailed repairs such as culvert replacements will begin. Motorists in the local area should expect delays, can check 511 for the latest traffic information as well, but we are there to support them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

Federal Impact Assessment Act Court Ruling

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Trudeau Liberals were taught a lesson by Alberta's Court of Appeal in our fight to stand up to Justin Trudeau's quest for absolute control over Albertans and Alberta's resources. And the NDP, who called Alberta the embarrassing cousin within Canada while they were in office, all the while handing Trudeau more and more control over Albertans and their resources while in office, in typical fashion remain silent on this issue. To the minister of environment: how has Alberta's UCP government been fighting back the relentless assaults by the Trudeau-NDP alliance on Albertans and this province?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, this government took the Trudeau Liberals to court and won yesterday an important case that made it clear that the Trojan Horse that the Trudeau Liberals have tried to

use to block our constitutional right to be able to develop our resources could not stand. Unfortunately, the Official Opposition, the NDP, both when they were government and in opposition, has chosen to stand with Trudeau as they try to block the birthright of Albertans. But, rest assured, this government will never let that happen.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that yesterday's court ruling was unequivocal – the highest court in Alberta called it “a classic example of legislative creep” and an “existential threat . . . to the division of powers guaranteed by [the] Constitution” – and given that this Trojan Horse legislation was an attack on Alberta's jurisdiction and our right to self-govern, can the Minister of Energy tell this House why the denial of the Trudeau government's no-more-pipelines bill is such excellent news for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right; this is excellent news. Alberta has a long and proud history of fighting for our right to develop our resources. In the 1970s Pierre Elliott Trudeau tried to take control of our natural resources. At that time it was to take our wealth. Well, Peter Lougheed fought him and won. Forty years later Justin Trudeau tried to take control of our natural resources through Bill C-69. His intent was to shut down our natural resources. Well, our government won the court case yesterday, and the court decision was a smackdown of Justin Trudeau's attempt to obliterate our constitutional rights, obliterate our natural resources . . .

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta knows that provinces are the ones best situated to make decisions for their own economies and given that Alberta deserves a fair deal from Ottawa, one that allows Albertans to harness the natural resources that belong to them, can the Minister of Energy tell this House what this means for the future of Alberta's energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This means that Alberta's energy future is bright. Justin Trudeau will not have a veto over the development of our natural resources. Bill C-69 would have effectively rewritten the Constitution. It would have driven away investment and choked our oil and gas sector. We sit on the third-largest reserve of oil in the world and have an abundance of natural gas. The world is looking for these resources, especially as it weeds out Russian energy. We believe this energy should come from Alberta, so yesterday was a great day for Alberta. After six years of fighting with the Trudeau Liberals as they developed this legislation, we won, and the no more pipelines . . .

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

Agricultural Costs

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, farmers are feeling the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, which will continue to lead to increasing food prices. Fertilizer costs are out of reach for farmers, the price of diesel is surging, and many farmers are still recovering from a tough season last year. On top of that, Alberta farmers elected the UCP government, that jacks up prices on crop and livestock insurance. This government is too busy fighting with themselves to care about

farmers or rural Alberta. When will Alberta farmers finally get some support from the UCP for all the costs they are facing?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I do love the enthusiasm, and I do agree with her that it is a challenging time for farmers. Fuel prices are through the roof. Fertilizer is through the roof. So are commodity prices. This will be the most expensive planting season in Alberta and many places around the world. It will also have the most upside for our farmers.

2:10

Ms Sweet: If they get a crop.

Mr. Horner: Of course. That's why we have great insurance programs that we're so proud to make better. We have to make them better because the NDP signed on to the last set of programs in 2018, and we continue to . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the tax exemption for the farm fuel offered a comparative advantage, however, the UCP refused to honour the intent of that program, and given that the price of diesel has increased by over 50 per cent for some and farmers are reporting that this will add about \$50,000 in costs this year and given that the increased price of fuel also adds costs on everything farmers need to ship – so not only are farmers paying more for fuel; the UCP removed the comparative advantage in the market – when will the agriculture minister finally provide actual help for farmers facing surging fuel prices?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I love this. I would just like to inform that side of the House that diesel and gas come from oil. You know, maybe you shouldn't stand on the steps saying, "No new approvals" and bring in things like the carbon tax. Your federal party joined with Trudeau. We brought in the fuel tax abatement, 13 cents on clear fuel, 4 cents for farmers. I wonder: do they want us to buy fuel for farmers? Is that what I'm hearing right now? Interesting proposal.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP are raking in revenues from those high energy prices the minister just referenced, that farmers will have to figure out how they're going to handle their surging costs, and given that the minister of agriculture is in control of what supports he provides and what costs he can increase and given that the UCP's response to increased costs for farmers has been to do nothing and given that agriculture is facing so much pressure, yet the UCP jacked up crop insurance by 10 per cent to gain \$40 million on the back of farmers when last year they had a decrease, how can the minister justify that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, everyone in the agriculture sector is very proud of our ag insurance program. Last year: a historic payout, \$2.7 billion out of a \$3.3 billion fund. There's a 10 per cent formula increase in the formula. The majority of the increase in the premium is from the increase in the commodity price, as it should be and as farmers understand. Like I said, the most upside of any planting season in Alberta's history, and here's what else I know through AFSC: our insurance program participation is up. It's up on the crop side. It's up on the moisture . . .

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

Social Supports and Calgary Transit User Safety

Ms Sigurdson: Homelessness, mental illness, and drug poisonings are worse than ever. The UCP is making all of these crises deeper by taking housing funding away from Albertans on income support, refusing to fund mental health support, and withholding life-saving health care from Albertans who use substances. The UCP is pushing vulnerable Albertans onto the streets, seeking shelter in transit stations. In classic UCP fashion, instead of real solutions the associate minister decided to troll a Calgary city councillor on Twitter. Does this minister accept any responsibility for the explosion of homelessness, mental illness, and fatal drug poisoning happening on his watch?

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a newsflash to the member opposite, but Calgarians and citizens within municipalities also have rights as well. They have a right to ride the LRT without experiencing violence. They have a right to ride the train without sexual assault or open drug use. They have a right to not inhale second-hand smoke from crystal meth and from crack. As a former police officer, we have to understand that the police are part of the solution to this very, very complex problem. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that expanded supervised consumption services would reduce open drug use in Calgary transit stations and given that these services are proven to save the health care system millions of dollars and free up badly overstretched ambulance and emergency beds in Calgary, given that this minister's failure to act has made Calgary less safe for everyone, can the minister grow up, knock it off with the mean tweets . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Sigurdson: . . . and actually take action to address the crises he has created in Calgary?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:15.

The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there's been no reduction in services for supervised consumption sites. Let's start with that. My office has spoken with operators. It's actually been the city of Calgary that has slowed the approval process, not the government of Alberta. We certainly welcome the application for the supervised consumption site in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. However, I have not heard from the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona whether she supports a supervised consumption site that we would like to put in that area.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that these crises continue to get worse because of the UCP's failed approach and given that this juvenile behaviour from the associate minister proves that Albertans can't trust the UCP to address these problems and given that asking him questions will only lead to more division – these guys have had their chance to take these crises seriously, and they have failed, so to the people of Calgary: I want you to hear me. An NDP government will protect your community, strengthen public health care, and save lives.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, under the previous government the only people that could get help were the wealthy. That is shameful. We removed user fees so that anyone . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The associate minister has the call.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we removed user fees. We have created 8,000 spaces. We have created the virtual opioid dependency program, an award-winning program. These are just a small snippet of the things that we have been doing to help people with the illness of addiction. If the NDP had their way, they would be keeping people in perpetual states of pain and suffering. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a question.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been diligent in our work to renew the K to 6 curriculum. Our government promised a curriculum that will give our children the foundational skills that they need for success. As a parent of two this is very important to me. I have also spoken to hundreds of parents and teachers in Calgary-Currie and relayed their feedback to the Minister of Education, similar to my colleagues. I know there have been a number of announcements since January of this year on this topic. To the minister: can you please update us on what work has been done since the beginning of this year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have done a great deal of work since January to make changes to the draft K to 6 curriculum and adjust the implementation timelines. In January we established a Curriculum Implementation Advisory Group to provide advice and recommendations on the implementation strategy and timelines for the new K to 6 curriculum. We also held virtual engagement sessions right across the province for all Albertans to have their feedback listened to. With that advice from the implementation advisory group we scaled back full implementation to three subjects and set aside \$59 million . . .

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The math, language arts, and physical education and wellness curricula K through 6 will be introduced this fall. Fort Vermilion piloted these subjects last year, and the students learning the new math and English curricula had on average two full years of growth in math and three full years of growth in English, which is amazing. As a parent of two and one going into kindergarten, we need to get this right. To the Minister of Education: can you please share with this House more about the data and research that informed the math and English curricula? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister is the one with the call.

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to, Mr. Speaker. These subjects have been based on science and advice from subject matter experts. For example, Dr. George Georgiou, who helped developed the English language arts curriculum, led world-class research on literacy in young learners. For his work he's been invited to participate in the Canadian Commission for UNESCO working group to examine pandemic impacts on elementary and secondary schools in Canada. In fact, Alberta is on the cutting edge, and

focusing on these subjects will help our younger students strengthen their numeracy and literacy skills.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that most of the feedback I have received on the curriculum has been about the draft social studies curriculum and given that we have committed to listening to feedback from Albertans and making changes to the draft curriculum using that feedback, including individuals from Calgary-Currie's feedback, to the minister: can you please remind this House what steps have been taken to address the feedback specifically and what the next steps are as we move towards a new social studies curriculum for kindergarten to grade 6 students? [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

One thing I am certain of is that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie provided a significant amount of respect and decorum to all other colleagues inside the Assembly when they were asking questions. I would guess that he deserves and expects the same.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been listening to the feedback of all Albertans and education stakeholders since the draft K to 6 curriculum was released. We heard Albertans' feedback loud and clear on social studies, and we went back to the drawing board. In fact, in December we went back to a new design blueprint on scope and sequence on social studies. Based on that feedback we have received thus far, we are making changes to the social studies design blueprint. Once the content changes are made, we will release the updated draft social studies curriculum in the coming months. I look forward to further engagement.

Electric Power Prices and Utility Rebate Timeline

Mr. Dang: Two-hundred and four days: that's six months and 21 days from now, when Albertans can hope to see their electricity rebates, maybe. That's the timeline for the solution that the UCP government has brought to Albertans who cannot use their stoves, their dryers, or even their computers because of limiters that are being placed by companies on their electricity usage, all because they cannot afford to keep up with the rising cost of utilities caused by this UCP government. This government has never let technical difficulties get in the way of helping wealthy companies make more money, so why are they dragging their feet when it comes to helping Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to affordability, we're not dragging our feet. We're moving quickly on establishing a program and getting electricity rebates out the door. The associate minister is working expeditiously to that end. On top of that, we've come forward with the suspension of the fuel tax, giving every Albertan a 13-cents-a-litre saving every time they fill up. That has a very positive impact for every Alberta family, every Alberta senior, every Alberta business.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are, frankly, tired of hearing vague statements like the one we just heard,

that they might get their rebates or the minister is working diligently, and given that they need real relief right now yet this government's plan is apparently to come up on another cold winter before providing this pittance of \$150 relief, why won't the minister just admit that this rebate is not something Albertans can trust, like this government?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's ridiculous. We are moving forward on affordability measures. But what I find so hypocritical is that when the members opposite, the party that the member was part of prior to his misdemeanour – that party, when they were in government, created the conditions for increased costs: the carbon tax; early buyout of the power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion; excessive build of our transmission system. Those are the reasons why costs are so high.

Mr. Dang: Given that energy experts, including Joel MacDonald, found that this year Albertans are going to face colder days in the winter and hotter days in the heat waves in the summers – the pattern of getting a break on bills this summer might be a thing of the past for them – and given that the minister said that these rebates are nothing but a temporary solution, why won't the government finally do the right thing and cap the cost of electricity? Albertans don't need possible outcomes; they need guarantees, and they need them right now.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'm always amazed. The only solution the members opposite have is capping every problem we have. They failed to deal with the systemic issues that drive up costs. That's why they brought in the carbon tax. That's why they paid out the power purchase agreements early. That's why they overbuilt the transmission system, because they simply don't deal with the systemic issues driving up costs. This government is dealing with those issues. On top of that, we're coming out with electricity rebates. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta Parole Board Decisions and Police Services

Mr. Sabir: Two years ago this government promised Alberta that a provincial parole board would provide a faster process than the federal parole board, but new data shows that the UCP's parole board has processed only 96 cases total in 15 months of operation. Over the same time, the federal board has processed 2,657 applications, or 28 times more. Is the latest Justice minister satisfied with the underperformance of this parole board? If not, how does he intend to fix it?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for highlighting the work that the Alberta Parole Board is doing and the fact that we have fulfilled the commitment in having a provincial parole board. Yes, I am satisfied and very happy with the hard work that the chair, Rick Hanson, and his parole board members are doing to make sure that we have greater accountability in having Albertans making decisions not just about conditional release but also on what the conditions are going to be for those who end up being released on parole.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the previous, previous, previous, previous Justice minister also promised Albertans a more transparent process but given that the board the UCP created doesn't release its decision, which is standard practice for the federal board, and given that the UCP has a terrible record of hiding the truth from Albertans at every turn, why did the UCP build a secret board, and will they commit to releasing all decisions publicly, as the federal board already does?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as a former member of the federal parole board, that is not how our decisions – sorry. When I was on the federal parole board, how their decisions are released: people apply to be able to access those decisions. The key is making sure that victims are involved in the process all throughout, and people apply to have access to those decisions. Now, the chair is looking into ways in which we can more proactively have the decisions of the parole board released to the public, but of course we want to make sure that the very private information of victims continues to be kept private for those victims.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this is another expensive and pointless exercise that has done nothing to reduce crimes and given that the UCP is pursuing another of these projects with an expensive and unnecessary police force, which Alberta municipalities have overwhelmingly rejected, will the minister take the lesson of his underperforming provincial parole board and drop plans to spend hundreds of millions of dollars of additional tax money to form a provincial police force for political reasons?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that is completely ridiculous. This is important work that the Alberta Parole Board is doing. It is doing excellent work in not even just making the decisions, the applications that come before them and making decisions about granting and denying parole. But the key is also having Albertans making decisions about what's right for the community and what's safe for the community and deciding what the conditions will be for the offenders when they go out into our communities, having Albertans making those decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Police Services in Coaldale

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I want to give a shout-out to the Women's Health Coalition of Alberta and the good work that they do.

Since 2014 Coaldale has been paying 100 versus 70 per cent, an extra \$500,000 per year, to pay for their policing needs compared to other communities throughout Canada. This means that Coaldale has had to allocate an extra \$4 million over the past eight years to a line item that other communities don't have to. To the Minister of Justice: seeing as every other community only pays 70 per cent of their policing costs, what can be done for Coaldale?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for all the hard work that he does in standing up for his constituents in Coaldale. We support Coaldale's position, that the new entrants guideline should not apply to them. This is a guideline that applies to communities that were never policed by the RCMP, and the town of Coaldale was in fact policed by the RCMP for many decades. With and through the member's advocacy I plan to raise this issue with the Minister of Public Safety Canada to urge the

federal government to reverse this unfair policy and how it's being attributed to the town of Coaldale.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

Given that article 4.1, subarticle 4.3, of the provincial police service agreement states that “the Provincial Minister may, by giving notice in writing to the Federal Minister, include . . . any geographical area” in the police service agreement, would the minister be willing to add Coaldale into the province's police service agreement so that they only have to pay 70 per cent of costs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Yeah. This is an interesting request, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me just start off by saying that we agree with Coaldale's position that it's unfair to apply the new entrants guideline to a town of 8,700 people. We are looking into seriously considering Coaldale's request, that the member has mentioned, regarding article 4. It was wonderful to be able to have the opportunity to meet with the town of Coaldale along with the hon. member, during which they made this request. We'll be looking into that and trying to see if this is an opportunity we might have in further bringing up this with the federal minister.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that Coaldale has been trying to talk or meet with the federal government to work through this issue for eight long years now and given that all they have gotten are crickets and roadblocks from the federal government, how would a made-in-Alberta provincial police strategy be more effective for Coaldale's policing needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this situation does underscore why Alberta's government has been studying the feasibility of establishing a provincial police service here in the province. We have a responsibility to explore how a new policing model could improve public safety and provide more effective policing for everyone in the province no matter where they live. While no decision has been made, we recognize the need to speak to people across Alberta with a significant interest in the issue such as Indigenous communities and municipalities before determining next steps.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, last week B.C. announced their plans to begin collecting race-based data to identify which populations are being underserved by government programs such as health care, the corrections system, education, and social assistance. This is something racialized groups have been calling for. My colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre introduced a bill to answer these calls, and this government voted it down. Why is this government refusing to listen to Albertans and voting against the first step, to collect race-based data?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We welcome the intent of the proposed legislation to better understand the realities of racialized Albertans

and to remove systemic barriers they face. We plan to address the challenges of racism, including the collection of race-based data, through more efficient and collaborative methods and in a way that considers Alberta's privacy law.

Mr. Deol: Given that you voted against the bill, given that other provinces are now starting to introduce legislation to collect race-based data to better meet the needs of racialized communities who face discrimination in both policy and their daily lives, and given that during the months of consultations with Albertans that my colleagues conducted, the first step that was identified was to collect the data, why is this government intent on making sure Albertans fall behind other provinces and voting down change-making policy?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. The recommendation that we had from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council had been worked on, and we're trying to find a way to address the issues properly. The antiracism action plan, currently under development, includes commitments for Alberta's government to collect and analyze race-based data in order to identify and address inequalities in our province.

Mr. Deol: Given that the B.C. legislation introduced was developed in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council and Métis Nation B.C. – and this government has a terrible record of consulting and partnering with groups on policy and legislation – and given that multiple professors and experts agree that the collection of race-based data is the first step in addressing systemic racism, which is often caused by policies, practices, and procedures that appear neutral on paper, why does this government refuse to do their job and listen to Albertans who are calling for change?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. We are doing the work. In fact, we have done so much more work than the NDP did in four years. Between 2015 and 2019, you know, they should have gotten to deal with racism, discrimination, and systemic racism. In particular, the collection of race-based data is a complex one that requires adequate consultation. I am proud of the work that the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism is going to be doing to make sure that we fully consult members of the community. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall wants to ask another question, I encourage him to get back on the list.

Postsecondary Staff Associations and Bill 17

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour and Immigration brought forward a bill that contains changes to the labour code that no one saw coming. Bill 17 makes temporary exemptions to the labour code that were set to expire for postsecondary staff associations for July 1 and makes them permanent. This was a surprise to postsecondary students and staff that will be impacted by these changes. Can the Minister of Advanced Education please tell us: why would he sign off on changes that negatively impact thousands of his stakeholders without checking with them first?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you listen to the members opposite ask these questions, I mean, you would think that they should know what they're talking about. This was a change that they actually brought in in 2017, and it was set to expire on July 1, 2022. We consulted with the stakeholders, and they have indicated that we need to make that particular change, that was brought in by the NDP in 2017, permanent. That's exactly what we have done.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that amendments to Bill 17 will remove the ability for impacted workers to decide for themselves, starting July 1, who undertakes the bargaining on their behalf and given that this bill now takes away those choices from those workers while allowing for an increase in power for the employers, can the same minister please explain why he believes that the employers of these workers have the right to decide how they exercise their bargaining rights but the workers do not?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, again, this was a change that was brought in by the NDP in 2017, that they have been working with since 2017. They have come to us to say: we would want this to be permanent because it's working; we should maintain the status quo. We do not want to upset something that's already working, and therefore we heeded their request to make it permanent.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that if Bill 17 passes in its current form, thousands of faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral students will not be able to decide for themselves who represents them in collective bargaining and given that in other Canadian jurisdictions these same workers have robust labour rights and the right to choose, can the same minister please tell the Assembly how he plans to attract the best and brightest to teach and learn in Alberta when he's attacking their wages, silencing their voices, and doing all he can to actually drive them away?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, given the expertise and understanding of the issues faced by their members, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations will continue to represent their members because they have built a great deal of expertise between 2017 and now. It is good for them. It is good for their students. I do want to thank those faculty associations and those institutions and the leaders of our universities that reached out to us to say: we want this to be permanent. I'm happy that we were able to deliver that to them.

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

Women in STEM and Skilled Trades Careers

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government is to continue to repair the economy after the disastrous NDP, all genders must have an equal opportunity to participate in this economy, yet women participating in STEM still face a landscape filled with systemic barriers. If there's any hope of our economy recovering fully once again, we must break down those barriers. To the Associate Minister of Status of Women: what is this government doing to ensure systemic barriers are removed and to ensure women can fully participate in STEM fields?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we know that the province's economic recovery will require an educated, skilled workforce. Upskilling and reskilling for Alberta women will be an important part of that recovery. We have announced \$1 million in

bursary programs to ensure that more women have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education in STEM programs: Bow Valley College in Calgary, NorQuest College in Edmonton, and Yellowhead Tribal College in Edmonton. We've also tripled the funding for the women's economic challenge grant, and that's for a total of \$3.6 million to enhance economic opportunities for women . . .

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that trades play a vital role within the Alberta economy and are vital to our day-to-day lives and given that women were historically discriminated against when participating in and learning the trades, to the same associate minister: what does this government plan to do to ensure full participation in the trades for Alberta women free from discrimination?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

2:40

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're really proud that we've allocated 2 and a half million dollars to Women Building Futures to achieve three goals: first, to address the growing shortage of skilled tradespeople in Alberta; second, we're empowering women to pursue rewarding careers in industries where women are traditionally underrepresented; and third, this investment recognizes that apprenticeship learning and skilled trades have every bit as much value, merit, and worth as a university degree. We also put a million dollars, as I said, into bursary programs. Bow Valley College and NorQuest College will both receive \$400,000 and Yellowhead Tribal College \$200,000. These bursaries will cover tuition fees and all wraparound services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. minister. Given that STEM and trades fields have been historically dominated by men and given that there are numerous reports of women being bullied, harassed, and abused when participating in STEM and trades training and given that this government has already stated that they have a strong mandate to stop gender-based discrimination, to the same minister: what is this government planning to do to ensure women are protected from gender-based discrimination when participating in the trades and STEM?

Ms Issik: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in February Advanced Education and Status of Women co-announced 2 and a half million dollars in one-time grants to assist postsecondary institutions in updating their campus sexual violence policies and to develop a survey. Other than the provincial survey, funds can also be used to support and develop training programs, including sensitivity training programs for individuals involved in the complaint process. Alberta's government is committed to supporting all survivors of sexual assault and shifting to a culture that prevents violence from happening in the first place.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 206, Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act, sponsored by the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. This bill was referred to the committee on April 28, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 206 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 206.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 206, Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act, is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? If so, please rise. I have noted a member who would like to speak to concurrence, which will now take place on the next available Monday.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? It looks like the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre may be rising.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce and table on behalf of the Friends of Medicare, members of which join us in the gallery today, a petition containing nearly 2,000 signatures calling on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to immediately reverse the privatization of Alberta Precision Laboratories and to instead expand its duties and responsibilities for providing lab services publicly under Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another tabling here for a person who had a vaccine injury. Actually, this one resulted in a death. Karen Burkart and her family are still waiting for autopsy reports for their son Tyler, 35 years old, six months later.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta, responses to questions raised by Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, March 7, 2022, Ministry of Service Alberta 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:15 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, citing Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time you noted just a moment ago, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was asking a question, directing it to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and at the time in her question, which was written on the paper, didn't appear to be ad libbed by any stretch of the imagination, the member said very clearly – and I do not need the benefit of the Blues; I have the benefit of pen and paper and memory – “[Will] the minister grow up.” Now, this is wildly inappropriate language, to say something so unparliamentary in this Chamber. These kinds of insults I don't believe have a place in the

people's Chamber, and I would ask that that member apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader to respond.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe this is a matter of debate. The turn of phrase “grow up” has never been ruled unparliamentary. In fact, in searching the Speaker's ruling database, I found that on April 16, 2008, the then Speaker told a member to “grow up,” because it is a common turn of phrase when someone is engaging in childish, mean-spirited behaviour, which the minister who was being introduced did when he trolled on Twitter a Calgary city councillor about issues of homelessness, mental illness, and fatal drug poisonings happening under his watch. Given that the Deputy Government House Leader has argued that it is a matter of debate when his ministers suggest that the opposition cannot read, I also suggest that it's incredibly thin-skinned of him to call a point of order on this. I believe it's a matter of debate, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said the following:

Given that this minister's failure to act has made Calgary less safe for everyone, can the minister grow up, knock it off with the mean tweets . . . [and] take action to address the crises he has created in Calgary?

While I agree that this phrase was directed solely at the minister and while I would agree that this type of language is unlikely to raise the level of decorum or assist in the level of debate here in the Assembly, I'm not sure that such a phrase rises to the level of a point of order. But I might remind members that what isn't unparliamentary today could be unparliamentary tomorrow depending on the way in which it is used. Ensuring that all members do not receive my ruling as a carte blanche opportunity to go around telling people to grow up – I think that if we focus on raising the level of decorum, all members and all Albertans will be well served. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 17

Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to the amendment that was put forward by the government to Bill 17. For those who are following right now or maybe didn't catch debate earlier in committee, this bill seeks to amend the provisions around bereavement leave, and specifically it indicates that bereavement leave will be available in the event that the pregnancy of an employee ends other than as a result of a live birth or the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than a result of a live birth. Then

there's another provision as well, but I want to focus my comments on those two subsections, (b) and (c), of the government amendment.

2:50

I want to begin by saying that, you know, I do appreciate that this amendment – we've heard very clearly statements from the minister and from government members that they intend for this amendment to include abortion and terminations for medical reasons. I am pleased to hear that firm commitment from the government, that they do support bereavement leave for women and gender-diverse folks who have had an abortion or a termination for medical reasons as well as, of course, the other circumstances, stillbirth and miscarriage. This is a really important change.

Now, it does feel to me, Madam Chair, that there was an opportunity to be more specific in the language, and it does not surprise me that this government may be very deliberately trying to avoid using the word "abortion" in legislation. We know that that is a very divisive topic among the government members, and it feels like this is perhaps a way to try to avoid specifically using the word "abortion," but we know that it now will apply to abortion. While we think it would have been better to be clearer and more specific in the language, certainly the clarity that has been provided by the government members, that this language will ensure that employees who have experienced stillbirth, miscarriage, an abortion, and termination for medical reasons will be covered by the three days of unpaid job-protected bereavement leave, is very important indeed.

You know, I shared in this House the story of my own pregnancy losses and mentioned, of course, the statistics that many of us are aware of, which is that this is actually incredibly common, as is abortion, Madam Chair. We need to be very clear that this is – actually, 12,000 women in Alberta in 2020 had an abortion. This is a significant number of individuals and Albertans. While pregnancy loss is often not spoken of very clearly, it is important to realize that it does touch the lives of many, many Albertans, so we need to be clear and inclusive in our language. We've been consistent on this side of the House as members of the opposition in pushing this government to use inclusive language and to make sure that we are capturing all circumstances of pregnancy loss. I think that that's very important to note, that not only did the members of the Official Opposition do that, but of course Albertans were speaking out about that and wanted that clarity.

I also want to give credit to many of the stakeholders, including Aditi Loveridge with the pregnancy loss and infant care centre, who has been a very clear advocate and worked very carefully with all members to try to get the best language possible. I understand that the stakeholders believe that this is clear, that it will cover abortion, that it will cover termination for medical reasons, and for that reason we believe that, you know, we can support this amendment.

I also want to take this moment, though, Madam Chair, because we have heard some statements from the members on the government side who did not want to talk about abortion. In fact, we heard those statements from the Premier. We heard it, shockingly, from the Associate Minister of Status of Women, who, I believe, had declared at some point that she was actually pro choice yet was very reluctant and seemed to be contemptuous of discussing abortion in this House and called it a divisive issue and that perhaps it was wedge politics that was being played. I am certain we heard those same comments from the minister of labour. I had the opportunity to review *Hansard* from yesterday. I was not surprised but once again disappointed in the tone from the minister of labour.

But this is a very good example of why we have to continue to be vigilant about reproductive rights. You know, Albertans, Canadians, North Americans, people across the world were shocked by what's going on in the United States, that it appears to be evident that the decision in *Roe versus Wade* will be overturned by the Supreme Court in just a few weeks' time. What that will mean is that thousands, millions, actually, of women in the United States will lose access to abortion, and it will be a shocking reversal of years of progress on women's rights and women's reproductive health rights. To say that this is not an issue that affects Albertans and Canadians simply because we're a different country was so devoid of contact with reality, Madam Chair, that it was shocking. I mean, you could see the outpouring from Canadians and Albertans. Most importantly, the message was to be vigilant – to be vigilant – because we cannot take anything for granted.

In fact, what we have to be really clear about is that we don't actually have – we can't sit here in Canada, we can't sit here in Alberta and say that we have fantastic access to abortion in this country. In fact, we've all now seen the data which shows how far women across this country and in Alberta, particularly in rural Alberta, have to travel to access abortion. Yes, it has been decriminalized in Canada. That does not mean, by the way, Madam Chair, that it's the same thing as it's legal in Canada to seek an abortion, to have an abortion. It's been decriminalized, meaning there's no law on paper making it illegal or criminal. However, provinces hold significant power, through their responsibilities for health care, to limit or to expand access to abortion services. So we cannot be smug here in Alberta or in Canada about access to abortion rights, because it's clear that thousands of Alberta women have abortions and struggle to have access to them.

We know that there were steps that the former NDP government took to make that better, which included, you know, passing bubble legislation to make a protective zone around those spaces so women weren't being harassed to go to an abortion and seek what they're entitled to as their reproductive health rights. I'm proud that the NDP government did that. Of course, we saw the UCP members. Albertans – I was in Alberta; I was not an MLA at that time – watched every single UCP member at that time run out of this House to avoid having to talk about it. That's why we need to be vigilant in this House, because that's the party that's now government.

I'm also incredibly proud of the fact that the former NDP government made available Mifegymiso – I always struggle with the pronunciation, but I got it – which actually significantly expands access to abortion services for women who may not be able to travel. That was really important because it's a medication that could be accessed. That's incredibly important. I know we still have a lot of work to do to make sure that pharmacies make that drug available. Again, I'm going to go back to comments made by Dr. Emma Herrington about the limited understanding of pharmacies to actually make that drug available, but that's an important step. Again, we have members of the government who don't want to talk about abortion, who don't want to talk about the limited access, and who actually want – when they were, you know, in opposition, they actually ran away from discussion around protecting women who are seeking abortion services. So we have to be vigilant.

Not only do we have to be vigilant about protecting the rights that we have right now for abortion, but we actually have to work very hard to make sure that we're expanding access to abortion rights. Yes, when a piece of legislation is before this House – originally, Bill 17 was silent and actually not just silent; it actually limited bereavement leave to only stillbirth and miscarriage. This government was content at that time to say that employees, women and gender-diverse folks, who had experienced an abortion would just have to ask their employer for it.

I'm glad that we were vigilant, that Albertans were vigilant, that the stakeholders were and said: no; that is not good enough. We need to make sure that anybody who has had an abortion can also seek bereavement leave because if you look at the purpose behind bereavement leave, it's actually around recognizing what the women or the gender-diverse folk are experiencing. It is loss, and it is complicated. There are medical complications, but there's grief, there's anxiety, there is relief, Madam Chair. I want to be clear that not all abortions, pregnancy loss are the feelings – I don't think we do a good service to women when we pretend there's only one response to that experience. Women have complicated responses to pregnancy loss. Some may be grateful. Some may be relieved. Some may be heartbroken. Some may be devastated. But the fact is that we're talking about bereavement leave for these women because we recognize that this is about them.

So, too, is abortion. Abortion is women's rights. Abortion is women's health rights. It is reproductive rights. It's a human right. So we have to be vigilant to make sure we are being inclusive of that at all times.

The opportunity to make sure that this legislation better reflects the experiences of women and the very complicated circumstances in which they may experience pregnancy loss: it is important to be specific, and it is important that we continue to push and to challenge to make sure that women's health rights and reproductive health rights are protected and expanded. I know that I sit with a number of my colleagues in saying that we will be vigilant, but we will also work to make it better. We will also work to ensure that more women, more gender-diverse people have access to reproductive health rights wherever they live in this province. By doing that, Madam Chair, we're making sure that we truly are the inclusive society that we all want Alberta to be.

3:00

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment. I appreciate that it is going to ensure that women who have had an abortion, had a termination for medical reasons, experienced a stillbirth or a miscarriage or a pregnancy loss of any kind are covered by bereavement leave. This is about human decency. It's about compassion. It's about human rights. I'm glad that we were vigilant and that we stood up for these women and those who have experienced pregnancy loss.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It feels like we didn't even leave on this one, and I mean that, actually, in a respectful way because it's been actually a really important opportunity, I think, to be able to talk about, you know, these really important, pressing issues in the Legislature.

I want to start my remarks by just expressing my sincere gratitude. I'll start with my colleagues because they're right near me: my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, who just spoke and who multiple times in this Chamber shared her own story of pregnancy loss, and, too, my colleague from St. Albert, who has been an absolute, you know, crusader when it comes to speaking out on reproductive rights. Many years ago, I believe, she first shared her story in the Legislature of accessing abortion, and I was proud that she was willing to share that again just yesterday. And to all my colleagues: the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, of course, for the work that she and our colleagues who were in government did to expand access to Mifegymiso, bubble-zone legislation. I

mean, these are all key pieces that have very much advanced reproductive rights in this province.

More importantly than us – I just wanted to mention all of us because they were very fresh in my mind; I don't want to miss anyone – of course, are the folks who have been advocating. You know, I'll name some of the recent people in my mind, but I just think about people who have been on the front lines of this debate – right? – women and men. I can think of some strong women who have been protesting the right to choose for so long. We have a debt of gratitude to all those who've come before us.

But I must, of course, also point out, you know, as has been said a few times, Aditi Loveridge, who, as we all know, worked with this government and spoke with us as well multiple times. She's the head of the Pregnancy, Infant & Child Loss Support Centre. I promised I would get the name of her organization correct today because I'm certain I got it wrong yesterday.

And, yeah, I mean, I will say it, too: the Member for Sherwood Park, who started this conversation through a private member's bill. We went back and forth quite a bit on that committee, and I appreciate that he was willing to take that on as a private member because, as he knows and we all know, your opportunity to get a private member's bill is a rare one, right? I've not had the chance yet. You know, I know that many of my colleagues haven't either. So I commend that.

I just, you know, will share or I will, I guess, reiterate, actually, some of the comments from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who, somewhat hypocritically, went on a fairly long conversation about the importance of private members' bills as well. Again, I appreciated her comments, but it's really disappointing when private members' bills from our side of the House are continually throttled at the committee level, particularly when I think about the most recent one on race-based data. That's really tough for us.

But let me get back to this amendment in front of us because I see the chair giving me a look. I appreciate that. You know what? I will give the labour minister props as well for being willing to work with Aditi and other stakeholders and being willing to put forth an amendment that addresses the significant concerns that we had.

So we'll move beyond that a little bit. I want to just talk a little bit about what we heard in the Chamber yesterday, so I may have to move a little bit away from collegiality here. My apologies, but I've got to get it on the record. We do have the minister saying – because, as I questioned, I queried multiple times in the Chamber yesterday prior to the minister providing clarifying remarks, we wanted it to be absolutely clear that without all forms of pregnancy loss named, you know, including miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination for medical reasons – we wanted to ensure that this amendment would be inclusive of that, and the labour minister said: "Yes." I'm quoting *Hansard* directly. "Abortion, termination for medical reasons, and a number of other reasons," and he goes on to say: "There are much more circumstances under which women can need these procedures, so we want to make sure that they are not limited whatsoever."

I appreciate that although I do want to point out something that many stakeholders have said as well. We want to really ensure as well – and I talked about this yesterday. We are all learning. I don't think anybody here would claim to be an expert. I make mistakes in my language all the time. But just being more inclusive, to not just talk about women accessing abortion but also who's impacted – right? – even going back to the MLA for Sherwood Park's private member's bill, it's important that we talk about if there is a partner involved as well and the impact on that person, too.

Now, what's troubling and what I need to get on the record today is the fact that that same minister then went on to talk about how this is classic NDP politics, identity politics, politics of division, that sort of thing, that we are "hung up on the word 'abortion.'" You better believe we're hung up on the word "abortion," and Roe versus Wade, the looming overturning of Roe versus Wade, has made this conversation even more important and even more critical. Absolutely, we are hung up because we know how slippery the slope can be when it comes to rights being attacked, and we have to look no further than this UCP government to see rights being rolled back.

This was the same UCP government that in 2019 became the first provincial government in Canada to roll back 2SLGBTQ-plus rights with the pushing through of Bill Hate, Bill 8, and that's a fact. So absolutely, we're concerned. This is the same government that allowed Bill 207 to proceed. Some of them, of course, will say: well, we voted against it. But we know for a fact that there are members on the record supporting conscience rights legislation that would disproportionately impact women, queer, and trans folks accessing health care, and the number of stories I heard from Albertans during that debate, heartbreaking stories of queer and trans folks being denied health care all across this province, heartbreaking stories of women being denied birth control, at that time, in 2019, being denied from their health care provider a prescription for birth control – and don't even get me started on the heartbreaking stories we heard about abortion access. We've shared a lot of those today.

I shared some stories yesterday from an abortion doula, Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, who does amazing work all across this province trying to support folks who are trying to access an abortion. The stories are real, and they are happening across this province, and if anybody on that side of the House doesn't believe that abortion access is an issue, let's sit down. Let's talk. Autumn has countless stories that she is willing to share with all of you. You know what? We could even drive to some of these communities and talk to people.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but if you could direct your comments through the chair, that would be great.

Member Irwin: Absolutely, Chair. Sorry; I get a little passionate about this when I'm being told I'm being divisive because it seems to me that being divisive sounds a whole lot like standing up for human rights. All right. So we need to get that on the record.

I very much need to just ensure once more from this amendment and the comments by the minister: this leave will cover abortion; no person will have to disclose to their employer why they need this leave beyond the loss of pregnancy. As was clearly outlined yesterday, we do not want people who are in one of their most difficult times to have to beg and justify why they are accessing bereavement leave. I want all members of this Assembly to support this. This is what this vote is about, to include all forms of pregnancy loss.

3:10

We want to ensure as well that when, you know, the government updates their websites, when the government takes on ensuring that there is education about the changes, those are clear, that it's clearly specified for Albertans how they will access this bereavement leave and that all forms of pregnancy loss are included. We don't want anyone to have to be navigating websites and reading through fine print; we want it to be absolutely clear.

My closing comment is that, you know, it's been clear from this government that they're not interested in supporting and uplifting

reproductive rights, that they've got a Premier who is unwilling to even utter the words "abortion," let alone "reproductive rights" or even "women," for that matter. Albertans need a Premier and a government who understand these issues, who stand with women, who stand with gender-diverse folks, and they'll find that in an NDP government.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:12 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Issik	Savage
Ceci	Jones	Shandro
Dach	LaGrange	Shepherd
Deol	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
Ellis	Madu	Singh
Fir	Nielsen	Smith
Frey	Nixon, Jason	Stephan
Getson	Orr	Toor
Glubish	Pancholi	Turton
Gray	Panda	Walker
Hoffman	Pon	Wilson
Horner	Renaud	Yao
Hunter	Rosin	Yaseen
Irwin		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 0

[Motion on amendment A1 carried unanimously]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 17, Committee of the Whole, obviously, with no amendments before us. Are there any members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to join in the debate on Bill 17 at Committee of the Whole. I had an opportunity to speak to this bill briefly at second reading. At that time, knowing that Bill 17 does three things: reservists' leave, a change to employment standards; bereavement leave, a change to employment standards; and then an amendment to the Labour Relations Code that impacts, specifically, academic staff, graduate students' associations, and postdoctoral fellows' associations, at second reading I raised some concerns about that third section but also wanted to have the opportunity to talk to stakeholders to find out more about those impacted and their thoughts.

During debate in question period today the minister of labour said that stakeholders had been consulted on changes in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What the changes do is that they give exclusive bargaining rights, they lock those in, for the associations that currently manage them. They were set to expire on July 1. These bargaining rights were put in place after a Supreme Court decision in 2015 because, of course, prior to that, many public servants and those in the academic world were denied the right to strike. So the government of the day, the NDP government, needed to

respond to that Supreme Court ruling and return the right to strike, freedom of association, and other worker rights to public-sector staff, which they did in 2016, and then also in the academic setting, which came separately in 2017, taking additional time to consult with those impacted at the time.

3:30

Even during that consultation time, since about 2015, it's been known that the right to associate and to strike was coming in these different work environments. Now, when it was implemented by the NDP in 2017, exclusive bargaining rights were put in place for a period of five years set to expire on July 1, specifically because this was a new strike lockout regime. It was a time of serious change. There were concerns about the associations, faculty associations for example, being surprised by perhaps a lockout or being surprised by changing of bargaining agents at a time when they hadn't had a chance to get their feet under them. For these reasons, a temporary exclusivity on bargaining rights was put in place.

That was set to expire on July 1, and this was something the stakeholders were all very aware of. With this change in Bill 17 the exclusive bargaining rights are going to be left in indefinitely. Now, in second reading I talked about some of the potential challenges with that given the impact on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, specifically the freedom of association. I also said during second reading that we wanted to go away, talk a little bit more to those impacted, and what we have found is that not one of the major university graduate student associations or postdoctoral associations, including their labour relations committees, was consulted on this change. Quite a few of them are very, very concerned and upset because they had already started thinking about what would happen following July 1. There are also some major faculty associations in the province who do not support the changes in Bill 17.

So while we are in Committee of the Whole and we have the opportunity to ask questions and to pop up and down, I'm hoping to find out more about the consultation that was done. When I realized that CAFA and all of the major university graduate student associations and postdoctoral associations were telling us that they were not consulted, that is a matter of serious concern to me, Madam Chair. Removing the expiration and putting in exclusive bargaining rights indefinitely denies freedom of association and very likely makes this section of changes to the Labour Relations Code against Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and against the rulings that were originally made that the NDP government was responding to, specifically rulings from the 2015 case that the RCMP brought against the federal government. That RCMP case affirmed the rights that are so important.

Right now what the government is saying with this change is that they know best who should represent these workers. I submit to you, Madam Chair, that I and Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms believe strongly that workers know best and workers should be able to choose who represents them. A point I would like to remake that I made at second reading is that even with the exclusive bargaining rights coming off, there's nothing to force these workers to change who their bargaining agent is. It just gives the workers the choice, the choice for what makes sense for them. To be very clear, academically employed students work in a very different-looking environment than many other workers, but they are workers, and they should have this right. I believe that the section in Bill 17 that removes this right would not be Charter compliant based off of previous Supreme Court rulings and based off of what the Charter says about freedom of association.

Now, a lot of these workers are now tuning in to this debate with a great deal of concern given they were not consulted on the changes, so I would like to read into the record just a small piece of that Supreme Court decision I mentioned, regarding the RCMP, brought against the federal government. In the Supreme Court decision there's a section specifically about "choice and independence are inherent to the nature and purpose of collective bargaining." Section 86. I think it is incredibly important for the debate that's happening here and the impact this will have on graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations as well as faculty associations or academic staff. Within bargaining the Supreme Court ruling reads:

Hallmarks of employee choice in this context include the ability to form and join new associations, to change representatives, to set and change collective workplace goals, and to dissolve existing associations. Employee choice may lead to a diversity of associational structures and to competition between associations, but it is a form of exercise of freedom of association that is essential to the existence of employee organizations and to the maintenance of the confidence of members in them.

I have to emphasize, Madam Chair. The Supreme Court was incredibly clear that being able to form and join new associations, being able to change representatives, dissolve existing associations is a form of exercise of the freedom of association, and it is essential.

Bill 17 is removing that, taking these rights away from the workers and giving more rights to the employers. To be very clear, particularly grad students and postdoctoral students work under extreme power dynamics. Workers and employers have a power imbalance to begin with, but when it comes to grad students and postdoctoral students, it's even more torqued.

I certainly want to ask the minister about his consultation process and why we are hearing that graduate student associations and postdoctoral associations have been surprised by this change and were not consulted, particularly given this being a violation of labour rights of freedom of association and associations being put in a precarious position where decisions that they are being forced to make are being made by the government and not by the workers themselves.

I think that this section of Bill 17 removes the rights of workers to choose who represents them, and major stakeholders do not support it. To continue this discussion and to focus our comments on this particular section of Bill 17, at this point, Madam Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Can I get a time check?

The Chair: You have just under 11 minutes.

Ms Gray: Eleven minutes. Great. Thank you very much.

The amendment I've introduced is that I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by striking out section 2. To be clear, section 2 is the section that changes the Labour Relations Code. My proposal with this amendment is to very seriously remove this change from this piece of legislation based off of the feedback that the Official Opposition has heard from the thousands of workers who are graduate students, who are postdoctoral students, and some of them faculty, who are concerned about this change and who were not consulted on this change and do want the right to decide who represents them in bargaining.

What we've heard clearly is that these workers want that option to associate with other associations and increase their bargaining power. They do not support this change. There is clear precedent in the Supreme Court of Canada that the government cannot limit the freedoms of workers when it comes to collective bargaining.

Now, the question may be asked: if this is so terrible, then why did the NDP government lock in exclusive bargaining provisions? I would suggest that it was done on good advice and for good reason, but it was also done for a temporary period of time. It expiring was what allowed it to continue. It would not cause a Charter challenge because it was temporary given the new strike lockout regime. By removing this, I think that the government will experience Charter challenges for this section. I think it's incumbent upon the government to pass constitutional pieces of legislation.

3:40

Now, what this amendment does is it just takes this section out and removes the changes. It remains in place that there would be an expiry on July 1 and gives those workers that opportunity to choose on that date, July 1, 2022. Of course, the change was never intended to be permanent.

Within section 2, that is being stricken with this amendment, the government is not just looking to remove the deadline; they're looking to permanently limit the rights of workers while giving freedom to the employers and allowing those employers to band together to form employer organizations. As part of the debate on this – allow me to repeat for the record – I'd love to know more about the consultation and particularly if graduate students and postdoctoral fellow associations were actually consulted with. They tell us clearly that they were not. Secondly, why is there a change allowing employers to form employer organizations without a related or relational change to allow the student associations, the worker associations the same rights? I hope the government might be able to tell us that.

They have in their term in government interfered with bargaining of collective agreements. We certainly heard that that resulted in the strike in Lethbridge. Some associations have been unable to reach collective agreements because of secret bargaining mandates set by the UCP. We want our academically employed students, who are workers – really, our priority is that we want them to be able to focus on the work that they do. It's difficult for them when they are not labour relations experts, when there is high turnover, to have this responsibility. For some of them, they are interested in exploring other options and exercising those bargaining rights and exercising the right to freedom of association.

I have introduced this amendment, which removes section 2. I would ask to find out more about the consultation the minister has done. I would ask the minister to reflect on the Supreme Court decisions that have made clear that employee choice is critical when it comes to collective bargaining, including the choice to change representatives, and for what reason that would be removed from graduate student associations, postdoctoral associations, and faculty given the Supreme Court's very clear rulings. Then, of course, why is there within section 2 the allowance for employers to band together to form employer organizations without the same being offered for workers and worker associations?

These are some of my big questions. But, generally speaking, I think that this amendment is a good one and would improve Bill 17. It would remove the labour statutes piece, allow Bill 17 to implement the reservists' leave and the bereavement leave that have been discussed heavily in this place. Voting for this amendment would allow Bill 17 to move forward as a constitutional piece of

legislation that would not likely be challenged. I think it makes sense to remove the section that violates freedom of association.

With those introductory comments on this amendment, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. I look forward to debate on this amendment.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her debate on Bill 17. I can say for sure that I do not support the amendment that she has put forward for the simple reason that it would defeat the purpose of that aspect of Bill 17 that is before the floor of this Assembly. I think this is one of those amendments that, in my view, are ill-conceived because it presupposes that the amendment that is put forward before the floor of this Assembly should not be. You don't just put forward a brand new piece of legislation without it being thought through or consulted on or making sure that it would meet the intention for which the amendment was put forward in the first place.

Second, it identifies a problem which requires a legislative solution. That's exactly what Bill 17, all of Bill 17, all of the components of Bill 17, is meant to accomplish. The amendment proposed, again, by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods would not permit bargaining agent exclusivity for academic staff, postsecondary students, and postdoctoral fellow associations beyond July 1, 2022. It will permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations as of July 1, 2022, as scheduled in the current legislation.

Madam Chair, I've listened to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talk about the Supreme Court of Canada's decision and the Charter concerns and all of those things. I can assure this Assembly that those concerns are absolutely ill-founded, have no business whatsoever. As currently drafted, Bill 17 grants academic staff, graduate student, and postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members indefinitely to preserve the status quo at postsecondary institutions. It recognizes associations' expertise and experience in representing their members and that they have existing relationships with the postsecondary institutions. They have that right to be represented by their own – their own – association. That is exactly what is going on here.

In 2017, as I indicated earlier today, the members opposite introduced that change that grants academic staff, grad student, and postdoctoral fellow associations that exclusive right to represent themselves. We are not asking them to be represented by somebody else. It was the same people, the same staff. It is their association that is representing them. If the concerns raised in 2017 that led to that introduction in 2017 were a concern then, they are still a concern now. The only difference is that there was in 2017 a requirement that it would expire. This amendment would effectively allow that to expire and, you know, then bring uncertainty and confusion into our postsecondary institutions. We have heard from them that there is stability right now. At this point in time there is no reason whatsoever to upset the status quo. I have not heard anyone out there who says that we need to upset the current arrangement.

In fact, I have heard from some faculty associations who have been to my office thanking me for bringing forward this amendment. But, obviously, you know, Madam Chair, in matters of this nature, especially when you are dealing with the potential for different unions or bargaining agents to jostle for who represents a particular set of employees, there are bound to be differences in opinion. That is all right. That's why we are a democracy. That's why there are people who may not feel comfortable, who may not like that, but ultimately the role of government is stability, especially where there are no problems that require a dramatic overhaul.

It's an expiry date that has been removed to provide for exclusivity by the same people – the same people – that are part of that association. That was the request that was made by them to us, and we are honouring that request. I would urge all members of this Assembly and indeed my colleagues to vote down this amendment because it would defeat the purpose for which Bill 17 was put forward in the first place.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Just to briefly respond to the minister, you said that you had not heard from anyone opposed to this; you had heard from some faculty associations. One of the questions that I asked a few times in my remarks was: did you consult with graduate student associations or any postdoctoral fellow associations? Those associations are impacted by this legislation. They are made up of thousands of academically employed students, who are workers who have rights, and when we talked to them, they said that the government had not consulted them in any way, shape, or form. So we were the first people to talk to them when they are impacted by this. I do acknowledge that some faculty associations are supportive of exclusive bargaining rights indefinitely.

Secondly, I talked about the constitutionality of this change. Indefinite exclusive bargaining rights is a significant change and does make this likely unconstitutional because it locks this in permanently. When the change was put in place in 2017, there was a temporary exclusivity that was set to expire, and that expiry was incredibly important. You also talked about the associations having the experience and the expertise to do this work. That is without question, but workers should have the right to choose, and that is called freedom of association. Bill 17, with this change and should the amendment not be accepted, removes that right from those workers. I think that it's really important that it be flagged.

My follow-up questions to the minister are around consultation with graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations. I have not heard of any such discussions and have specifically heard from those academically employed students that they do not support this, the unconstitutionality of locking in the exclusive bargaining rights given the Supreme Court rulings, some of which I have read into the record.

Finally, the question that I asked around employer associations and this section of Bill 17, which we proposed through the amendment to strike out: why does allowing those employer associations while not at the same time allowing an equivalent for the academically employed students or the workers make sense to the minister? That does not provide any balance and, on face value, does not make sense. I'd appreciate the minister's comments.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise this afternoon and follow up on some of the comments that I've been hearing here in the debate. I'll thank my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this amendment forward, which I very much agree with. To the minister's comments that it would allow the expiry date to go through: that's the exact point.

See, I've spent some time as a labour activist, you know, at least a couple of decades, and spent the past seven years in this Chamber fighting for hard-working Albertans and their labour rights, so I've seen some things happen, come and go over the years, as they say. I can sum it up with: the right for workers to choose their bargaining agent is right up there with their right to strike. For those that now

seem to be keeping score with regard to Supreme Court decisions as of late, both of those are Supreme Court decisions: the right to strike, the right to choose your bargaining agent.

Of course, I very much appreciate the history lesson that my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods did so that we understand how we've gotten here today. I know from my time serving on the bargaining committee of my own workplace before I was an MLA that one of the biggest advantages I found during that time was one of my work colleagues, who was also the shop steward over the course of about 25 years at that point and had attended probably the last – I can't even remember now – six or seven bargaining sessions at that time. It was very much interesting watching my first set of negotiations. The company would kind of try to say, "Well, this is what happened," and she would say: "No. I was there. I know what was discussed. I have my notes, and that's not correct." The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who just happened to serve during the NDP government as the labour minister, had to deal with the Supreme Court decisions around the right to strike.

Now all of a sudden you have workers who have never had an opportunity to be in a position to withdraw their labour in the event of a dispute. This was something that's never been explored by them because they were simply denied it. They had to figure out how this whole labour relations thing works; hence, the decision to put an expiry date on that legislation that was brought forward. It gave them the opportunity to start working with this process, figuring out how things work, how things don't, what you can do, what you can't. At the end of that term they could then have absolutely every freedom, just like every other worker had had for decades, around being able to choose their bargaining agent.

Now, I've always said that if the bargaining agent is doing their job, members will never want to leave. It's that simple. I'm not saying that I've never heard of members wanting to leave their union, because I certainly have. I've heard of it. I've heard of these people approaching the union that I was a part of, the UFCW. The first step, though, was to work with their union to try to figure out where their members feel they're dropping the ball. But the bottom line is that if that can't be resolved, you have the right to leave and to find another bargaining agent.

Now, if that happens, for any current contract language that you have, all bets are off. I absolutely understand that. I would certainly never recommend willy-nilly that somebody just go and do that, because you then place yourself potentially in a position of losing all of that that you've negotiated over however many years that's happened. That is the risk you take. It's a very significant risk. Members should never ever take that decision lightly, but they have the opportunity to do that.

Now, the language contained here in Bill 17 locks in that bargaining agent, period, for groups, as was mentioned – graduate student associations, postdoctoral associations, and labour relations committees – representing over 5,000 Alberta workers. I shouldn't have to lecture the labour minister on his duty to consult with these people. They're saying that you didn't. I can only come to one conclusion, then, Madam Chair, that someone's info on that subject is not entirely accurate. It's either that the student associations', the postdoctoral associations' info is not correct, or it's the labour minister's info that's not correct. It's one or the other. And seeing as how we've done our homework, we've talked to these associations, and they say that they were not consulted: pretty good chance, it sounds like they weren't. So you're making changes without their input. You're not doing your duty.

4:00

As you can imagine, I very much support this amendment because, in my experience, over these past decades, with regard to

labour relations, fighting for workers' rights to strike, to have good contract language, to choose their bargaining agent, if you pass this bill in this form, it will get challenged, and you'll lose. I'm telling you that right now. It will be challenged. You will lose, Minister.

Mr. Madu: No, we will not lose.

Mr. Nielsen: You will lose. I'm telling you that right now. I'm doing my best here to save you a whole bunch of aggravation, a whole bunch of time, and the province a bunch of money. We've seen too many of these kinds of decisions.

I'm sincerely hoping that the trip down memory lane from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and former labour minister, who dealt with this whole subject as it unfolded, and my comments, my experience dealing with language – we can get into a whole debate about language with the labour minister another time and my concerns with his. He'll change his mind. He'll reconsider accepting this amendment, and he'll urge his colleagues to do the same, because you cannot deny workers' right to choose their bargaining agent. It was a temporary measure to allow a sector that's never had the ability to do these things before to get their feet underneath them, to understand what's involved, how they need to proceed, the rules, all of that stuff. Now they get to do it just like everybody else does right now. Everybody else gets to choose their bargaining agent. You can't deny these folks the ability to do that because – I'm telling you, Minister – you're going to lose on that one.

I hope you'll reconsider. I really do because, as I said, Bill 17 as a whole: there's some good stuff in there, you know, with reservists. Certainly, we can have that discussion of whether I would've liked to have seen stronger language around women's reproductive rights and have the word "abortion" in there. Again, I don't know why I have to continue to lecture you about language being clear and concise, especially to somebody who's a lawyer. You should understand the importance of that. I would've liked to have seen stronger language. This is a little bit watered down, but let's not make the mistake with this labour relations side, because that's what it is. It's a mistake.

I look forward to hearing some other comments from other people as we go along.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to address my colleague's amendment that's on the floor and to follow my colleague from Edmonton-*Decore*, who has a long association with this work around labour relations and organizing. It's really interesting to hear his views.

I want to focus on a couple of things. I want to focus on the lack of consultation that I think my colleague here spoke to eloquently, and I want to focus on the unconstitutionality of the government's actions.

You know, we've heard – and I'm pretty incredulous that the minister hasn't heard the same things that we have – that the changes proposed in this bill are not supported by the individuals that will be impacted by the removal of the expiration date to the exclusive right of academic staff associations and graduate student and postdoctoral fellow associations to choose their own bargaining representatives, bargaining agents. That is what we've heard, and I can't think of groups like graduate students and postgraduate students, people who are in many ways in a precarious situation in any event – they're working in an institution where they fully hope to graduate from someday, and it would seem already that there's a power imbalance. Their employer and the faculty in that situation have the power, the deans have the power to grant higher degrees to these people, the

people who are working towards them. So I think that we need to respect and listen to and understand what their challenge is with not having the ability to find their own bargaining agent.

I can't understand why it's not understood that this was a temporary measure put in, not a permanent measure. It had a sunset date. It was very much our plan to remove it so that it aligned with the Supreme Court views. That's what it was put there for, to give, as my colleague said, some opportunity for a relatively new group of people who are bargaining, organizing, to give them time to put their feet under them before any kind of competitions for the right to bargain for that group were launched.

Certainly, it makes a lot of sense to me that we would bring this amendment forward. We've heard from those impacted by this change, as we have said repeatedly, that they were not consulted. It will put them in a lesser situation than they currently are in, and the fact that their employer organizations are allowed to form a collective to bargain is also something that causes tremendous pressure, potential harm to those bargaining groups of graduate students, postgraduate students, and faculty throughout the province.

I went to the picket lines of Lethbridge faculty – I didn't have to go far; it was in Calgary – and I've never seen faculty of a university picketing their university, their employer. I've never seen that in this province. But under this government we are seeing that now. We are seeing people – and it was 15 to 20 below. It was in January, February, and there were people freezing out on the picket line in Calgary against the University of Lethbridge because of the actions that that employer was taking against them. That's on this government.

Madam Chair, the changes proposed by the government are not fair. They will not be upheld, my colleague who has spent a lot more time in that situation than I have tells me. My other colleague here who has worked as a labour critic, worked as a labour minister says that what the current minister is doing will not stand up.

4:10

What we've heard is that we're talking about 5,000 student workers. That's just the graduate student associations or postdoctoral associations. We believe this to be a violation of their labour rights and freedom of association. We believe what we did was transitional, not absolute in terms of always existing, and what the government is doing is doing that. This bill and the way it's written suggest that the government knows best what these groups of graduate students, postdoctoral students, and faculty need, and we don't believe that to be true. This government is also taking the side of the institutions and allowing them something that they're not allowing these students, these groups of students, university graduates' associations, other associations.

How is that constitutional? Well, it's not. The RCMP challenged the federal government about their own ability to get their own bargaining agent, and they won with the federal government. Speaking of the RCMP, I met several of those individuals as they were touring across the province on their RCMP tours to inform Albertans about the bad ideas not uncoincidentally brought forward by the now minister of labour, who was then the Minister of Justice.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The RCMP have succeeded in their ability to reach out to Albertans, towns, municipalities, and the outcome of that is that there is no support across the province for a change in the direction that the now minister of labour, then the Minister of Justice, believed that Albertans wanted to move in. I'm just bringing that up because I think there's a pattern here. The pattern is that the government believes they're acting in the best interests, yet again they are wrong.

The information – and we don't have all the resources. The government does. There are 23 of us on this side. There are 60-some on that side. There's a government bureaucracy. There's a minister and a ministry. We hear from that side that they haven't got any of this information. They think everything is hunky-dory. "Just say yes," is their view. Well, no.

This amendment is the right thing. This amendment should be supported. The minister says that he's not heard anyone upset with this arrangement. Then he goes on to say to his caucus colleagues there: just defeat this; this is a bad amendment. You know, he doesn't provide any justification. He doesn't answer the questions that were posed. "Just vote it down. We have the numbers," essentially, he was saying. "We can vote this down. We can vote the next one down. We can vote the one after that down."

Remember, there are over 5,000 people that'll be affected by this. These workers across the province: they may not be watching now. They may be busy with their studies. They may be trying to get ahead, you know, to provide the capacity that this province needs in employees in the future. They may be wanting to teach at these institutions in the future. But they'll learn about it. They'll find out that yet again this government has sided against workers and is supporting or allowing the academic institutions to get together but not giving the same consideration to the organizations, the associations that don't want this.

I said I would talk briefly about the lack of constitutionality that these actions obviously indicate. I brought up the RCMP as an example of what they did to challenge the representation that the federal government was not allowing. I think more and more that if we support bills like this or parts of bills like this, we will be mowing over the rights of people in the workforce to find their own bargaining agent.

I was represented for eight years by CUPE local 38, inside workers, at the city of Calgary. We had that right to choose CUPE or not. We were very satisfied with the actions of our bargaining agent – and I still am friends with and see some of those people today – but they knew and I knew that if their actions went offside with the majority of the people that they represented, they could be replaced.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

You are taking away that right from a group of people, and they didn't ask for it. The minister hasn't stood up and said: yes, they want this; they want to never have the right to choose their own agent. It's not constitutional, it's not formed with the input of the people it's impacting, and it shouldn't be allowed in this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A2? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill in Committee of the Whole, Bill 17. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: All right. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's unfortunate that all of the members of the Official Opposition were voting for that amendment but it did not pass. I'm not surprised because I think the government in bringing forward the changes in Bill 17 was doing so deliberately and likely in full awareness of the lack of consultation, the unconstitutionality, and the unfairness in creating employer associations and not providing the same for workers, but it was important to me that we try and remove that section. Given that we were not able to remove that section, we will

have to proceed with talking about this section and potentially ways that we might be able to improve this section of the legislation.

Given that we now know that Bill 17, when finally voted on, will have the labour relations section as well as the employment standards section as well as both the reservists' leave and bereavement leave, Madam Chair, I wanted to make a request of you. Prior to the final vote on Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole I wanted to request that the votes on Bill 17's clauses be separated as follows: with sections 1(1) to 1(3) to be voted on as block A; sections 1(4) to 1(5) to be voted on as block B; section 2 to be voted on as block C. The reason is that the bill does deal with three separate issues: block A being reservists' leave, block B being bereavement leave due to loss of pregnancy, and block C on changes to the Labour Relations Code relating to postsecondary associations as bargaining agents. We did attempt to remove block C, which would have made Bill 17 more logically consistent, but that amendment has been defeated. So I make this request of you, Madam Chair.

4:20

The Chair: That would be agreeable with the chair.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

Now, as we continue to debate Bill 17, I think that to focus my remarks, I would like to introduce another amendment at this point, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the pages for your help, as always.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 2 as follows: (a) by renumbering the proposed section 58.2 as 58.2(1) and adding the following after the proposed section 58.2(1):

(2) Despite subsection (1) and unless the Lieutenant Governor in Council prescribes a later date, divisions 4 to 9 apply effective July 1, 2023.

(b) by striking out subsections (3) to (5).

Now, the key to this amendment, Madam Chair and to my colleagues here in the Chamber, is that date. Given that we were not able to remove this section from Bill 17 despite what I would suggest were excellent arguments made by the Official Opposition, I would like to propose, and I hope that the government might seriously consider, that instead of making the change permanent, we extend the deadline by another year, to July 1, 2023. The reason for this extension is that we've heard extremely clearly from a number of faculty associations but also essentially all of the graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations that we reached out to their lack of support for making the exclusive bargaining rights permanent, having those in indefinitely and impacting that freedom of association.

Now, I spoke earlier with the first amendment about the difference it makes when there is that deadline that will expire versus something that is permanent when it comes to something as restrictive as restricting workers' freedoms of association, which is a fundamental piece of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I put forward this amendment in good faith because I believe that if there are concerns, extending that deadline an additional year would allow faculty associations who feel that they are not prepared yet additional time to prepare to communicate to their members. Again, I would like to make the point that these academically employed students as well as academic staff do have the option to remain with their current associations even after exclusive bargaining rights have been removed.

I would suggest that leading to the removal of exclusive bargaining rights is the best labour relations solution. Giving this additional year would allow the minister more time to consult. There are 5,000 student workers whose representatives disagree. They disagree, and they say that you did not even ask them. Now, through the debate at Committee of the Whole I have asked the minister a number of times to speak to the consultation. While he has referenced some faculty associations, there are other faculty associations that I know I've spoken to who disagree with the changes in Bill 17. Again, we have not found a graduate student association or postdoctoral fellows association who says that this government consulted with them. I think that's incredibly concerning, and I think it would be incumbent on the minister to be on the record with who he consulted with and who is impacted by these changes.

Five thousand students who are working in an extreme power dynamic, as I described earlier – to be clear, these students are graduate students. They are postdoctoral fellows who are also workers while doing their studies. They often have a work dynamic that is different than the average worker, but that does not mean that they don't deserve the rights that all workers deserve under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Everyone that we have spoken to and consulted said that they want their rights, they want their freedoms to be honoured. The changes put in by the then NDP government in response to Supreme Court of Canada rulings were never intended to be permanent, full stop, because a permanent change would be in violation of these rights. I think that this amendment could be an important compromise. The minister spoke about stability. This would provide an additional year and, following that, allow these workers to have the freedom of association that, as I read into the record earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada said is critically important for employee choice and is an important "form of exercise of freedom of association... essential to the existence of employee organizations and to the maintenance of the confidence of members in them."

This amendment I put forward in good faith for debate with all members of this Legislature. I will repeat the request to the minister to disclose more about who he consulted with, with the particular focus on the graduate student associations and the postdoctoral fellow associations. If the answer is that he did not speak to these 5,000 workers impacted by this change, I think that is a shame. I think that's potentially a dereliction of his responsibility as the minister, but I also think that that would be a good reason to seriously consider this amendment and to allow the exclusive bargaining rights to remain in place for only a single year rather than indefinitely.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again, I think the point that I want to express here is somewhat similar to the point I expressed on the previous amendment. Effectively, this would defeat the purpose of Bill 17 with respect to postsecondary faculty associations' bargaining. This proposed amendment, as I look at it, would extend agent exclusivity until July 1, 2023, again providing a level of uncertainty that has existed for the last four years. This provision that we are seeking to amend now was put in place in 2017. These faculty associations have had to deal with this instability since 2017. Between 2017 and now we have not heard from anyone out there that they are concerned about the current arrangement. Have not heard.

As I said before, I have letters from some of the faculty associations thanking the department for putting Bill 17 forward.

The faculty associations: my department has been consulting and speaking and meeting with all of the relevant parties involved. I don't have a single letter or e-mail from anyone other than what the members opposite are saying.

It's important that we understand that this is customary of the NDP. I heard the Member for Calgary-Buffalo trying to compare the consultation with respect to the inquiry into whether or not a provincial police would be ideal at this point in time to this one. That member forgot to mention to this Assembly that their counterparts in B.C., in fact an all-party committee that is made up of the NDP and other political parties in B.C., have made the same recommendation to transition to a B.C. provincial police.

4:30

That really is the level of hyperpartisanship that we face with the NDP. Rather than focusing on the substance of the issue, they are more interested in pursuing their ideological pursuits. That's really what this amendment is all about. It's not about whether or not this Bill 17 will serve the best interests of our universities and postsecondary institutions. Those postdoctoral students, those graduate students are represented by their own associations, by themselves. They are the ones representing themselves. That is their own association. There is not a third-party association. There is not an external association. That is themselves representing their own interests.

This may be news to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but I have not heard, if that's what you're looking for, any concern, not one single letter, not one single e-mail. You know, Madam Chair, that amendment, again, is very ill conceived. While I thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and I accept that she is passionate about these issues and I am looking forward to working with her on this file, I am more interested in amendments that deal with the substance of the issues before us rather than ideological pursuits.

The current arrangement is working. It's been four years and not one single complaint, not one single concern other than the pursuit to have this opened up to create instability in our postsecondary institutions, something that our universities do not want. Listen, I know a lot of postsecondary, postgraduate, graduate students. A lot of them. I come from a community where many of us have two or three postgraduate degrees, a lot of them, one of the highest ratios in the world. I know so many of them: personal friends, family members, colleagues of mine, people with whom I interact on a daily basis in this city, in this province. I oftentimes would pass off ideas. I check in with them on some of the policy work that the government is doing to tell me how they feel about some of these things. I did not hear a single complaint. Not one.

Madam Chair, if we accept this amendment, it means that it will come to an end July 1, 2023, and after that time bargaining agent exclusivity would end and other unions could then seek the bargaining rights for the academic staff, postgraduate students, and postdoctoral fellows, contrary to the intention behind Bill 17. It would not permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations until July 1, 2023. A reminder that what they're seeking to extend right now is also part of the current changes that they brought in in 2017, that we are now seeking to make permanent. On that basis, you can tell that this amendment is only seeking to prevent this bill from proceeding, and therefore I would urge members of this Assembly to vote against it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question, through you, to the minister. You have mentioned talking to faculty associations,

and you've mentioned talking to personal family, friends, and connections who happen to be graduate students. Did you talk to any graduate student associations or any postdoctoral fellow associations who are today responsible for managing the labour relations environment and who, when I speak with them, say that they do not support Bill 17? Did you talk to any graduate student associations or postdoctoral fellow associations in bringing forward this change, which impacts them and roughly 5,000 students that they represent?

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The silence is deafening from the minister in response to that question. In all probability the response was what we've heard from grad students' associations and postdoctoral fellows' associations and most of the faculty associations, that the minister, in fact, did not consult with them, and that's the reason that the minister was unable to rise and name the individuals or the faculty associations, GSAs, or postdoctoral fellows' associations that he, in fact, claims to have met with in his consultations for Bill 17.

What we are attempting to do, Madam Chair, with the amendments we're bringing forward this afternoon are a number of things, but one in particular is that we're trying to offer the government an opportunity to save face. They have a horrific record in this province of labour relations; failures and disasters, starting off with the tearing up of a contract, a bona fide, legitimate contract, with the doctors in this province. That, in fact, began the demise of the relationship between this government and labour that didn't have to be that way, yet that was what they chose to do. They chose to go to battle with labour and attack labour.

In fact, this is what Bill 17 is attempting to do here by limiting the rights of the workers, in this case the academic workers, to choose their bargaining agent. That's the fundamental question that we're debating here this afternoon. Does the government believe that a union, a faculty association, or workers have the right to choose their own bargaining agent or not? In other words, do they support what is constitutionally guaranteed to workers in this country, or do they not? Are they seeking ways to oppose it?

It's a very simple question that the debate is revolving around, Madam Chair. The minister claims indeed that he is attempting to salvage the rights of workers when, in fact, what the bill will do is permanently limit their ability to choose their bargaining agent, which we, of course, claim, I think with strong legal opinion behind it, will be ultimately found to be unconstitutional if indeed the bill passes without being amended to strike that element of it.

I think the government would be well served if indeed they accepted this opportunity to really save face and to try to re-establish trust in some small ways, at least with the workers in this province, by showing a level of respect for basic, fundamental workers' rights such as the right to choose who your own bargaining agent might be. That's a very simple and clear element of labour relations and labour law, and our Charter of Rights in this country, Madam Chair, is something that shouldn't be a matter of dancing around by the government on labour legislation that they bring forward, this Labour Statutes Amendment Act.

The amendment we're bringing forward gives the government a chance to reset the clock on its actual consultations and come back in a year from now, perhaps, and say that they've actually done the consultations. Give another year for this status quo to remain, and then perhaps the grad students' associations, the postdoctoral fellows' associations, more of the faculty associations will actually be able to properly be consulted and express their distaste and

displeasure for the minister's desire to permanently lock them into the agents that they have right now bargaining for them, the self-representation, rather than giving them the opportunity to choose their own bargaining agent, as is a right guaranteed under our Charter.

Madam Chair, I think that, fundamentally, the minister knows in his heart that this is the right thing to do, and perhaps he may feel that the opportunity to perhaps move forward with this amendment by moving the date to July 2023 for the expiration of the status quo would be a way to perhaps heal some wounds that the minister is creating, I feel, by claiming that adequate consultation or any consultation at all took place with significant members of the 5,000 student workers who, in most cases, disagree that the government should be moving forward with making this bargaining agent permanent, the self-agency situation permanent.

4:40

The minister is saying that this is what the association has wanted. In fact, they are saying very clearly that, no, this is not what they want. They are saying very clearly: no. The opposition was the first to actually consult with them, save for some of the faculty associations that the minister says that he spoke with. It's a clear case, Madam Chair, of the minister claiming to have made consultations, but we have evidence, names of people willing to come forward and willing to publicly state that they were not consulted.

Be that as it may, I wish the minister would maybe take this opportunity to perhaps reload and talk to folks in a way that one would expect a minister would speak to the representation of over 5,000 students, academic student workers, in the province of Alberta, who are astonished that indeed the government is trying to move forward with legislation that would cement their agency to one choice – that is, the existing status quo, the self-representation – and deny them the right that the Charter actually guarantees them, to choose their own agents.

In fact, I believe that it's a worthwhile opportunity for the minister to relent on his plunging forward with this measure, that is not supported by the academic students who he claims to have met with, and it's something that will offer an opportunity for the government to take at least one small step in bringing forward a renewed relationship between groups of workers in this province and their organized labour representatives.

Hopefully, in an effort to re-establish trust and begin to build some relationships that are healthy in this province between government and organized labour and labour that is looking to seek to be represented, the minister will reset the clock on this element of the legislation so that in 2023, perhaps in the fullness of time, the government of the day will be able to sit down and properly speak with the grad students' associations and with the faculty associations and the postdoctoral fellows' associations and understand completely what their wishes are.

They're certainly expressing to us, Madam Chair, that they do not want to be force-fed what the minister is feeding. They do not want to be limited to the representation that they have right now, and the original intention, of course, when the former NDP government brought this legislation in, was to make it a temporary solution to allow the academic workers to sort out the various options that existed for them, and it took some time to do that. Not only that; many of these students are transitory. They're here for a short time, and the population changes over time very quickly. It's incumbent upon us to recognize that we're asking these academic workers to involve themselves in choosing very complex representation options and to hear out the various different parties that may wish to be competing to represent them.

It's a process that, you know, over the course of the five years prior to the expiration that was initially contemplated in July of this year, one would have hoped could have occurred and that the grad students, these academic workers, would have been in a position in July of this year to actually choose their bargaining agent and allow the government to meet the Charter right compliance that one would expect a labour minister to hope to achieve. Instead, what the government is doing is looking to cement in the one status quo option as if it had been intended to be a permanent solution, where it was not, and deny these workers their Charter right to actually choose the agent who would represent them in ongoing labour negotiations.

The amendment that we brought forward I believe is a reasonable one, and I encourage all members to support it. It allows the government to begin building some bridges with labour in this province, with workers, to show that indeed they respect the fundamental elements of the Charter rights that workers have, of course the right to strike and this right to associate freely with whom they choose. That would be allowing them to choose the bargaining agent of their choice.

The amendment before us gives a bit more time for the government to reset and rethink and perhaps re-establish a relationship with the workers that are involved in this legislation, that being the academic student workers in various institutions right throughout the province. It's a message that the minister of labour should hope to be sending to all Alberta workers and the general population, that Albertans who are engaged in work, which all of us hope to be, are respected by this government. Indeed, it's not reflected in the legislation that's been brought forward by this government with respect to Bill 17.

Certainly, the first move that they made right out of the gate after being elected in 2019 was to tear up a contract with the doctors, a legitimate, bona fide contract with the doctors of this province. One would hope that they have seen the folly of that move and that Alberta's workers and the whole population were shocked with that move. Hopefully, the government has learned from that that there is a respect amongst the population of Alberta workers and in general that workers have rights and that we respect them and that we respect those rights that are enshrined in the Constitution and in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We really will be demanding of our government, no matter what stripe, that they stand up for those rights and protect them and respect them and not bring forward legislation that denies or attempts to chisel away at those rights by creating elements of legislation that will certainly trigger a challenge to the Charter.

The minister does not believe that it may be triggered, but he also claims that he would win such a challenge. I respectfully disagree with the minister on that point. Don't take my opinion for it, but there are certainly legal minds that have advised us that indeed a challenge of this element of the legislation would be one that would not survive in the Supreme Court of Canada.

I hope that indeed the minister takes the opportunity. I think that there have been some opportunities afforded to the minister in the past where he's decided to alter his thinking in certain ways, and this perhaps will be one of them. I believe that he's got an open mind to a good argument, and I think that we're making one on this side of the House. There is an opportunity for the minister to say: yup, indeed, let's reset the clock on this, and let's do all the talking we need to do with the academic grad students who are affected by this and make sure that we're not offending 5,000 people and not diminishing their rights as workers. That's, I think, the bare minimum that we should be able to ask of the minister of labour in setting labour legislation, particularly as it surrounds the

fundamental rights of workers and their ability to associate and choose their own bargaining agent.

4:50

That precedent that's being set by the minister's wish to not allow the academic students to make their own choice once the expiration date happens on July 31 of this year, if indeed this amendment doesn't pass, is really very regrettable, and it's not something that would be taken very lightly by organized and regular workers in the province because it's a threat. It's an open threat to organized labour when the minister decides that he will implement pieces of legislation that were perhaps purposely designed to be subject to a Charter challenge and make an effort to chisel away at rights that are sacrosanct in this country to working people and ones that won't be abridged without a large, large amount of anger in the labour movement. It's so unnecessary, absolutely unnecessary.

The minister can circumvent all of that acrimony and build some bridges by accepting this amendment and moving the date forward to July 1, 2023, and reset the clock with his consultations and make sure that all of the academic students and the associations are satisfied with the discussions they've had with the minister, and I think after that consultation it'll be absolutely clear to the minister that the position that should be taken by the government is to go forward and allow the academic workers who are students to choose their own bargaining agents. We hope the minister takes this opportunity to re-establish trust or attempt to re-establish a small measure of trust with working people in this province, build some bridges and allow them to look at the past at some of the things that they've done such as tearing up doctors' contracts and perhaps realize that that was a huge mistake and maybe move in the other direction.

Having an opportunity to gain the respect of workers in some small measure by adopting this amendment is something that would go a long ways to perhaps turning the corner in the reputation this government has with working people. So, with that, I think I'll conclude my remarks and allow others to add to the debate.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I just wanted to quickly respond to the comment made by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Let me begin, obviously, by thanking him for his contributions to this debate. You know, other than the period that I left the provincial government to establish my law firm, I have spent my entire life working. I have been a worker all of my life, and I had the privilege of working for the very department that I now lead as the Minister of Labour and Immigration years ago, the department that I am acutely aware, profoundly aware of the work that they do. In fact, many of the folks that still work in that department continue to be personal friends of mine.

I spent my entire life in public service advocating for the rights of workers. I began with the provincial government as an employment standards officer. To the members opposite: sometimes you guys think that those of us over here, you know, came from some alien country. We are grounded. We know what it feels like to be employees and workers because many of us here have spent our entire lives either as workers or employers or creating employment opportunities for workers, making sure that we build an environment for everyone. I went on to a senior policy role that oversaw many of the policies in this department that I now lead. So to the Member for Edmonton-McClung: rest assured that I am fully aware of the need to make sure that we have a legislative environment that serves the interests of workers and, yes,

employers because we can't separate those two. Employees need employers. Employers need employees. We have to carry that along at all times. We have to think about them at all times.

But coming back to the amendment before us, as I said before, I know a lot of postgraduate students. I know a lot of postdoctoral fellows. A lot of them. And we have not received – again, I want to put that on the record. This bill was introduced a couple of weeks ago. I have read it. I have searched online content to see the reporting on this particular issue. I am yet to see any reporting that reflects the argument that the members opposite are making on this amendment. I have not received a single – let me confirm that again: a single – e-mail or letter on this particular issue. We are here to solve problems; we are not here to create problems where there are no problems. That is what our constituents expect of us. There is no need to upset something that is working or create more uncertainty in the system. That's why we are here.

So again to the Member for Edmonton-McClung: I thank you for your contributions, but again I urge you, I urge members opposite to focus on the problems, where there is one, so that we can see an amendment – and, yes, I am open to amendment where I see that there are real concerns. I am not interested in an ideological fight. Not interested. I am interested in solving problems . . .

Ms Hoffman: This is a problem.

Mr. Madu: . . . and there is no problem here because the people that – you are making up a problem that doesn't exist, to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that's what, you know, is so disappointing about some of this debate on this amendment.

When you guys make complaints that you want to work in a collaborative manner, guess what? It is a two-way relationship. I call it a symbiotic kind of relationship. It has to make sense. It has to be substantive. It can't just be ideological politics on your part all the time. There is no problem. I have not heard from those faculty associations or those postdocs. If you have any letter to that effect, I want to see it, and I bet you don't have any. I bet you don't have any because I have not heard. It has been more than two weeks that it's been out there. Not one letter. Not one e-mail. Not one negative report on this bill. Why oppose it for the sake of opposing it? Did the faculty association – this association represents the same members that you are talking about. The same members that you're talking about. That is what is so disappointing about this.

So, again, Madam Chair, I urge all members to vote against this amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll take this opportunity to remind all members to speak through the chair. Using words like "you" is probably not helpful in the debate.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 17. I was certainly hopeful when the minister stood up that he would answer some of the questions, the actual questions, that we asked, as opposed to, you know, the job history. The question was: who was consulted other than – you know, the minister noted that he has a number of friends and colleagues that are postdoctoral students, or postdocs, as we are calling them, but that wasn't the question, "How many people do you know that are postdocs?" The question was: who was consulted? Put it on the record. Table it. If indeed the work was done and the consultation was transparent and it was done in a way that you can guarantee that you have talked to all of the folks that this legislation would impact and you know how they feel about this and you're crystal clear, then table it for this House.

The Chair: Hon. member – sorry – I hesitate to interrupt. I just reminded all members that using words like "you" in this Chamber is not helpful and definitely not directing comments through the chair.

5:00

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In any event, I think that probably there are many of us that do know postdoctoral students, but that doesn't mean that we've consulted. In fact, it is not our job, Madam Chair, to consult on this legislation and to make sure that it is, you know, done correctly or is drafted correctly or it's actually solving the problem it sets out to solve. That is the job of the drafter of the legislation. The problem is, the concern is, that we've said over and over again, that we don't see that, and the people that we have contacted don't agree with the government. So I would suggest that this amendment would allow additional time.

Strangely enough, my son, who – I don't know if he's watching right now; it's past midnight in the U.K. He's a postdoctoral fellow. Hi, honey, if you're watching. Consulting him, my texting with him or chatting with him thanks to technology, doesn't mean that I consulted. It just means that I chatted with him. It does not mean consultation. But, you know, the minister does know how to pick up the phone, apparently. Why not pick up the phone and consult with these associations? They have some concerns.

What I do know about this small group is that this is a group – and it is a small group now. It's 5,000 for all of the associations. But I want to talk specifically about – sorry. I've lost my notes here. I'm getting a little disorganized.

This particular group of postdocs is a very transient group, as the Member for Edmonton-McClung noted. Typically this group – and I'm sure the minister knows this. They don't stick around for more than a couple of years. Weirdly enough, my son has been a postdoctoral fellow twice and a postdoctoral student once. I won't get into that. This is a group that doesn't earn a lot. I'm sure the minister knows this. Universities set some minimum standards, I believe. I think that the University of Alberta is probably somewhere around – like, \$35,000 is the minimum. It's difficult. It's a rough life. You know, there's a lot of confusion. Are they staff? Are they researchers? Are they students? There's a lot of confusion there. It is difficult. They're very often trying to make ends meet, often having to get their parents to help them out, but that is the life of a postdoctoral fellow or student. In any event, this is a group that should be consulted. This is a group that doesn't have a lot of power – let's just agree on that – and should be consulted.

Given that confusion, I want to go back to why we're saying that adding some time via this amendment is a good idea. We know that in July 2022 it will expire, and there is a reason that we want this to continue. I am not a lawyer obviously, so I actually went and looked at the – well, it's actually the summary of the lawsuit that we were talking about. I would have liked to hear from the minister, who is a lawyer – he gave us some of his job history – to tell us that he can pretty much assure this House that there won't be a challenge to this legislation, that it won't be a problem, because the people that we have spoken to have said: yes, it will be a problem.

Anyway, I want to summarize a little bit, and here are some of the facts. The Mounted Police Association of Ontario versus Canada (Attorney General): the Supreme Court of Canada made a major pronouncement on the scope of the section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2(d), freedom of association. Now, the RCMP had previously been excluded from unionizing and collective bargaining rights available to other public service employees. And then there was a piece of federal legislation that was referenced, but we don't need to get into that.

Instead, the RCMP members, very much like the association for postdoctoral students or other student associations, have a staff relations representative program for employee representation to voice concerns, things like that. Now, this forum does not provide a forum to raise some issues such as wage issues. It lacked independence, and it was the only employee association recognized by management. Now, they did note that it somewhat resembled a union in form as there were membership dues. They had the ability to lobby government, and of course they had the ability to assist and support members if there were disciplinary issues. However, it ended there. It was not a forum for collective bargaining with the employer. Some of the members opposing it went on to say that they weren't elected.

Now, the problem is that it infringes on the freedom of association and can't be justified under section 1 of the Charter. It seems to me that that's a problem, so if the minister is so confident that not endorsing this amendment or letting the legislation proceed as it is won't be challenged, that it won't be a problem, then perhaps he should reassure this House, maybe table some evidence, table some opinion from other lawyers other than just giving us an opinion or assuring us that he's called some friends and everything's cool, because I don't think that's good enough.

I do think that these changes will effectively stop the work – scratch that. Let me back up a little bit. I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I've lost my place.

I did not do any consultation other than texting with one person, which is absolutely in no way any form of consultation, but some of my colleagues have. What we have heard from the workers is that no one with a major university graduate students' association or postdoctoral association, including their labour relations committees, was consulted. Now, it seems to me that that is a problem given that they represent 5,000 student workers. Part of the reason I talked about some of the things that I'd heard from one postdoctoral fellow is that I think that these are folks with not a lot of power and not a lot of agency and not a big voice, particularly given the number. I mean, 5,000 is a big number, but it's not a big number when you look at the scope of the fields that they represent, so I think this is a group that needs to be consulted.

Associations are being put in a precarious position when the decisions being made on behalf of the workers are not done by the workers, and this bill suggests, as it is, that the government knows best who should represent academically employed workers. As usual, one of the concerns that we have – and we heard this repeatedly. This was a theme this morning, that it's unnecessary oversight by a government that undermines the autonomy of a sector. Obviously, this bill removes the right of workers to choose who represents them. By not allowing this to expire and then giving these groups other choices, this government is dictating what they have to do.

Major faculty associations in the province do not support the changes in Bill 17. Now, if the minister has proof that this is not the case and if he's done more than pick up the phone and call a few friends and if there is documentation that there are faculty associations in Alberta that do support the changes in Bill 17, then he should table those with this House. Demonstrate the consultation. Earlier this morning we talked about: what is consultation? Consultation is not picking up the phone and talking to a friendly. Consultation is not talking to a lobbyist. Consultation is not just talking to someone who you're fairly confident is going to agree with you. Consultation is about being very clear and objective. What are you consulting? What problem are you trying to address? Who are the stakeholders? Did you speak to people that, you know, may disagree with you in addition to people that agree

with you? It's about transparency and about being very clear about the work that you've done.

You know, Madam Chair, why I do support this amendment is that I don't believe, once again, that the UCP government has done that particularly with Bill 17. I think that by supporting this amendment, we would allow more time and perhaps the government to do their job and consult.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to quickly rise because I was intrigued by one of the comments from the minister around just solving a problem. Great. Let's solve a problem. Hopefully, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, maybe I can get some confirmation around some language in Bill 17 – a head nod will suffice, very much so – that the language as currently written in Bill 17 locks in the bargaining agent for all of these individuals and associations. You can't change it. They can't go anywhere else. These are who they get, and that's the end of it. Am I on the right track with that? Hopefully. The bargaining agent that currently exists right now: that's locked in; that's the way it is. Not really getting a response.

5:10

Hopefully, the minister will take that for what it's actually worth, because as we know, everything started around this in January 2015 due to a decision by the Supreme Court to affirm the constitutional rights of all workers in Canada to join a union of their own choosing and engage in meaningful collective bargaining, which is all fine and dandy.

Now, here's the part. Because the bargaining agent is locked in and they can no longer choose to go somewhere else – if that was the case, here's the problem, Minister. In a 6 to 1 decision the court expressly states that the right to freedom of association, section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, includes a right to meaningful collective bargaining. The judges write:

We conclude that the [section] 2(d) guarantee of freedom of association protects [the] meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests.

If you're locking in the bargaining agent, that is not a degree of choice and independence. You've just violated that, hence why I said that this will get challenged and you'll end up losing.

Again, here I'm trying to say that supporting the amendment buys you some time – confirm all of this; check with the associations, all that jazz – and potentially saves you a whole bunch of headaches. Hopefully, the minister will reconsider after hearing that and save himself a lot of headaches, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A3.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Hoffman	Nielsen
Dach	Irwin	Renaud
Gray		

Against the motion:

Fir	Madu	Singh
Frey	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Getson	Panda	Stephan
Glubish	Pon	Toor
Horner	Rosin	Turton
Hunter	Savage	Walker
Issik	Schow	Wilson
Jones	Schweitzer	Yao
LaGrange	Shandro	Yaseen
Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.	
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 29

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 17, in Committee of the Whole, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. It's unfortunate that the previous amendment was not successful.

Ms Hoffman: We're getting closer, though.

Ms Gray: I can hear that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is quite hopeful. The third time is the charm, perhaps. With that in mind, I will just begin my remarks by saying that I will introduce a third amendment, and then I will continue from there.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 2(2) in the proposed section 58.2 by striking out "Divisions 5 to 9" and substituting "Divisions 4 to 9."

Now, in response to the second amendment that I've introduced so far on the labour statutes amendment portion of Bill 17, the minister suggested that rather than changing what he considers the intent of the bill – I disagree. I think the previous amendments were an attempt to make something that is unconstitutional constitutional, to respect the rights of workers to be able to have choice and that fundamental freedom of association.

This amendment perhaps will be able to secure his support. Although we've heard from labour relations committee members and executives who have opposed Bill 17, what this amendment serves to do is ensure that if the government is insisting on preventing workers from exercising their rights for freedom of choice and assembly, balance is maintained in the system by preventing employers from joining together to bargain collectively against small worker associations that do not have the same rights.

Now, there are some worker associations as small as 40. This becomes very much about balance of power. You may recall from debate on some of the previous amendments that I've spoken at length about the graduate student associations and the postdoctoral fellow associations, who are operating under an extreme power imbalance, the dynamics there.

5:20

Keep in mind that these are academically employed students. They are workers, they have rights, but they are also studying, some for one to two to maybe four years. The membership of the graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations can be small, depending on who their employer is, and it can be frequently changing. What this speaks to, specifically, is one of the questions that I asked earlier in the debate, which I have not heard the minister

respond to, which has to do with this Bill 17 allowing the employers to form employer organizations, yet there is no option for that for the workers.

This particular amendment won't fix everything in section 2 – that's something that we would have to do upon change of government – but it does at least make the section a little less bad. For the record even faculty associations who like the idea of having exclusive bargaining agent status have said to us that this section is something that they do not support, employers being able to form large employer organizations whereas the workers' associations will be only able to bargain for themselves and not to collaborate.

There is a serious disparity, and they wonder why the minister, from their perspective, is seeking to take power away from the workers and give more power to the employers. That is why this amendment has been put forward in consultation with graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations. I think it's been fairly clear from the debate this afternoon that the minister has not consulted with the graduate student associations, the postdoctoral fellow associations. We've asked that question a number of times, trying to tease that out. While he has talked to some academic staff, some faculty associations, it certainly wouldn't have been all of them given the number who've reached out to us with concerns.

I've put forward this amendment, the fourth amendment to Bill 17, the third amendment to the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, seeking to prevent the balance of power from really tilting fully out of whack, and I look forward to debate on this particular amendment and our attempt to improve Bill 17 just a little bit.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I think that if you are looking for a good example of a pursuit that is purely based on philosophical underpinnings, this is one of those classical examples. I mean, I fully understand where you are coming from, but you are saying that . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but please speak through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Absolutely, Madam Chair.

You know, we are talking about how this amendment would effectively prevent the establishment of employer organizations, and you ask yourself: why would the members opposite be interested in preventing employers from establishing an organization? There is an association that is representing the interests of employees. What is it about that? Obviously, I would not support this because the members opposite have not advanced any substantive reasons, under the context of bargaining and the relationship between employers and employees and in the context of Bill 17 and in the context of the labour environment, why it is a bad thing to have employer organizations.

To be clear, division 4, which is really what this amendment is all about, deals with capacity of employers' organizations. Section 30 of the Labour Relations Code reads as follows:

- 30(1) For the purposes of this Act, an employers' organization is capable of
- (a) prosecuting and being prosecuted, and
 - (b) suing and being sued.
- (2) An employers' organization and its acts are not unlawful by reason only that one or more of its objects are in restraint of trade to the extent that those objects are necessary for carrying out its duties under this Act.

Then you have section 31. You have section 30 and section 31, that make up division 4, that is the subject of this amendment.

Section 31 deals with suspension or expulsion from employers' organizations.

Again, the essence of this amendment: it would allow, obviously, academic staff, postgraduate student, and postdoctoral fellow associations to maintain the bargaining agent exclusivity. That's not an issue. This amendment preserves that. But then it would not permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations. That is the crux of this amendment, and I don't think that it is appropriate under the circumstances. I would urge members to vote against the amendment.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to be crystal clear in reading this bill and now in addressing the amendment to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What the government is in the process of creating through their movement of this bill is an uneven playing field. They are creating conditions upon which they can determine who employees are represented by, and they have, through this bill, created a mechanism for employers to choose to band together, if they so choose, so that employers have the ability to become one large bargaining association, essentially, on the other side of the table, but employees don't.

Simply, what we're trying to do here through this amendment is create more balance. Having been on both sides of the bargaining table – I had to think about that for a second – most recently on the employer side but also having experienced bargaining as an employee, I can tell you that when you actually have balance in terms of the kind of resources you can bring to the table, the number of people you can bring to the table, and the ability to hire outside counsel to support you in your negotiations, you get the best agreements when both sides of the table are relatively in balance.

One of the biggest concerns that has been brought forward to us – and I'm not shocked. I will take the minister at his word, through you, Madam Chair, when he says: I haven't received correspondence about this. I am not shocked when a bill introduced in the final days of the session for most instructors and right before spring session starts for most instructors – this is a busy time of transition for a lot of people working who are graduate students or postdoctoral fellowship students. This is a busy time of year. I'm not surprised that the bill doesn't even mention postsecondary in the title. It's referring to the Labour Statutes Amendment Act. Of course, it touches on a number of different pieces that relate to a number of different types of employee organizations. But I will take the minister at his word, and if what he said isn't accurate, then I certainly would appreciate it if he could correct the record in this House at the earliest possible convenience.

He says that he has received no correspondence at all as it relates to this bill and the questions that have been raised. I will tell you, through you, Madam Chair, that when we have picked up the phone – and I know the minister knows how to pick up the phone. It is well documented; it is in the news. When the minister wants to, he can pick up the phone, he can make a call, and he can talk to somebody about an issue that he wants to give feedback on or get feedback on. That is very well documented in the news. So when we picked up the phone and reached out to graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellowship associations – thank you to my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the fantastic staff in the NDP who support her. When we picked up the phone, universally the employee side of the table said that they had grave concerns about this section, that they wanted it out, that they didn't think that it was fair, it wasn't going to create balance, and that they

wanted some – you know, if they could only make one change, this would be the one. They would like to make other changes, too, but the biggest issue is the innate embedding of imbalance between the two sides of the table.

5:30

So we are calling upon the government – and I've been there, when an amendment comes forward and you think: oh, it actually sounds like this might be helpful. There was a time where we actually voted against an amendment, and then later that night I was, like, "I don't know if we did the right thing," and we actually brought the legislation back to committee so that we could amend the amendment. We brought the bill back to committee so that we could bring forward a very similar amendment.

Don't do that. That's too much work. If you're not sure if you're doing the right thing on this, I'd say that you can absolutely move that we adjourn at this section. You can think about it tonight. You can come back and accept the amendment, because I will say that this is about creating fairness and balance in the legislation. That's the intent.

This is the biggest issue that, when we did pick up the phone and speak to a number of different graduate associations, postdoctoral fellowship associations, they highlighted as their number one concern. We think there are other issues in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act as well. You know, clearly, the government doesn't want to address those. After the next election we'll see how things roll, but I imagine we will be in a position in this Legislature that folks can maybe come to the table and bring forward some solutions to the issues that have been seen, Madam Chair, through you, in this piece of legislation.

The biggest one today that I would urge the government to, honestly, like, pull out the earplugs on, pick up the phone, talk to people and make sure that the righteousness that we've heard is actually reflective of the reality that employees, who are incredibly busy during this time of the year – I am confident that they will answer the minister's call if the minister or political staff from the minister's office reaches out and wants genuine feedback about this section.

I have heard the minister say that, you know, he's been an employee and a worker, and I appreciate that. I am confident that he, then, understands the importance of having balance on both sides of the table. To actually be able to bring forward problems and get to the point of resolution, both sides need to show respect and have balance in terms of the power dynamic. Because the government has decided that they're going to determine who it is that represents employees, this is one way to say: well, at least employers will have to represent themselves on a smaller scale. They won't be able to all band together because employees won't have that option in the way the bill is being presented currently. So it really is an intention to create balance. Again, you know, a number of people, everyone we reached out to, all said that this was probably the area of the bill that was so heavy handed in favour of one side of the table over the other. This is one way to create a little bit of balance.

I honestly and sincerely call upon the government. If they're not willing to make a decision on this right now – the easiest decision one can make is to say no. But if you actually think, "You know what? Maybe we should make a couple of calls, and we should see where they stand," and you come back to this place and stand by the statements that were made earlier, that nobody has a problem with this and the only people who have a problem are the NDP – well, first of all, that's not what the actual people this bill is going to impact have told us. There are probably staff watching this debate right now who, if the minister passes a note or, you know, sends a

message, could absolutely make these calls while this bill is still up for debate in committee rather than making a decision that will be very difficult to undo later on.

It can still be undone. Certainly, whatever government happens to be here after the next election can bring forward a variety of pieces of bills, as the current Premier highlighted through his first session. When we were all here that first summer, he definitely brought forward a number of omnibus bills and a number of bills to undo work that previous governments had done, and that can absolutely be done again. I suspect many pieces will be in short order, but this is one that I don't think the government needs to move forward on. I don't think that it actually gets them any significant benefit as it relates to this section. I don't think that there is any benefit in this section other than the heavy-handedness that is moving forward with creating a significant imbalance between the employee and employer sides.

Again, through you, Madam Chair – I appreciate that you've cautioned folks to keep the debate through the chair, and certainly that's my intention – I urge the political staff to the minister to actually pick up the phone. We know they can do it. Give these organizations some calls, and then come back to this place and accept this amendment. It's not a big one, but it is something that universally we were told would create better balance between the two sides of the table, and it's something that I think the minister would be wise to accept. It really is something that I think will address some of the biggest issues that have been highlighted for us as they relate to this bill.

There is a significant trust issue between a lot of these stakeholders and the current government. I know that this is only one minister that these stakeholders work with, but this minister has a chance to set the path on a better direction. This is one of the interesting things. When there's a change in who the minister is, you can re-examine some of the past decisions and undo it. For example, the current Minister of Justice has worked very quickly to undo some decisions that the previous Minister of Justice brought in around traffic court – right? – and was very proud to stand in this place and say: we're undoing that; we're not going to move forward with charging people a hundred bucks to be able to argue their traffic tickets. And I will say that the minister of labour also has an opportunity to say: "You know what? Some of the direction that the last minister took didn't serve Albertans well." It's a new minister. It's a new day. Let's try to repair the relationship. That's definitely what the Minister of Justice has signalled on a number of fronts that he's trying to do as the new Minister of Justice. There's certainly an opportunity for the minister of labour to follow the lead of the minister that is so closely aligned with the Premier and is clearly doing that.

I hope that the current minister of labour takes this amendment and the feedback that we gathered through consultation, picking up the phone and talking to stakeholders, and carries it out in a way that I think would benefit democracy and make this part of the bill a little bit less bad. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to debate? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to quickly respond to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. You know, I am absolutely committed to the well-being of our postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows that work in our great postsecondary institutions – absolutely committed – because I very much relate with those students who work in those environments. When my wife was doing her master's in law at the U of A, she was the vice-president of academics of one of those grad student associations, and as I said before, I have so many personal friends of mine, relatives who are in this country, in this province pursuing

their graduate and postdoctoral studies. This is a group of individuals that I would want to do everything I can to make sure that there is fairness in their work environment, in their academic pursuits, and in their relationship with their universities. I think that is a shared goal of all of us.

What I reject, Madam Chair, is to impute imaginary problems where there is no problem. As I said before, we are called upon to solve real problems, not to imagine problems that do not exist. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora talks about fairness and levelling the ground and power imbalance. I don't see that in this bill. We are talking about a group of individuals that have an association that would negotiate and bargain on their behalf that is made up of themselves. The problem here, I suspect, that the members opposite have with this bill and the reason for that particular amendment – and don't get me wrong. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods: I have enormous respect for her. You know, I quarrel with the members opposite, but where I can find an opportunity to work together, we will – I can assure you that – because it is the right thing to do. My one appeal is – I understand that oftentimes there are ideological differences; I get that – that we must choose our battle in a way that serves the best interests of the people that we are advocating for.

5:40

On this one – on this one – I am acutely aware of the implications of Bill 17 on those folks. I don't see how having an employer organization – and I've read division 4. I've read sections 30 and 31 into the record. I don't see how that would all of a sudden create this massive power imbalance that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is talking about. It doesn't exist. We are not here to pursue imaginary problems that do not exist; we are here to solve real problems. I just wanted to put that on the record, Madam Chair.

I think, you know, we see this, and I was one of those who were watching carefully between 2015 and 2019 in this province, where we saw a lot of disruptions in our economy, in the largest sector of our economy, where there was so much confusion and antibusiness culture, an environment that led investors to withhold billions, hundreds of billions of dollars in investment, because they did not have faith that the government of the day had created a steady environment for businesses to do what they know how to do best. You know, the law firm I used to manage not too far away from here: we had so many start-up companies disappear between 2015 and 2019 that were doing so well prior to the members opposite forming government in 2015; one of the reasons that led me into politics, because as a business lawyer I was having conversations with my clients, taking a look at their financials, and they were closing shops after shops. Why? They would tell you one thing: we don't trust that the government of the day understands what it means to build an environment and society for everyone to do well.

So I urge members opposite, you know, to think hard about how our policies – they may be well intentioned. I'm not going to impute bad faith here. They may be well intentioned, but we must have the capacity to think them through on the other side. Those disruptions between 2015 and '19 that led hundreds of billions of dollars to flee our province prevented employers from making investments in our country, had real-life consequences on the economy of this province and, by extension, on the financials of our small businesses and the bank accounts of ordinary citizens. They do have ripple effects, and unless you're able to track those ripple effects, you ignore them.

When it comes to employees and employers, these are people that we must think about every single day as we do our work. We must think about employers and small businesses. We must think about employees and how we can make sure that they do well in the

workplace, keep them safe so they can go back to their families and loved ones at the end of the day. You can't adopt an approach that sees one as an enemy or sees one as a problem.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

You know, I have sat here for some time now. I have been keeping track of some of the adjectives that the members opposite use to describe employers and businesses. If you are a small business like myself that used to run a small law firm, I was pretty much disappointed between 2015 and 2019 any time I tuned into the Assembly and listened to how they refer to, describe small businesses and employers. You would think that these people must have come from somewhere.

That is a problem that I have with the submissions of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, not so much the amendment that's been put forward. It's well intentioned. But the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you know, is trying to impute problems that do not exist, and on that particular basis, Madam Chair, I will call on members of this Assembly to vote down this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Gray	Renaud
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Amery	Madu	Singh
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Frey	Panda	Stephan
Getson	Pon	Toor
Glubish	Rosin	Turton
Horner	Savage	Walker
Hunter	Schow	Wilson
Issik	Schweitzer	Yao
Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.	Yaseen
Lovely		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 28
---------	---------	--------------

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Any members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question. Hon. members, as you might recall, there has been a request to vote in sections on this bill. That request has been granted. We will vote on block A, block B, and block C. Block A is sections 1(1) to 1(3), block B is sections 1(4) to 1(5), and block C is section 2.

5:50

Hon. members, on the clauses on Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block A, sections 1(1) to 1(3), are you agreed?

[Sections 1(1) to 1(3) of Bill 17 agreed to]

The Chair: On the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block B, sections 1(4) and 1(5) as amended, are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that sections 1(4) and 1(5) of Bill 17 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Issik	Schweitzer
Ceci	Jones	Shepherd
Dach	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
Deol	Madu	Singh
Fir	Nielsen	Smith
Frey	Nixon, Jason	Stephan
Getson	Panda	Toor
Glubish	Pon	Turton
Gray	Renaud	Walker
Hoffman	Rosin	Wilson
Horner	Savage	Yao
Hunter	Schow	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 36	Against – 0
---------	----------	-------------

[Sections 1(4) and 1(5) of Bill 17 agreed to unanimously]

The Chair: On the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block C, which is section 2, are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that section 2 of Bill 17 was agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

Amery	Madu	Singh
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Frey	Panda	Stephan
Getson	Pon	Toor
Glubish	Rosin	Turton
Horner	Savage	Walker
Hunter	Schow	Wilson
Issik	Schweitzer	Yao
Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.	Yaseen

Lovely

Against:

Ceci	Gray	Renaud
Dach	Hoffman	Shepherd
Deol	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 8
---------	----------	-------------

[Section 2 of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 17.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and would like to

report the following bill with some amendments: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried. Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	1323
Members' Statements	
Security Infrastructure Program	1323
Bereavement Leave for Pregnancy Loss.....	1323
Alberta Junior Hockey League 2022 Championship	1323
Premier's Leadership.....	1324
Lemonade Day in Northern Alberta	1324
Norma Vidal.....	1324
Integrated Emergency Medical and Fire Services	1325
Provincial Support for Edmonton.....	1325
Hemp Industry Development.....	1325
Oral Question Period	
Emergency Medical Services	1326
Health Care System Capacity	1326
Provincial Support for Edmonton	1327
Dene Tha' First Nation Flooding.....	1327
Federal Impact Assessment Act Court Ruling.....	1328
Agricultural Costs.....	1328
Social Supports and Calgary Transit User Safety.....	1329
Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum.....	1330
Electric Power Prices and Utility Rebate Timeline.....	1330
Alberta Parole Board Decisions and Police Services.....	1331
Police Services in Coaldale	1331
Collection of Race-based Data	1332
Postsecondary Staff Associations and Bill 17.....	1332
Women in STEM and Skilled Trades Careers	1333
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	1333
Tabling Returns and Reports	1334
Tablings to the Clerk	1334
Orders of the Day	1334
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 17 – Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.....	1334
Division	1337
Division	1347
Division	1351
Division	1351
Division	1351

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca