



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 24, 2022

Day 35

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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United Conservative: 61 New Democrat: 23 Independent: 3

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Members of the gallery, if you'd like to take your seats, you're welcome to do so.

Members of the Assembly, in just a couple of moments here we're going to take a group photo of the 30th Legislature. We only have a couple of minutes, so if you can please get yourself ready. I'm going to ask a number of you to move into position so that we can see everyone. The photo will be taken from the press gallery down to the Chamber floor. I see that the hon. Member for Camrose has moved and the members along the back row have moved. Well done. I will skip – yes. Please come in. Take your seats. Members, if you can see, it will be at the press gallery. I'm sure that you can see the photographer. Hon. members, please. Thank you so very much. I feel as though we have created some sort of record in which the time that that photo has taken place.

We will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. Please rise and feel welcome to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II Address to the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Members, we have a number of very important things happening this afternoon, so I would like to beg for your indulgence for just a few brief moments.

Members, we are so very fortunate to do our work in the Chamber, that has seen many historic moments, perhaps nothing as historic as when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II addressed Albertans from this very spot on this very day in her 2005 visit commemorating Alberta's 100th birthday. It was the first and only time that the monarch had addressed the people of this province from the floor of the Assembly. During her visit a series of stained glass windows designed by Paul and Andre Winter were unveiled, depicting the reign of monarchs throughout Alberta's first hundred years. The centre window at the front entrance of the Legislature Building commemorates the reign of Her Majesty the Queen. The monograms of the royal cypher stand for Elizabeth Regina II and are surmounted by the royal crown. The royal cypher is flanked by wild roses, which were adopted as Alberta's floral emblem in 1930.

Her Majesty reiterated:

During a previous visit 32 years ago I said that “. . . I want the Crown in Canada to represent everything that is best and most admired in the Canadian ideal. I will continue to do my best to make it so during my lifetime, and I hope you will all continue to give me your help in this task.”

Members, I think we can all agree that Her Majesty has honoured her commitment.

As a way of giving thanks, we now have the opportunity to celebrate her 70th year of service during this platinum jubilee year. I invite all Albertans and members to submit a congratulatory message, photo, or other monarch moment to be included in a digital display marking her unparalleled reign. Information about how to participate can be found on the platinum jubilee page at assembly.ab.ca.

May God bless the Queen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce a friend to many and a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. They call him Mr. Landslide, Dave Schneider, for his massive electoral victory of eight votes in the constituency of Little Bow. He is accompanied by his wife today, Mrs. Sharon Schneider. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, we do have many guests in the gallery, so I would ask that you hold your applause until the end of the introductions, and I would ask that all guests rise as I introduce them.

Earlier today I had the pleasure of meeting a School at the Legislature group joining us from Father Leo Green school in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also, members, joining us today in the members' gallery, a very special guest and the wife of the Minister of Indigenous Relations, Rose Wilson.

I'm pleased to introduce 10 members of the Memory Keepers Association of 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi of Rwanda. They're guests of the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also in the gallery is a group of 20 childhood educators who are the recipients of the minister's award of excellence in childhood development – they are here in recognition of Early Childhood Educator Day, which was Friday, May 20 – two of which just happen to be from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, one of which is celebrating their birthday today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us today are guests of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. She's the constituency assistant for the constituency, Ms Naomi Knoch. In the gallery as well are four representatives from Farming Smarter and West-Central Forage Association. They are guests of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

And, finally, members, there are two guests of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Jonathan Moser, senior vice-president and ESG practice lead of Rubicon Strategy, and Jonathan Stewart, the CEO of Direx. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

Government Record

Ms Ganley: Alberta has a bright future, but we have to see the world as it is. We have to work together to move Alberta forward. I look around me and I see bright, innovative, hard-working people, and I know that we can achieve it. Alberta can continue to lead today and for years into the future but only if we have a government that looks towards the future and not the past.

For the past three years Alberta's UCP government has grasped at old, disproven economic theories, where diversification is a luxury we can't afford, climate change is a hoax created by a children's movie. They even created a curriculum that is 50 years out of date. This is not what Albertans thought they were voting for, and the current Premier's resignation changes none of it. The drama and the infighting and the disunity that have plagued the UCP are not over. It's only just beginning. To all those Albertans who voted for the UCP and feel let down by their actions and behaviour over the last three years: you deserve better.

Alberta's NDP is working day and night to build a team that will provide the forward-looking, thoughtful, responsive, pragmatic, and unified government that Albertans need. Every one of us will work tirelessly on what matters to Albertans: good public health care and good public education, good-paying jobs for you and for your children into the future, and protection from the rising cost of living. Albertans deserve a government focused on those things, not focused on infighting and empire building. The UCP will try to tell Albertans that they've changed and learned, just like the current Premier claimed when he took office. It won't be anymore true today. We can leave the UCP to their internal battles, and together we can build that bright future.

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

Sikh Community

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be a Member of this Legislative Assembly to represent not only the constituents of Calgary-Falconridge but also as a representative of the Sikh community. In the past two weeks gurdwara committees in Calgary and Edmonton organized Nagar Kirtans to celebrate the foundation of Khalsa Panth and festival of Vaisakhi. I would like to thank the Premier and my caucus colleagues along with thousands of Albertans for their participation in those celebrations. Those are the wonderful events that celebrate the culture and religious practices of Sikhism. These events are an opportunity for more and more Albertans to join with members of the Sikh community in their values of respect, kindness, and selflessness.

Since 1897 Sikhs have called Canada home. By 1906 there were roughly about 1,500 Sikh people in our country, which has now grown to more than half a million. While working hard, the Sikh community has contributed to other communities through their selfless service. I'm very proud of Alberta's acceptance of Sikhism along with other cultures and religions that have been welcomed to this province. Our acceptance of diversity offers a strong motive for Sikhs and other communities to choose Alberta.

As we have faced challenge through the world-wide pandemic, Sikhs have participated by helping other communities through delivering food and providing sewa, service. Today we see gurdwaras in many neighbourhoods of Alberta's major cities, signifying the success of Sikhism in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Sikhism is a religion and culture of belonging. I'm proud to see that our government has built strong ties with Sikh communities. I know there will be continued success for every community in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Agricultural Innovation Hubs

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us in this Chamber know how vital agriculture is to our province. Today I bring a message from our southern rural communities. While we all know

the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and soaring inflation challenge every aspect of our lives, out on the Alberta landscape farmers plant crops with their famous dogged determination or, as I like to refer to it, the Albertan spirit. Farming requires accepting change and adopting practices that sustain soil and water.

Fortunately, in Alberta we have a class of nonprofit associations dedicated to finding the best ways for farmers to adapt to change. They are a network of regionally focused, on-farm innovation hubs across the province. The one closest to me is Farming Smarter, and it is a stellar example of what these associations contribute to our economy and vibrant rural communities. It operates with a privatized approach but focuses on the public good. Farmers trust information coming from these hubs and participate in setting direction and discovering best practices suited to their region. It is a board comprised of farmers, and its commitment to agriculture and innovation will never waver.

While going about the business of changing the way people farm, these hubs invest in people. Farming Smarter grew from one half-time position to 10 full-time specialists and 15 summer student technicians. It became Alberta's strongest regional innovation hub because of strong leadership and strong partnerships. Farming Smarter is a hub of postsecondary student learning, industry professional development, and on-farm research. It connects all prairie ag scientists directly to the landscape. Farming Smarter turns 10 in 2022, and we can expect it to remain on that landscape for decades to come. As long as it thrives, our agricultural industry also thrives.

Recent history illuminated the importance of domestic supply chains and food security. These associations reinforce both. We need to support these rural economic engines, and I urge this House to recognize the value and dedication the innovation hubs bring to our agricultural industry and invest in them. If they win, we all win.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

AISH and Income Support Indexation

Ms Renaud: In 2018 the NDP government introduced and passed legislation called An Act to Combat Poverty and Fight for Albertans with Disabilities, and that was a great day. The progressive legislation provided a one-time increase to AISH and income support recipients while automatically indexing the rates to inflation. Disability and antipoverty advocates had for decades asked the government to inflation-proof benefits so that disabled and low-income adults would be able to manage future increases of rent, food, and utilities. Inflation-proofing benefits was an important step to ending the downward spiral of grinding poverty while restoring a measure of dignity for those who rely on these benefits.

In 2018 all of the current UCP members and ministers, who were then PC and Wildrose members, supported this legislation. They shared personal stories and constituent examples on why indexing AISH and income support was so important. The legislation passed, and the path out of poverty for disabled Albertans was becoming visible.

In 2019, soon after forming government, the UCP summarily cut AISH and income support, immediately halting any progress out of poverty for tens of thousands of vulnerable Albertans. They said that times were tough and fiscal restraint was necessary, so they took it from disabled people while they directed tens of millions to a ridiculous war room, cut taxes for the wealthiest corporations, and bet billions on Trump's re-election. Not one single minister or government MLA stood up for disabled and low-income Albertans, and they all voted to take money from the poor and disabled. They are all complicit. They remain complicit.

Three years later inflation is at a 31-year high, and the cost of food, rent, utilities, and more has devastated household budgets for those already living in poverty. What disgusts me the most, Mr. Speaker, is not the blatant hypocrisy from this party but their selfishness and their weakness. They boast about a balanced budget thanks to record-high commodity prices when they know poverty is deepening. Food insecurity and homelessness are spreading as a direct result of these cuts, and still they do nothing. We will change that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement to make.

NDP and UCP Government Records

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2019 the people of Alberta spoke clearly that they did not trust the NDP. They could not be trusted to oversee the energy sector as they appointed anti-oil activists and imposed the carbon tax. They could not be trusted to oversee the electricity file as they cost Albertans billions of dollars. They could not be trusted to control government spending as they created deficit after deficit and accumulated over a \$60 billion debt. They could not be trusted to balance the budget but, rather, to tax and spend. They could not be trusted to oversee the agricultural sector after passing Bill 6. They could not be trusted to develop an educational curriculum that would address significant issues in math and language. The NDP could not be trusted to support parental choice or parental authority in our education system, refusing to allow any new charter schools while they threatened to close 27 independent schools. They could not be trusted to protect our democratic institutions as they legislated away secret ballots for union members, disenfranchised the election of Senators-in-waiting, and voted against the right of recall.

1:50

In contrast, this UCP government has passed close to 90 per cent of our campaign promises, bringing forward grassroots legislation like the right of recall, citizen-initiated referenda, and we brought back Senators-elect. The UCP promised to balance the budget: promise kept. The UCP promised to create jobs and lower taxes: promise kept. The UCP government passed legislation that recognized parental decision-making and choice in education while creating more charter schools. The UCP government has defended and expanded the oil and gas industry. The UCP government has introduced the AIOC program, that has done more to help First Nations become full partners in the Alberta economy than any of the empty left-wing rhetoric. The UCP diversified the economy, seeing huge gains in the film industry, the technology industry, the industrial hemp industry, the hydrogen industry, and the list could go on.

Mr. Speaker, as the 2023 election grows ever closer, the people of Alberta will be provided with a clear choice, and I think we know who they can trust.

Oral Question Period

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

Electric Utility Rebates Health Care System

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, an Albertan named Bobbi* wrote to me terrified to know her power could be turned off because she's fallen behind on her bills. You see, she's been off work since December

because she needs surgery that, unfortunately, has now been delayed, and to make matters worse, her husband's construction job was shut down in January, around the time her whole family got COVID. Despite all of this, Bobbi has managed to stay on top of everything except the power bill. To the Premier: on what date exactly will Bobbi and her family get the rebate that he promised to them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP for having decided to stop blocking that legislation. We finally got it through the Legislature after their obstruction. It's now the law. It's received royal assent, and a clear direction has been given to the 40-plus electricity retailers in Alberta to deliver that \$150 rebate on the bills of Albertans as soon as they possibly can. That is our full expectation.

Ms Notley: Well, if only Bobbi could get away with paying her bill as soon as she possibly can.

I'm focused on her and her family right now because no one over there is. For five months this UCP government has been on leadership campaign autopilot, and now we have a health care system that is literally flying into the side of a mountain. The Premier has lost his mandate to pursue radical restructuring, and he simply must reinvest in front-line care and start supporting the front-line workers he's ignored for years. Will the Premier commit to working on health care stability, not chaos, for once in this mandate?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, regrettably, Bobbi is being forced to pay – her household is being forced to pay \$600, if they're an average household in terms of their expenditures, on the Liberal-NDP carbon tax, the same carbon tax that this Conservative government repealed, the same carbon tax that we fought all the way to the Supreme Court, the same carbon tax that the NDP wants to quadruple. The leader of the NDP wants Bobbi not paying \$600 but \$2,400 in carbon tax, making her family poorer, making it tougher for her to pay her bills.

Ms Notley: Well, that was rather fanciful, Mr. Speaker. That was not what I was asking about. I was asking about health care.

Now, today I wrote the Premier outlining the tenuous nature of his mandate. The fact is that, going forward, Albertans need him to focus on stability and resourcing across the board on every issue rather than ideologically driven policies with consequences that will far outlast this Premier. Now is the time to help Albertans who can't afford their bills, who can't see a family doctor, and who want better from their government. Will the Premier do that, or is he still refusing to read the room?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:54.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the NDP leader sure didn't read the room of Albertans when she imposed the largest tax hike in Alberta history with the carbon tax, when she increased income taxes, increased taxes on employers, and created a jobs crisis in this province. This is the government that is cutting taxes, that scrapped the NDP carbon tax. While they want to raise the cost of living, this is the government that has scrapped the Alberta fuel tax, that is providing more consumer relief during this time of high inflation than any government in Canada bar none. Why did she and

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

the NDP join into a coalition with Justin Trudeau with no demand for inflation protection for Canadians?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Phillips: Albertans are working harder and harder; they're falling further and further behind. According to the latest figures Albertans took a 4 and a half per cent cut to their wages as weekly pay failed to keep pace with the rise in the cost of living, much of which is being caused by this interim UCP government. Income tax, property tax, tuition, park fees, insurance, utilities: all gone up under this acting government. In fact, economists say that these UCP cost increases are making inflation much worse. So why is this acting Premier, for now, adding more costs and driving up inflation, that leads to wage cuts for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that eliminated Alberta's fuel tax and has saved Albertans 13 cents a litre, delivering a \$150 electricity rebate, consumer price protection for natural gas. That is the member and the party that wants to make life, especially fuel, more expensive. They want to quadruple the carbon tax in their coalition with Justin Trudeau. Why doesn't the member just admit it? They love to see the cost of living go up. They want to punish people for consuming energy.

Ms Phillips: All kinds of uncertainty in Alberta politics right now but one constant, this Premier's self-importance. Anyway, enough about yesterday's man.

Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate in the country amongst cities, and Alberta has had the slowest wage growth in the country for more than three years. The situation is so bad that even the Finance minister says that he can't afford to pay his bills. If the Finance minister can't afford his own bills while earning almost 200 grand a year, how can this government expect Albertans to pay theirs, and why won't he at least help out with people's cost of insurance? Is it his friends at Wellington who want him to run for leadership?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the party that gave us a jobs crisis and the worst economy in modern Alberta history has a lot of chutzpah to talk about the fastest growing economy in Canada, 165,000 net new jobs created since the beginning of last year, \$70 billion of new investment over the past year, the first balanced budget in 14 years, with record investments in health and education, a government that's kept 90 per cent of its election promises, that beat Justin Trudeau and his no-more-pipelines act at the appeal court two weeks ago and is now acting more than any government to support . . .

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

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is up; so is unearned pomposity.

According to a recent survey half of Albertans are just \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of the month. That's the highest level in the country. But as Albertans fall further behind, the answer they get from the current Finance minister is to get a better job. Well, we all know the acting Premier is now looking for another job, and the Finance minister has his eyes on the Premier's seat, but not everyone has this luxury. What will the government do to help Albertans falling further and further behind on their bills as

the UCP continues to add up more and more costs on utilities, insurance, taxes, and everything else they can find?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's simple. We eliminated the Alberta fuel tax. We're providing both consumer protection on gas prices and the electricity rebate. Why don't they just stand up and admit that it is NDP policy purposefully to make everything more expensive by quadrupling the NDP-Liberal carbon tax? How can they want to quadruple that tax, making it more expensive for people to heat their homes, while pretending to care about the cost of living?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Hospital Emergency Room Wait Times

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want a government that is focused on fixing the urgent crisis in health care. The UCP's health care chaos has left many families without a doctor, and now those same families are being forced into the emergency room, where they're having to wait longer. According to AHS wait times in Calgary are at the highest point in two years in every single ER in the city. If the Premier is truly focused on the crisis, can he tell us why he spent the weekend trying to explain his resignation status to the people of Alberta rather than dealing with our overwhelmed ERs?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the very important question. There is significant pressure on our emergency rooms, and that's why Alberta's government has added an additional 800 staff in emergency departments, more today than there were under the NDP. We've also added 230 more paramedics than two years ago, and 20 more fully staffed ambulances will shortly be operational in both Edmonton and Calgary. We've also hired 250 additional personnel to increase by 19 the number of baseline intensive care beds in our hospitals, and we're on track by September to add another 31 additional intensive care beds in our hospitals.

2:00

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have watched this government fight with front-line health care workers for two years in the middle of a pandemic. The crisis is worse at Alberta Children's hospital, where the percentage of children seen by a doctor within four hours has dropped by half. Can the Premier put himself in the shoes of those parents and children lined up outside of the ER and tell Albertans what specific action he is taking to ensure that no child waits outside the ER ever again? Is this even a priority over there?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right to raise concerns such as those, which are in part a result of the fact that while COVID is not currently a threat to our overall hospital capacity, it's still imposing a real burden. Many kids are getting COVID cases and being taken to the emergency ward. In addition, we've seen a spike in influenza cases, and there's an additional challenge with respect to acuity. Many people who did not present to hospitals or doctors through the COVID period have seen chronic conditions worsen. All of those things combined are placing a unique pressure on the system, which is why we've added \$1.8 billion to the baseline health care budget.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Alberta lost 140 doctors last year. There are currently 24 communities with fully or partially closed hospitals, including many with no ER coverage over the long weekend. EMS

red alerts are increasingly frequent, and dispatch is so overwhelmed that they're forced to hang up on calls. The Alberta Medical Association says that ERs are at the breaking point, beds are blocked, and urgent care is now being delivered in the hallway. Is this what the Premier wants his legacy to be? If not, what is he doing to fix it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, speaking of legacies, one legacy of the NDP government is that they left us with the most expensive health care system in Canada, with some of the longest surgical and diagnostic wait times and the lowest per capita number of critical care beds of all 10 provinces. That is their shameful legacy. I'm proud that this government – as part of our \$1.8 billion record additional investment in health care we've seen the hiring of some 230 additional paramedics. As I said, I believe it's 18 – 20 ambulances will be added both in Calgary and in Edmonton in the next few weeks.

Insulin Pump Program Consultation

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, many people with diabetes gave a deep sigh of relief when the UCP announced that they were pausing plans to cancel the insulin pump therapy program. However, that relief was lost last week after the UCP's inconsiderate, insincere consultation with that community. Instead of a listening ear, the diabetic community was met with scripted talking points, officials dodging questions, and an utter lack of empathy from their government for what thousands of dollars in new costs would mean for them. Will the Premier today admit that this was a sham consultation, apologize to the people who joined in, and tell us how he will truly listen to the diabetic community going forward?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last week approximately 300 people participated in the town hall with Alberta Health. I don't know why the member would characterize their participation as being a sham. These are people with legitimate concerns and constructive feedback. I know the minister is intently listening to them. As you know, we've expanded access to more modern assistance for people who are coping with diabetes, and the minister has paused certain other changes fully to consult with the community of people living with diabetes.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, selling parks, coal mining in the Rockies, a disastrous curriculum: the UCP has a long history of insincere consultation. In this case they left the diabetic community questioning if the UCP actually plans to listen at all or if this is just a cruel attempt to buy some time before they continue with their original plan to cancel the program. Albertans already don't trust this government with their health care, and this kind of treatment for the diabetic community continues to undermine their trust. Is the Premier or is the minister simply killing time before cancelling the program like they always intended, or will they do better and actually listen to the diabetic community?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this issue. It is an important issue. As I said two weeks ago, we put a pause. We said that we'd consult, and no one will be left behind. I give that commitment to the House. I give that commitment to the people who are affected by this program. I thank those, the 300 people, who participated in the town hall last week. That's the start of consultation, because we are not going to make any changes until we get this right.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, there's a crisis in EMS which the UCP has not addressed. Doctors are leaving the province at record

rates, and the UCP has failed to adequately respond. There are lineups outside hospitals to access an emergency department; health care professionals burning out, not knowing how they can continue; surgeries being diverted and cancelled across the province; over 20 hospital closures in rural Alberta. The UCP has no answers or plans for any of those problems, so I have to ask. To the Premier: why are they focused on taking away insulin pumps for people, a choice that will undermine their health and make every one of those other problems worse?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. The intent of the changes that we announced was never to take away insulin pumps. We recognize that this community needs the insulin pumps, and we also recognize that this actually helps that community stay out of hospitals. Our intent in making the changes would be able to broaden access to different types of supports for this community. I recognize that we didn't get this right in terms of the announcement. That's why we're going to fix this. We are focused on fixing our entire health care system. We are investing an historic \$1.8 billion additional money into it, and we'll get this right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a question to ask.

Premier's Appearance before U.S. Senate Energy Committee

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians and Americans are concerned about the cost of energy. Albertans know that prices are high because of the supply crunch created by Russia's criminal war coupled with failed policies from left-wing governments. We know that Albertans can rise to the world's energy needs and supply responsible and reliable Albertan energy to Americans and abroad. Can the Premier inform this House about his recent trip to testify before the U.S. Senate energy committee?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Together with the ministers of environment and Energy I had the opportunity last week to make an historic presentation before the United States Senate committee on energy to make the point about how Alberta can be the solution to the global energy crisis, particularly for North American energy security. Our American friends are facing record-high fuel prices because of a scarcity, in part because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This province, with the third-largest oil reserves on Earth, can and must be part of the solution to displace dictator oil with responsibly produced Alberta energy.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for his efforts. Given that Albertans deserve greater market access for their responsible and reliable energy and given that Americans deserve greater access to that very same Alberta energy and given that we know that failed left-wing policies have left this continent's energy infrastructure underdeveloped and increased Americans' reliance on oil from the world's worst regimes – Russia, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia – will the Premier tell us the response that he heard from Senators when he was down in the States?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the response from American Senators – I think there were 12 who attended the hearing and heard from

Alberta – was amazingly positive. Democrat Senator Joe Manchin, chairman of the committee, said, “We must work together to chart a responsible path forward that’ll ensure security & unlock prosperity for [both of] our nations.” As he has said, Alberta is a key part of the solution to both North American and global energy security. We were delighted to get our message across at the highest levels of the American Capitol.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the Premier. Given that that is great news and given that the issue of energy security is one with life-and-death implications for people not only in the free world but right across this globe and given that, to paraphrase Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, energy must be reliable and affordable, otherwise people suffer and sometimes die, can the Premier tell us what the outlook is for increased partnerships between America and Alberta on energy security for those who call this continent home?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I informed the committee that there are currently about 300,000 barrels of unused capacity in the continental pipeline system, which we could fulfill this year, in addition to pipeline optimization, rail capacity, the pending completion of the Trans Mountain expansion, all of which could represent well over a million barrels of additional Alberta production. That means jobs in Alberta, it means more revenues for social programs here, and it means displacing OPEC oil. I was very pleased that the committee accepted my invitation to come to Alberta as soon as they can to see how we are leading the world on responsible energy production.

2:10

Violence Prevention

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this weekend the North of McKnight Communities Society organized a town hall in my riding to address the proliferation of guns, rising gun violence, and increasing concerns about community safety. There have been 58 shootings in Calgary so far this year. The people I heard from feel abandoned by the UCP. They’re too focused on their own infighting to take real action, and they have only spoken out about keeping firearms in the hands of Albertans. Can the Minister of Justice rise in this House today and pledge specific actions to curb guns and gun violence in Calgary and throughout this province?

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

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is an important question. There has been an alarming increase in violent crimes, particularly in our major urbans in the province, and that is a concern for this government. We will continue to make sure that our municipal police services have the adequate funding to be able to respond, and we will call on our municipalities to make sure that they work within the Police Act to make sure that our independent police commissions are making decisions about budgets to make sure that we have adequate funding for our police services in this province.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we have actually seen violence endorsed by the UCP, given that the members for Taber-Warner and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland supported the Coutts blockade even after they stockpiled weapons and plotted to kill RCMP officers, and given that they have faced no sanction from the Premier or minister for

their actions, will the minister rise and state for the House record that his colleagues were out of line endorsing the planned violence at Coutts and that he will personally talk to the Premier about removing them from the UCP government?

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

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let’s just say that when it comes to getting advice from the #defundpolice caucus over there, we’re not going to take any advice from them. We’re going to work with our police services throughout this province and make sure that they have the resources to be able to respond to the gun violence that we are seeing in our communities and make sure that we’re supporting those police officers in coming home safely to their families every night.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we have already seen a contestant in the UCP leadership race call for amnesty for those who plotted to kill cops at Coutts and given that members of the governing caucus have demonstrated through their actions that they may agree with her and given that the Minister of Transportation and some of her constituents were at the same town hall this weekend, will the Minister of Transportation rise and condemn any talk of amnesty for the Coutts blockaders, and will she pledge real action to curb guns and gun violence in the communities we both represent?

Mr. Shandro: Completely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, as we expect to see from the NDP. We continue to see them advocating for ridiculous policies and ridiculous responses to various issues throughout this province. We will continue to work with our police services throughout the province, make sure that they have the resources to respond to the increasing rates in violent crime in this province while they will continue, as we’ve seen, to advocate for defunding the police.

Violence Prevention and Social Supports

Member Irwin: Last week two men were violently killed in Edmonton’s Chinatown in an unprovoked attack. They are remembered as hard-working, kind, and dedicated community members. Their families and many folks in Chinatown are looking for real solutions to improve safety, housing, and help those struggling with addictions and mental health. They don’t want blame or finger pointing between levels of government. Their message is clear: this can’t happen again. To the Premier: can we work together and with the city of Edmonton to help Chinatown?

Mr. Shandro: A really good question, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that very thoughtful question. Let me just say on behalf of the entire House that our hearts are with the families of the victims of not just the two shootings that we’ve seen in Chinatown, but we’ve seen gun violence outside of pubs on Jasper Avenue and an increase generally in violent crime in Edmonton. That’s why the concerns right now that I would have with Edmonton city council in announcing an effective cut of \$22 million to the Edmonton Police Service budget – it’s a concern, in particular the way that they’re proposing to do it, without even advising or working with the Edmonton Police Commission.

Member Irwin: Given that the communities I represent are home to some of the hardest to house folks – many of them live rough and in encampments. Given that a proven way to help support unhoused folks is through permanent supportive housing – it not only saves money; it saves lives, too – and while the city of Edmonton has attempted to expand permanent supportive housing, they’ve not

received support yet from the UCP. There's never been a more critical time to invest in housing, so will the Minister of Seniors and Housing acknowledge the crisis that our communities are facing and commit today to prioritizing supportive housing?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, it's a great question. Thank you for the question, to the member. This is why we need to work – and we call the NDP to work with us – ensuring and calling on our municipalities to make sure that our police services throughout the province are getting the adequate funding that they need to be able to respond to violent crime throughout the province. It is time for us to make sure, in particular when we see increases in violent crime – this is not the time for us to have any municipalities decreasing the funding of police services in this province.

Member Irwin: Given that my constituents have pleaded for help to support the unhoused folks living in unsafe situations in their communities yet haven't had a response and no action from anyone in this provincial government – it's hard to understand the scope of the housing crisis and how many people are living rough unless you get out and you walk on the streets, in the ravine, in the parks, in the river valley – and given that my constituents have invited members of this cabinet to walk with them, on their behalf I want to just ask again: will any minister from this government join my constituents to just truly start to understand the severity of the housing crisis and the very dire need for action?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member, for bringing us some very important questions, and my condolences to those family and friends who have these tragedies happen in their family. Yes, from my colleagues and across ministries working on their plan to the meetings of the community leaders: they are working on a plan for how we're going to prevent these tragedies from happening again. As Seniors and Housing we are continuing to provide the budget and are looking to work with the municipalities, work with the city, work with the mayor to make sure that we provide affordable housing for the . . .

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

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Barnes: For Albertans, this government has failed to achieve a fair deal with Ottawa. Justin Trudeau continues to implement his just transition plan to phase out Alberta's leading industries, an immediate and pressing issue for oil and gas mining and other primary sector workers and rural communities. More than ever Albertans need an intergovernmental affairs minister willing to get tough. To the Premier: now that you've announced plans to step down, will you immediately resign as intergovernmental affairs minister to make way for someone who will stand up for Alberta?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is that this government will be focused on the economy, on the people's business in the weeks and months ahead. From day one we made it a point to position this province for disproportionate investment attraction, job creation, and wealth creation. It's working. Investment is pouring in by the billions. Jobs are being created. In fact, our unemployment rate is lower than before the NDP took office.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I doubt the prospect of a lame-duck Premier writing more useless letters has Justin Trudeau quaking in his boots and given that on April 25 the members of this Assembly approved my motion to deploy every tool at this province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta and given that the current intergovernmental affairs minister has achieved no progress towards a fair deal nor has even launched formal negotiations, to the Premier: when will you pass the baton to another member who is actually interested in achieving a fair deal?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be with the Premier and the Minister of Energy down in Washington last week advancing the interests of this province further than any government in history when it comes to our oil and gas industry with Washington, standing up for the birthright of all Albertans, a sharp contrast from what that hon. member and the NDP have done in their time in government. I will remind you of just a few weeks ago, when we won a historical case in the Alberta Court of Appeal on Bill C-69, standing up for Albertans. That is some significant work by this government, and we're going to continue to do what we need to do to defend the people of Alberta.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that on November 18 this Assembly approved a motion to recognize the results of the equalization referendum and given that the equalization program is up for renewal in just 2024 and given that any changes to the program must be negotiated prior to that deadline and given that Justin Trudeau has a deal with the NDP to keep themselves in office well beyond this current Premier's tenure, to the Premier: isn't your continued tenure as intergovernmental affairs minister now effectively counterproductive to Alberta families' best interest?

2:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, while that member has focused on tag lines and Internet memes, this government has focused on getting things done: again, a historical win to defeat the NDP and the Liberals' no-more-pipeline law, Bill C-69, done by this government just a few weeks ago, and just last week again in the Senate for a historical hearing to be able to move Alberta's energy interests forward. That's what this government is doing, real, concrete action, and you're going to continue to see it.

Confined Feeding Operation Proposal

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, a lot of government policy just stinks, and oftentimes it's complete bull, figuratively speaking, of course. But trust this government to turn cliché into reality: literal cow manure, 36 tonnes a day, to be precise, dumped into the Pigeon Lake watershed if the government allows a proposed feedlot on the west shore of Pigeon Lake. There are health risks from existing cattle manure runoff: gastrointestinal illness; skin, ear, or eye infections. Can the minister justify why this feedlot location, where families vacation, people live, and children swim in the lake, is in any way acceptable?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're proud in Alberta to have one of the best regulatory systems in the world. Confined feedlots are regulated by the NRCB. I don't – and none of my colleagues – interfere with the regulatory system. We have strong environmental rules. We trust the regulatory system to do their job. No, we will not listen to the NDP's calls to break the law.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'm just asking the government to protect Pigeon Lake and given that I have received hundreds of e-mails from folks across the province with concerns about this project and

given that when I was out there door-knocking last week to hear residents' concerns, folks were unanimously opposed to the location of this project and given that users of this area could only find out about the short window for feedback through a small weekly flyer and didn't have time to provide feedback or ask questions – I can't help but feel that this supposed consultation effort stinks – will the minister pause the project, go back into the community, and provide genuine consultation and public engagement?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the authority to do that. Again, unlike the NDP, I will not interfere with an independent regulator. That said, we have very significant water regulations and rules inside this province that will ensure that Pigeon Lake is protected. The NRCB has a good track record of making sure that those rules are enforced. We will let the regulator do the job free of political interference. Again, to the hon. member: he should stop trying to interfere with regulatory agencies inside this province. It is against the law.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'll never apologize for trying to protect Pigeon Lake and given that a large community event was held with presentations, speakers, hundreds of attendees, and advocates hoping to find a way to make this project better for the community and given that the information shared could have been of value but, unfortunately, not a single UCP MLA, including the MLA for Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin, showed up and given that it was made clear at the community event that people in Pigeon Lake think that this decision literally stinks, does the Minister of Indigenous Relations and the local MLA even care, or would he rather just hold his nose and avoid talking to people who do care about . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, that does not surprise me. It has been my experience that the NDP does not respect the rule of law, but the Conservative Party does. Again, we have strong environmental rules that will protect Pigeon Lake, and we trust the NRCB to do its job, including the hon. Indigenous affairs minister, who works very hard on behalf of his constituents each and every day. He is keeping tabs on what is taking place at the NRCB. But, again, we will not politically interfere with an independent regulator, ever.

Edmonton Downtown Revitalization

Mr. Bilous: Downtowns across the province are struggling, and Edmonton is no exception. The office vacancy rate sits at almost 20 per cent. People have not returned to the downtown core, and I regularly hear concerns from residents and small-business owners about safety concerns. These are big issues to tackle, and the UCP does not have a plan. All they could muster for downtown Edmonton was \$5 million in their last budget. To the minister: why such little support from the UCP for our province's capital city?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, cities around the world are dealing with the challenges of bringing workers back to the downtown offices. Alberta is no different than any other jurisdiction around the world. That being said, right now we're working with our Edmonton metro working group. They're going to give us advice on how best to move forward here in our province. That being said, we want to make sure that our downtowns are safe. As our Justice minister has recently said, we want to make sure that our municipal partners are investing in police to make sure our city cores are safe when people come back to the workplace.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the UCP has finally received the report on revitalizing downtown Calgary and that many of the recommendations for Calgary include support for wraparound services, including housing and mental health and addictions, and given that we're dealing with a housing and opioid crisis in downtown Edmonton that's leading to concerns about safety – in fact, the Edmonton Chamber has identified this as one of their top priorities – will this government finally listen to their own working group and the business community by investing in these services that can help vulnerable Albertans and partner with the city to enhance safety and revitalize our downtown?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, you know, I thank the member for the question. As I've indicated in this House before, this is a very complex problem. A very close friend and ally of the members opposite in the NDP, of course, is a city councillor in Edmonton. He has a couple of policy examples which are to exempt people in Edmonton from minor possession but also trafficking of drugs, so I'd like to know. The member opposite: does he support the policy of supporting drug traffickers? I have some serious concerns, because I'm pretty sure the people of Alberta have concerns about the NDP supporting drug traffickers.

Mr. Bilous: Given that those comments are absurd and offensive and given that the UCP has left money on the table for affordable housing and thrown up barriers for accessing mental health and addiction support and given that the mayor of Edmonton said that the UCP is chronically underfunding these services in Edmonton, which is holding Edmonton's economy back, why is this government failing to support our downtown and holding back Edmonton's economy? And please stop blaming. Take responsibility. You hold the pen to funding; fund them.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows as well as the mayor of Edmonton knows, the funding between the major cities is based on a formula. The formula is applied equally to both cities, and they each get what they get. That being what it says, Budget '22 has \$118 million over the next three years to begin implementation of a plan to put 25,000 more affordable homes in Alberta over the next 10 years. We've got \$588 million as part of our support for LRT projects, \$371 million towards an Edmonton hospital, \$142 million towards the Gene Zwozdesky centre, \$92 million towards the Terwillegar expansion. There's so much more we're doing. We're doing lots for . . .

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

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Falconridge is a constituency in northeast Calgary which is full of people excited to contribute to Alberta's economic recovery. Many of the people in that area of the city are newcomers to our province who are looking for long-term careers to establish themselves and families in Alberta. To the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: as we work to diversify the economy, what types of job opportunities does that create for my constituents under a UCP government?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. There is good news right now. Our

unemployment rate is down to 5.9 per cent across Alberta, the lowest that it's been since early 2015. People from across Canada are now moving to our province for high-paying jobs and affordable cost of living. Our logistics industry: you could look at warehousing, manufacturing. You look at the film and television industry. On top of that, the tech sector, the first quarter of 2022: \$466 million, a new record for Alberta.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's unemployment rate is now lower than it was when the NDP took office thanks to the UCP government's job-growth policies and given that more people are moving back to Alberta and Calgary to find good employment, to the same minister: what is the UCP government doing to bring jobs back to Alberta and make life more affordable in our province?

2:30

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it has been the mandate of this government since day one to make sure Alberta has the best possible business investment environment. From making sure that we've lowered the corporate tax rate down to 8 per cent with our job-creation tax cut, eliminating red tape, we're well on our way to getting to that 33 per cent mark that we set. People didn't think it was possible, but we've done it. We're working that way. Alberta is back. We've built up that reputation again. People are putting billions of dollars to work in our province. Thousands of jobs are being created across our province.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that northeast Calgarians are happy to see those unemployment numbers under the UCP government and given that the NDP drove thousands of jobs out of our province when they were in office as a result of their terrible policies and tax hikes, to the same minister: what are some of the large, job-creating investments in and around northeast Calgary that have brought Alberta back to life?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, one of the industries right now that doesn't get a huge amount of play in the media is the logistics and warehousing industry. Right now Alberta is a hub when it comes to getting goods from the Pacific Ocean across Canada with our access to the port of Prince Rupert and port of Vancouver. We're seeing warehouse after warehouse going up; amazing job opportunities in warehousing as well as logistics that are happening right now across our province. That is just one industry of many. We also have the film and television industry. Right now in our province we've effectively doubled that during our time in office. That's an exciting industry. Lots of career prospects here in diversified industries.

Land Titles Registry Delays

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, typically it should take a few days and, at peak times, maybe a couple of weeks to register land title documents, but currently there is a three-month delay for Service Alberta to register such land titles. This is holding up real estate transactions such as buying or building a new home, and ultimately it's holding back our economy. Meanwhile the UCP is only focused on their internal drama. Why is the government allowing their infighting to hold back our economy? Did they really spend so much time fighting with each other that they completely forgot about the important work of the land titles office?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears as though the member opposite has forgotten everything that I shared with him during our budget process earlier in the year. If he remembered what we talked about, he would know that we approved in Budget 2022 over \$9 million of additional funding to address the challenges in the land titles office. I want to assure all Albertans that we are investing in building capacity in this system so that we can deliver timely results for those Albertans who are looking to purchase or sell real property in a timely manner.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that these land title delays can lead to confusion around where municipal tax bills are sent as we head into tax season and given that this confusion can lead to bills being sent to the wrong owner, which can lead to Albertans being penalized for late property tax payments, and given that this is through no fault of their own – instead, these delays are the direct result of the UCP government's incompetence – is this government prepared to cover late fees if assessments are sent to the wrong owner?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear that part of the reason why there are delays in our land titles office is because our systems are so old. In fact, they predate the Internet, and what that means is that when the NDP were in government, they did nothing to prepare for future growth in this province. Well, we will not make that same mistake. We are investing in building capacity in our land titles system and modernizing it to prepare for the future because – you know what? – Alberta is back. Our volumes in our land titles office are over 100 per cent higher than they were last year. That's a good sign. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this government already tried to sell off land titles after being lobbied by the Premier's former chief of staff and given that this deal would have provided a 35-year contract to a private company that would have substantially increased fees and given that this deal was in the final stages of closing and the UCP had already started laying off staff, leading to the delays we see today, why is this government more concerned with helping their friends and insiders than Albertan families who are trying to buy their home?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the members opposite do not have any idea about what the truth is. Yes, it's true that we investigated and did due diligence on a possible transaction that could maybe have added value for Albertans through a concession agreement, and – guess what? – that due diligence showed us that we should not proceed, and we did not proceed.

Mr. Speaker, the member is alleging that we would have done something that would have increased fees, when, in fact, we made it very clear that the fees would be in the control of the government no matter what decision we made. We are always looking out to protect Albertans, unlike the members opposite, who did absolutely nothing to prepare Alberta for the future.

Residential School Gravesite Identification at Saddle Lake Cree First Nation

Mr. Feehan: Last week the Saddle Lake Cree Nation announced that they had uncovered human remains likely belonging to children at the Blue Quills residential school. The lead investigator for the nation obtained records showing that between 1898 and 1931 212 students died at the school. The community discovered what they believe to be a mass grave in 2004 and has requested that the federal government pay for two pieces of ground-penetrating radar

equipment so that their own surveyors can conduct the search. What supports and resources has the Minister of Indigenous Relations offered to the First Nations to help them in identifying this tragedy?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is a very important question right now with what's been going on. We worked closely with Saddle Lake. As you know, we put out our community research grant. They applied for it and did receive it. We don't tell them how to use the money or what it could be used for, but it can be used for the ground-penetrating radar. It could be used for elder groups to talk about the problem or how to move forward with it. That money has gone out the door. They have received it, and we're working closely with the community.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the Saddle Lake Cree First Nation also requested funding for mental health services to support witnesses as people are encouraged to come forward and given that the investigative team believes that there could be more missing children than the 212 who have been accounted for in the records and given that the First Nations have been historically underfunded when it comes to mental health funding, what mental health supports for this community dealing with this unfathomable tragedy has the Minister of Indigenous Relations provided, and will he commit to delivering more?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, along with the community research grant we did put out mental health grants, which they also received. There was also money set aside through Alberta Health for the general population throughout all of Alberta to help. These are going to be ongoing issues. The trauma that's going to come out of this is going to be huge, and we recognize that. We know it's going to be an ongoing situation. We want to work with these communities to make sure that they're able to get through this difficult time. That's why I travel across the province, speaking with people and trying to work with the communities to help them get through this difficult time.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this work has been traumatic on the team who have uncovered the bodies while digging graves for reburial, including members of the community, and given that the investigation team has predicted that there could be more than the 212 bodies indicated by the available records and given that it is said that in the past many families were afraid or unable to speak out when a child never returned home, what is the minister doing to ensure that Saddle Lake Cree First Nation and any other community can access the resources needed to identify and address any missing children or mass graves on the site of the former residential schools?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, this is going to be an ongoing issue across Alberta. There were many residential schools across Alberta, and this is going to be a situation that's going to carry on for quite some time, unfortunately. We're working closely – I've worked with the University of Alberta, who have a program there. We're helping them as they help with ground-penetrating radar. We've also worked with some private corporations that are going to be doing the work for free.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be an ongoing thing. There is a helpline for the survivors. It's a national crisis line. If you need

more information on that, please contact my office, and we'll help you with that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Early Childhood Education

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, May 20, we celebrated Early Childhood Educator Day. The minister's award of excellence in childhood development recognizes the important work of early childhood educators and providers. I'm proud to note that one of the winners, the Aboriginal Head Start program at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, is from my constituency. Early childhood educators are passionate, enthusiastic, and skilled individuals who dedicate every day to care for and educate the next generation, and I thank them. To the Minister of Children's Services: what are you doing to recognize these exceptional individuals?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member noted, this award highlights exceptional early childhood educators and programs right across the province. Last Friday we were able to have a virtual celebration with the award recipients to congratulate them on their win, and today we have a number of them here at the Legislature as well as in the gallery. It is truly a pleasure to be able to thank them for the very important work that they do. I also want to thank all early childhood educators right across the province for all that they do to support kids and families.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for her answer. Given that Alberta's government has recently made many exciting investments related to the federal-provincial child care deal and given that we know quality child care cannot exist without quality educators and further given that the Minister of Children's Services has previously mentioned upcoming early childhood education workforce supports as part of the overall child care plan, a made-in-Alberta plan, to the same minister: what are you doing in the immediate term to support these educators and grow the workforce for tomorrow?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The federal-provincial child care deal has absolutely been a game changer for Alberta families. I am absolutely positive that this would not have been possible without the dedication and passion of early childhood educators right across Alberta. We continue to provide among the highest wages in Canada for early childhood educators, but we know that there is more to do. There is more exciting news to come. We are engaging on exactly what those next steps are right now, and I know that there will be great news when it comes to professional development and additional supports for educators very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that we know this minister is committed to addressing current issues in the early childhood education, or ECE, workforce and given that we've seen her incredible work on the made-in-Alberta child care deal and given

that early childhood educators are highly skilled professionals whose contributions play an integral role in Alberta's economy and, of course, in the development of our children, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to build a long-term early childhood education strategy to ensure Albertans can access quality child care for generations to come?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our first priority was to roll out these affordability dollars for parents so that parents could be confident in getting their children back into these spaces and increasing our enrolment in all child care spaces right across the province. We also announced \$7 million, doubling the investments we put into inclusive child care training, very important, right across the province in every single type of space. We can double the amount of educators and programs that are able to offer these supports, and we have \$300 million dedicated to supporting our early childhood workforce. On that, I'm excited to say that there's more news to come.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Nielsen: I want to start by offering my deepest thanks and the thanks of the entire opposition caucus to Alberta's EMS and paramedics for their heroic work under tremendous pressures during the pandemic and afterwards. Even when facing stressful situations, fewer resources, and more and more work, they still show up and they go to work saving lives. They are facing burnout, exhaustion but still go out to help Albertans. Albertans appreciate the work and know the sacrifices that these front-line heroes are making and do support them.

The UCP's plan is to continue ignoring the crisis and even, disgustingly, to ask advanced care paramedics to take a pay cut. Our caucus has warned about the increasing number of red alerts, instances where in our largest cities there are no ambulances available to respond to emergencies. We have stood with paramedics to present the data that shows clearly that, under the UCP, ambulance response times have been progressively worsening this past year alone. There is no clearer evidence of this crisis that has developed under the UCP than the image of 14 ambulances waiting outside the Red Deer hospital, waiting to drop off patients for care.

Rather than seeing and hearing the concerns and warnings from the front line, the UCP has chosen instead to ignore the problem in hopes it will simply address itself. The Education minister and the Health minister have tried to dismiss the crisis by claiming that this is a Canada-wide problem, as if that stale talking point somehow provides comfort to Albertans who, thanks to the UCP, now have to worry, if they're injured or in an accident, how long it will take an ambulance to arrive, if one will even arrive. For the past two years the UCP have sat back and watched as this crisis has developed.

The NDP won't do that. We will stand with paramedics. As a government we will work with them to ensure they have the support, resources, and partners to ensure they can do their essential work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Health Care in Northern Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2019 the value of major projects in the Northern Alberta Development Council region was just over \$60 billion. Northern Alberta is the economic powerhouse in Alberta, and the people who make sure that northern Alberta continues to be an economic powerhouse feel left behind. My constituents are unable to deliver their babies in their hospitals; they have long wait times to see a physician, if they can find one; the emergency rooms are often closed; and, to make matters worse, when my constituents drive to the nearest city to take care of their medical needs, they are often met with potholes and frost heaves. These conditions are getting out of hand, and they are unfair to the Albertans who work so hard to contribute to the prosperity of this province, especially when they are seeing other Albertans receive first-class services often on northern Alberta's dime.

Mr. Speaker, we can't just tell the people of Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and St. Paul to move to a place to get better access. We need these people in these communities. My constituents have rich and very diverse histories in these regions. Also, these individuals run our oil sites, our logging industries, and our farms that are located there. As many of my colleagues have pointed out in this House before, transferring wealth from one area in which it is generated through hard work and responsible fiscal policies to another area that frivolously spends is unfair. Northern Alberta is starting to feel like they are contributing equalization payments to large city centres to pay for public transit and ring roads.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I want Alberta to be prosperous, but it is time that we start to look at the needs of northern Alberta and take action. If we contribute so much to Alberta's GDP, then why can't staff be paid more in our regions so that we have reliable access to emergency rooms, obstetrician departments, and education? Before we look for a fair deal for Alberta, we need to look for a fair deal within Alberta. Let's look at addressing these problems and not leaving the Albertans who run the economic powerhouse behind.

Go, Oilers, go.

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

Government Record

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring recognition to everything this government has done and continues to do, from building and strengthening relationships to being exceptional representatives to Alberta. We are showing that Alberta is a place you can be confident in investing in and a region you can trust. Not too long ago the Premier hosted Senator Manchin for a tour of our oil and gas sector. During the tour the Premier provided a strong voice for our resources and a road map to reducing the world's dependency on dictator oil. Just last week the Premier also made a resounding case for a North American energy alliance as he appeared before the Senate energy committee in Washington, DC.

In the past three years alone we have reached more meaningful accomplishments, created more jobs, and sparked more investments in Alberta than the NDP ever did. We did so by doing something they never did: listening to Albertans. You know what, Mr. Speaker? We will continue to do just that. As elected members of this Legislature it is our duty to advocate for our province and its residents. It is a privilege to do so, that we can never take for granted. Our government has taken this duty very seriously, and the results we've achieved in just three years are remarkable, and it's only the beginning.

By building bridges, the Premier and our government have given Alberta's voice more weight in jurisdictions all around the world. This is paving the way for new opportunities to be explored in our province. It is for this reason that I am extremely proud of our government and its efforts. I eagerly anticipate our province reaping well into the future the fruits of success our government has been able to plant in proving Alberta's voice abroad, and, Mr. Speaker, we are far from finished.

Thank you.

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

Early Childhood Educators

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, May 20, was early childhood educator day in Alberta, and I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight the important work of these individuals. Early childhood educators are hard-working and skilled professionals who look after our children every day. The trust we instill in these people is immense, but it is earned. As we know, in many cases early childhood educators love the children in their care as though they were their own.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, early childhood educators provide essential daytime care, without which many parents would not be able to participate in the workforce or go to school. In Fort McMurray, in the region that does not sleep, where energy companies produce Alberta and Canada's revenues 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we need the support of these early childhood educators to provide overnight care for families that have parents working the night shift in Alberta's energy sector. This care is vital to our economy because it enables parents to contribute to the prosperity of this province and nation.

Early childhood educators also play a critical role in shaping the future. The early childhood years are critical for knowledge development and building a foundation for lifelong learning. Through fun, creativity, and learning ECEs shape Alberta's youngest children into leaders of tomorrow. Every year the Minister of Children's Services recognizes the most outstanding in educators through the minister's awards of excellence in child development. We are joined in the gallery today by some of the recipients of this award. I want to take the opportunity to thank all early childhood educators for their important work and for shaping the future leaders of tomorrow. Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee I am pleased to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Diane McLeod as Information and Privacy Commissioner for a five-year term commencing on August 1, 2022. Copies of this report will be available online.

Thank you always so much, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of two motions. First is Government Motion 30, to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that (a) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is the all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly as

referred to in section 131.1 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act for the purpose of considering a draft amendment to section 8 of the publication ban, court applications and orders, regulations proposed to be made under section 131(1)(d.1) of that act; (b) the committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued; and (c) the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within three months of the day on which it commences its consideration of the draft regulation.

I also rise, Mr. Speaker, to give oral notice of Government Motion 31, also to go on the Order Paper in my name.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee tabled on May 24, 2022, Sessional Paper 117/2022, and recommend to Lieutenant Governor in Council that Diane McLeod be appointed as Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a term of five years effective August 1, 2022.

The Speaker: I am not sure that it's needed, but knowing that we have an introduction of bills, perhaps the Government House Leader might be willing to extend the Routine.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will be close, so, yes, I would like to extend the Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Bill 24

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move first reading of Bill 24, which will be the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, as you know and the Chamber knows, a common piece of legislation in a legislative sitting.

This includes amendments that'll be housekeeping in nature that will provide clarity on several acts of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, a fairly simple piece of legislation, and I hope it has the support of all members of the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader has a tabling.

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I have seven tablings, with your indulgence. Opening comment: they are all related to Bill 17, where the sponsoring minister had said that he'd received not a single letter or e-mail and that the concerns being raised by the opposition were imaginary.

My first tabling is strong concerns from the University of Lethbridge postdoctoral association.

My second tabling is an e-mail of strong concerns from the University of Lethbridge graduate bargaining team.

My third tabling is a letter signalling strong concerns from the University of Alberta Postdoctoral Fellows Association.

My fourth: a letter of strong concerns from a six-year academically employed grad student and PhD candidate who previously sat as the VP of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Alberta.

My next is from the University of Calgary Graduate Students' Association, particularly their Labour Relations Committee. Again, strong, strong objections to Bill 17.

A University of Calgary graduate student has written in to the minister.

As well, from the Athabasca University Faculty Association, again expressing strong concerns with Bill 17.

I table these letters and correspondence for the record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and the hon. the deputy government whip has withdrawn his points of order.

That leads us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 17

Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said previously in this House, Bill 17 introduces changes that would improve Albertans' access to bereavement and reservist leaves and maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions. Proposed changes to reservist leave would better address reservists' need to take time off work to attend annual training by removing the 20-day limit on the amount of time reservists can take for this training. To recognize the pain and grief of those who lose an unborn child, Albertans experiencing the end of a pregnancy other than as a result of a live birth would have access to unpaid bereavement leave regardless of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy. Other proposed changes would maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions by allowing academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to continue to have exclusive right to represent their members in collective bargaining negotiations.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We have heard much debate on the proposed changes in this bill, Madam Speaker, and I thank all members for their thoughtful contributions.

I am pleased that we have had broad support for the changes to the reservist leave. These changes recognize the vital role reservists play in protecting the country by making sure they can take the time they need for annual training while keeping their civilian employment. They will continue to be required to give their employers four weeks' notice and include the anticipated return-to-work date before taking reservist leave, which can help employers plan for their absence. Once again, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for his commitment to the men and women who put on the Canadian military uniform, members of the Canadian Armed Forces for sharing their views with him and for their service. With these changes, reservists would have the time they need for their annual training.

Madam Speaker, we have had a thorough discussion on bereavement leave. We voted on an amendment that provides a broad approach to address any situation where a pregnancy ends other than as a result of a live birth, regardless, once again, of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy. I do want to thank the MLA for Sherwood Park and Ms Aditi Loveridge, the founder and CEO of the Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre, for their

advocacy and help in this regard. I would also like to thank the members of this House and others who have spoken about the importance of making bereavement leave available to any employee who experiences pregnancy loss.

As we have discussed in this House, the legislation does not mention any specific examples of pregnancy loss. Madam Speaker, this is intentional. The legislation uses general terminology to make it clear that any employee experiencing the end of a pregnancy other than as a result of live birth is eligible for bereavement leave. To be clear, this includes miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, and other medical termination and other specific situations that may not have come up while debating this legislation.

3:00

Madam Speaker, this wording, "other than as a result of a live birth," is already used in the Employment Standards Code specifically for maternity leave, where employees whose pregnancy ends within 16 weeks of the due date have access to maternity leave. Including specific examples of pregnancy loss in the legislation raises the risk that we will leave some circumstances out or create confusion for people on whether there is a difference in who is covered under maternity leave and bereavement leave provisions. The length of bereavement leave is also staying the same, at a total of three days per calendar year.

Madam Speaker, the third set of changes in Bill 17 allows academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to continue to give their members strong representation at the collective bargaining table. During debate on this bill some members commented on whether stakeholders were consulted about this change. I would like to speak briefly about that.

Both the former Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister of Advanced Education discussed the exclusive right of these associations to represent their members during meetings with postsecondary faculty associations in 2021. The majority of these associations indicated that they support continuing to give academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members. Madam Speaker, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations have the experience and the expertise to represent their members. They also have existing relationships with postsecondary administrations. Allowing them to continue to have the exclusive right to represent their members will ensure a continuity of experience, expertise, and stability.

Madam Speaker, Bill 17 preserves the status quo at postsecondary institutions while improving employees' access to reservist and bereavement leaves. It allows academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows to continue to receive strong representation from their associations, and it allows our brave men and women in uniform and those who have lost a pregnancy to take needed time away from work without the fear of losing their employment.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading to talk about the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I would like to focus my comments on the changes in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act contained in Bill 17 specifically because in his third reading speech just now the minister has stated as fact that the majority of associations have asked for and want this change while acknowledging during the Committee of the Whole debate that he did not reach out to and talk

to graduate student associations or postdoctoral fellow associations across this province.

I've just finished tabling seven letters that the minister has received in the past week from associations at the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University, all making clear their strong objections to these sections. Given that the minister during debate in Committee of the Whole suggested that the Official Opposition was raising imaginary problems and now we know that these were very, very real concerns, Madam Speaker, at this point I would like to introduce an amendment to third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment REC1.

Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Gray: I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2."

Madam Speaker, this amendment is not to prevent Bill 17's final passage. However, I think that this Assembly and particularly this minister did not have the full facts and information while we debated at Committee of the Whole and that there should be an opportunity to return to Committee of the Whole so that this bill can be improved and the concerns of incredibly important stakeholders, who are experiencing an extreme power differential between their employment status and their employers, can be considered and put into the record.

Now, I will remind you, Madam Speaker, that during debate at Committee of the Whole the minister said that he had received not a single letter or e-mail on this particular issue, that he had not heard a single negative report on the bill, that we were referring to "imaginary problems," and that he was "absolutely committed to the well-being of our postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows that work in our great postsecondary institutions." Given that we now have letters from many of these associations suggesting, first, that they were never consulted, that no one had reached out to them to get their input on these sections, and, secondly, that they strongly object to Bill 17 and the impact it will have on them, I find it very problematic that we continue on in third reading without going back to Committee of the Whole, where we can have a more fulsome debate.

Now, I have tabled seven key pieces of correspondence that are representative of the workers in this sector and their perspective on this piece of Bill 17. Certainly, we heard during debate at Committee of the Whole that the minister said that the current arrangement is working and there have not been complaints. I really must stress that people, particularly in the graduate student and postdoctoral sector, were not complaining because they were anticipating being able to have their constitutionally protected rights to collectively bargain upheld once the timelines had passed, timelines that Bill 17 is now going to interfere with.

Certainly, some of the letters included: "Without proper consultation, the UCP Government has put our workers in a precarious situation. We deserve autonomy in the decision of who we choose to represent us." Other letters spoke to how "deeply troubled" they were with "recent assertions that post-secondary associations were consulted prior to the introduction of Section 2 of Bill 17," because, as we now know, they were not, that the legislation "being considered is a testament to the complete lack of consultation with those impacted." Certainly, several of the authors of these pieces of correspondence really wanted to flag that the "bill

was introduced during final exams and during the time when Graduate Student Associations are in the process of rolling over to a newly elected executive" and that the bill was introduced "during one of the busiest times of the year" for graduate students, again, I will repeat, Madam Speaker, after they had not been consulted in any way, shape, or form.

Now, I have tabled these seven pieces. I suspect that the minister may have received more than just those seven pieces, but I want to thank all those who wrote in and copied the Official Opposition so that we could make sure that this was put on the record. This correspondence was received during the constituency break, which I hope gave the minister ample time to review and potentially even reach out to these organizations.

Given how important this is and how seriously this impacts fundamentally important, constitutionally protected rights of freedom of association and to collectively bargain, I believe that this amendment, which would move us back to Committee of the Whole, is entirely appropriate and should be supported by all members, including the minister who has moved third reading and has moved this bill. I hope to hear from said minister, particularly given the divergence of opinions between what he has stated repeatedly through debate – and now we get into third reading – about how widely supported this section is with the evidence that it is not the case, particularly for graduate students and postdoctoral fellowship associations.

For that reason, I move this amendment. I look forward to hearing more of the debate on this particular piece. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment so that we do not pass Bill 17 in a form that will remove the rights from these workers, workers who deserve to be consulted, workers who deserve to have a government who respects their valuable contributions and is prepared to listen to their concerns.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the debate? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will address the amendment put forward by my hon. colleague, but I will do that in just a moment. I think it's interesting that they're now trying to slow down progress on this bill, which is strange because there was a convergence, strange bedfellows in politics perhaps, where we had two different sides of the aisle and two very different sides of the political spectrum within these two coalitions of the NDP and the Conservatives coming together on the amendment we saw in Committee of the Whole.

It's that amendment that I think is why this is so important that we not delay and why we move forward so quickly. I understand – and I'm happy to be corrected by members opposite – that from the labour-intensive, socialist point of view the concern was making sure that workers' rights are concerned and protected in this legislation, so the goal was to say that we need to expand the definition of who could be able to get bereavement leave.

This bill allows parents, particularly mothers who end up having a miscarriage or stillbirth, to be able to take a bereavement leave, and that's important. I agree with the members opposite that it is a basic right that they have to be able to mourn the loss of their children, to be able to recuperate after what is a very trying and difficult time in that family, mother and father's life. The truth is that without the dignity and respect that we show to our most vulnerable, I don't think we're a very strong society at all.

I appreciate that the members opposite come at it from a different perspective, theirs from the strong tradition of solidarity within labour union movements. I appreciate that, but my perspective is more animated instead by my deeply convicted pro-life belief that those stillborn and miscarried babies deserve to be recognized by those mothers. Those mothers have gone through a true and genuine loss, and when they lose that child, they need to grieve, and that is what bereavement is for, to grieve the loss of someone, and there is little more intimate a relationship than there is between a mother and a child in a womb. Every movement, every single moment that mother is aware of the caring, nurturing love that she has for that child in the womb. I think to recognize that miscarried and stillborn babies are valuable to that mother and for us as a society and a Legislature to pass legislation acknowledging that is the least that we need to do.

Life itself is valuable, intrinsically so, and there's not any of us in this Legislature, any law we can pass, that has the competency to change that. It is intrinsic in the nature of life. Madam Deputy Speaker, if any one of us has intrinsic dignity, every one of us might. It's true no matter where you come from. Happily today, sitting above me, we had representatives of Rwanda, and when they underwent the Tutsi genocide that happened – that life is valuable, intrinsically. No matter what tribe they come from, what part of the world they come from, no matter how old or young they are, no matter how sick or valuable they may or may not be to our society, no matter where they are, in a womb or out, that intrinsic dignity is real.

Human life is something that we must always cherish no matter the circumstances, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is why I was so glad to see the amendment expand to include loss of pregnancy for any reason. That includes abortion. That includes children that were lost in abortion. I believe that those mothers should have that same opportunity for bereavement leave. Whatever they might do with it, I think it's important they have that opportunity. I believe every single life, no matter the cause of the loss of that pregnancy, is real. No matter the circumstance that led there, I think it's important that that opportunity for grief and bereavement is offered, if by any place, by this Chamber, that acknowledges the dignity of that life. We must. We must as legislators say that every life – if any one of us has intrinsic value, every one of us has that value.

I believe that this piece of legislation, as interesting as it might be, created these strange bedfellows that aren't naturally always aligned, especially on these kinds of issues. A socialist, labour union NDP Party along with strident conservatives who believe in the dignity of life such as myself and others, a diversity of views in my caucus, all came together to say that we must recognize this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot acknowledge the life of the stillborn and the miscarried without also acknowledging the intrinsic value of the miscarried and aborted babies. Those aborted babies are babies nonetheless. I believe that deeply.

That's why I'm so glad to see that the NDP as a caucus unanimously voted in favour of the amendment to protect that right and to acknowledge their existence as children that ought to be grieved, that this Legislature ought to acknowledge that bereavement extends not just to those inside our world today that live outside the womb but those in the womb as well. It is a deeply held conviction of mine that we must protect every single innocent life.

I know it's a fraught topic, Madam Deputy Speaker, but one that we must address and one that I feel compelled to put on the record today. That is my belief, and I believe – maybe I'm in a minority; I don't know – that thousands upon thousands of other Albertans will appreciate that as well. But I think the ones who appreciate it the most are not the ones driven by an ideology, not the ones informed

by a set of beliefs and who come to a place with an abstraction, but the ones who get to benefit day to day from this piece of legislation, that will recognize the value and dignity of all these children before they're born and also recognize the grief that mothers and parents need to go through when they lose a child.

I am proud to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I will be voting in favour of the legislation. I will not be voting in favour of the amendment, which, I believe, the purpose of is to slow down the passing of this legislation. I believe this will be the most pro-life piece of legislation that I will ever have the chance to vote on in my life, probably the most pro-life piece of legislation this Chamber will pass, and I couldn't be more proud that we're going to do it, I believe, God willing, unanimously, on all sides of the aisle.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, let me thank the Member for Peace River for his comments. You know, he referred to us as unlikely bedfellows. Noting that we are coming up to Pride Month, I was entertaining the thought of being his bedfellow.

Mr. Williams: I'm married. I'm very flattered, but I'm married.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh. Anyway, we can't be held responsible for our thoughts, Madam Speaker, but it was an interesting picture that I didn't expect the Member for Peace River, of all of the members here in the House, to paint.

I wanted, unlike the Member for Peace River, to focus my comments on the actual amendment that is before us today, and that is to send this bill back to Committee of the Whole to reconsider the changes to the Labour Relations Code that are being proposed here.

Before I get into the reasons why we need to reconsider the changes, I want to provide the House with a little bit of historical perspective that I would have as the Minister of Advanced Education who brought forward the legislative changes that are being amended in this bill before us today. When I was Minister of Advanced Education, we inherited a unique labour relations model in the postsecondary system in Canada, one where academic staff were designated as academic staff by the boards of governors of the universities and colleges where they worked, with no possibility of appeal, one where academic staff were prohibited by legislation from going on strike, where binding arbitration was the only option for settling labour disputes. That was true for graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows had no recognition as employees whatsoever under the Labour Relations Code or the Post-secondary Learning Act or any other piece of legislation that affected the province of Alberta.

We recognized that this was unconstitutional, and we embarked on significant changes to the labour relations model in the academic sector to comply with the Constitution of the country, that allows for employees to freely associate in labour unions and to withdraw their labour if they see fit to do so and, conversely, to give employers the rights to lock out their employees if they saw fit to do so after exhausting all of the other legal channels, putting everybody in a right to strike or a right to lock out. I'm proud of the work that we did restoring those constitutional rights that had never been granted to academic workers in this province, and I'm very pleased to see that those labour relations changes have resulted in some strong negotiations and significant wins for faculty associations in the province of Alberta, all across the province.

3:20

I'm also particularly proud of the fact that we were the first jurisdiction in the country to freely recognize postdoctoral fellows as employees of universities. This was something that no other jurisdiction had done, and by doing so, we granted postdoctoral fellows the ability to form unions and to negotiate for better wages, better working conditions, and, really importantly, extended health benefits. That was something that was very important to postdoctoral fellows that I talked to when I was Minister of Advanced Education.

A lot of the postdoctoral fellows who work in our universities come from outside of the country, earn very little money, and have a really hard time covering those additional health expenses that crop up from time to time. I'm thinking of dental bills, medical bills, prescription drug costs, if you need to get an ambulance, for example. They didn't have the ability to pay for those things. But because our government was the first in the country to recognize postdoctoral fellows as employees, they had the right to bargain as a union for extended benefits, a significant advancement.

There is no shortage of labour exploitation in universities and colleges. By allowing postdoctoral fellows to form unions and negotiate under the Labour Relations Code, we significantly advanced workers' rights on campuses in Alberta. Now, part of the deal when we made these changes was to protect the exclusive bargaining rights of faculty associations, grad student associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations for a period of five years. Now, why did we do this, Madam Speaker? The reason was because none of these associations had any history or experience dealing with a traditional labour relations model, where people could strike or be locked out. They had no strike funds in place. They had no experience running a strike. We gave them a five-year period to effectively get their act together and prepare for a traditional labour relations model as it's practised in other jurisdictions in the province.

But at the very beginning all of those associations understood that once that five-year period was expired, their members would be able to freely choose who was their bargaining agent. That was designed to be an incentive for faculty associations, grad student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations to demonstrate to their members that they could effectively act as their bargaining agents, and if not, then those members would have the right to choose another bargaining agent. That was the deal. Everybody understood that at the time. Now, with these changes that the minister of labour is proposing, that deal has been rendered null and void.

Now, Madam Speaker, when I was Minister of Advanced Education, I was accused of running a plot on behalf of CUPE to turn over labour relations on campuses to that union in particular. Now, nothing was further from the truth, but I will say that larger labour unions have much more resources in terms of people on the ground and money in the bank to support smaller bargaining units in bargaining for better working conditions and wages and benefits. These smaller associations, particularly grad student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations, when they're small, are left at the mercy of the employer. They don't have the collective power to fight back against the potentially unreasonable demands that the employer may make of them during bargaining. So if they so choose, if they see that their employer is taking advantage of them, under the system that we promised them in 2017, when we introduced the legislation, they could choose as of 2022 a new bargaining agent to better represent them. Now that's being taken away from them.

You know, one of the documents that my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods tabled this afternoon was a letter from the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge. They said that they represent 30 employees. Thirty employees. Well, these are employees who earn very little money, \$15 to \$20 an hour typically, and they often have a hard time making ends meet. What kind of strike fund can 30 employees who are earning \$15 an hour generate on their own? If an employer makes them fight hard for a good deal at the bargaining table and puts them in a position where their members want to go on strike, they won't have the power to fight back. So it's only fair that in these kinds of circumstances the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge have the option of choosing a bigger union to better represent them, give them a fighting chance to bargain a fair deal for themselves.

This government loves to talk about fair deals. Why aren't they giving the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge at least the courtesy of an invitation to consult on the changes? Maybe they're perfectly happy with their postdoctoral fellow association as it's constituted, but the minister of labour won't even let them have their voices be heard and is forcing them to stick with their existing association, with no chance of that being removed in the near future. It's absolutely not fair, and it's unconstitutional, Madam Speaker. I am certain that if any group were to challenge the constitutionality of this legislation once it's proclaimed, the Supreme Court would probably uphold the finding that it's unconstitutional.

That's why we are here to propose this amendment to send this part of the bill back to Committee of the Whole so that we can reconsider these changes and at least give the minister and the members of the House the opportunity to hear from the people who are being impacted by these changes to see if this is actually what they want and what additional tools they need to put themselves into stronger positions of bargaining with their employer.

Madam Speaker, it's quite clear to me that the minister made a mistake when he proposed these changes, and I think that the only proper thing to do is admit that he made a mistake, send this portion of the bill back to Committee of the Whole, allow members of the Legislature to hear from the people who are being impacted, and then make a decision on what the right path forward should be.

I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment and reconsider this section of the bill. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will rise in support of this amendment and having the bill recommitted back to Committee of the Whole to remove section 2. Now, I appreciate the member speaking to the fact that he believes that this is a way to slow down this piece of legislation. It is not the case. In fact, the government could easily send this bill back to Committee of the Whole under this recommittal amendment, remove section 2, consult appropriately, proceed with the bill without section 2 in it, and we can all vote on it and move forward.

Then the pieces that the hon. members were concerned about, with the amendment that both the government and the opposition agreed on in regard to parental leave in relation to loss of pregnancy, would be dealt with. We would be able to support that. We would be able to move this bill forward with those pieces of the labour code in place to support the very concerns that the hon. member was speaking to while removing section 2 out of the piece of legislation and allowing the minister appropriate time to go back

to the seven or so associations that have written him in the last week and fix the legislation as they're requesting be done.

I don't think it's unreasonable to ask that this bill go back to Committee of the Whole, and in fact it would be in the best interests of the government to do so so that they can actually fix the very concerns that the minister is hearing.

3:30

It's not very common to see a group of associations come together and write the minister in such a quick period of time, at the capacity and at the level that this minister has received. Again, as my hon. colleague mentioned, we only received seven of those letters. We don't know if the minister actually has received more correspondence in regard to this section of the bill or not, so there may be more concerns being brought forward, in particular on section 2, that the minister needs to consider and look at with more detail and go back to those organizations and those associations and have those conversations.

But what this speaks to, again, is the very issue that this government continues to see themselves in, which is looking at bills, writing bills that speak to so many different sections that don't necessarily speak to each other. We see this with the red tape reduction legislation all the time, where this government will then introduce a section of a piece of a bill, they will make changes, and then all of a sudden realize that those changes that they have made now impact a whole bunch of other sections in other pieces of legislation that then now have to be amended or fixed because they create a problem over here.

Well, again, this government has done the same under Bill 17, moving and looking at a variety of labour-related codes and regulations, adjusting a whole bunch of pieces, and then realizing that they actually are not even correlated to each other: one is about the ability for bargaining and the right to association, the other piece of the bill is about parental leaves or loss-of-pregnancy leaves, yet they're in there together. Again, I think that what this minister needs to do is to acknowledge that maybe this was an error and that there is more consultation that needs to be done, bring the bill back into Committee of the Whole so that the section can be evaluated and removed.

Then we can all agree that the changes to the employment standards around loss of pregnancy for any reason can be adopted by both sides of this House. We fundamentally both agreed. When the amendment was introduced by the government in Committee of the Whole around pregnancy loss, it was agreed that that was something that we all supported. This actually wouldn't prevent the bill from potentially, because I will not determine the outcome of a vote in the House, moving forward by the end of today. It's an easy fix. You come back, you introduce an amendment, you remove the section, we vote on that, we move forward, go to third reading, decide what the outcome of that is, and done as dinner.

I disagree fundamentally with the government member that stood up and said that this is a tactic to slow things down. It's not. It's just this government's unwillingness to work collaboratively with the opposition on something that really should be fixed, that is very simplistic in the process of really just some parliamentary practice. It doesn't take very long. We're all skilled at being able to move into Committee of the Whole and rising and reporting and coming back and doing all of the things that we need to do. We could get this done today. So I think it's very important that the government really look at the opportunity that is being presented to them with the request to move into Committee of the Whole, to revert back. It gives the government the opportunity to introduce, make a change, continue on, and then the bill could potentially be dealt with by the end of today.

I think that we all agree that the loss-of-pregnancy component that is in this piece of legislation is something that we can all agree on, so of course we wouldn't want to prevent that from happening. We would want to encourage the bill to move forward, and we support that in happening. We believe that bereavement leave needs to be in place as soon as possible, so we fundamentally agree with what the government member was saying only a few minutes ago.

We disagree on section 2. I don't believe that the government was aware to what extent the issue was going to be for them when it was introduced into this House because, of course, as indicated by my colleague, most of the associations that were being impacted were in the middle of exams and were in the middle of doing a variety of different things when this piece of legislation was introduced.

I mean, we could say that maybe that is why the government introduced it when they introduced it, because they knew it was going to be a problem. Instead of choosing to engage and ensure the right to associate was protected, the government decided to do this at a time when people were distracted and the associations were distracted by the work that they do, so they wouldn't be able to be loud and push back on the government the way that they maybe normally would have. There's that component. That could have been the case. I mean, we can't necessarily always trust this government in what they do and why they do the things, and maybe this is an example of that. Or, giving the benefit of the doubt, the government just didn't have a clue what was going on because they didn't consult properly, and now there's a mistake.

Going back into Committee of the Whole: here's an opportunity. This is the opposition trying to help the government do something that makes sense, maybe save their bacon a little bit in regard to this. Bring it back, go into Committee of the Whole, look at section 2, make the changes. Decide what they want to do, whether it's remove section 2 altogether or amend it, which takes longer – but that's up to the government to do – and then we can proceed after it's dealt with. Now, again, I mean, I would be interested to see if the government is willing to do that. I would encourage them to do it, though. I think that at some point humility is best, and sometimes acknowledging that you made a mistake – whether you got caught in the mistake or not, it was a mistake.

Or be honest and stand up and say that there is a fundamental disagreement between the government and the opposition around the right to association, and the government doesn't agree with that; therefore, that was why this was done. If that's the case, the government could be honest and say that, too, but be honest either way. Be honest that you don't agree with the right to association. Be honest in that you slid this through when nobody was paying attention because we didn't really want to deal with it, or be honest and say: we made a mistake; we should probably bring it back and fix it.

It's all about honesty. It's all about showing Albertans that you can be humble and admit when you make a mistake. I would think that we're at a time where this government would like to maybe shift the direction that they've had in the past, and this would be a prime opportunity to do that. There's a little bit more humility, maybe, in this government, and this would be an opportunity to show that humility and acknowledge that mistakes were made, turn over a new leaf. Things are changing. Here's your opportunity to show us today, first day back, that things are different. Probably won't happen. You know, we like to believe that things can change, but we do know that past behaviour is a prediction of future behaviour. The likelihood of things changing is probably not going to happen the way that Albertans would like it to.

I will leave it at that. I will support this recommittal back to Committee of the Whole to support the government in trying to

make better decisions and to fix this mistake. I will leave it with them to decide whether or not they're willing to take that opportunity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon, provide some additional comments, of course, with the amendment we have to recommit here to Committee of the Whole, a very sensible amendment given my comments when we were in Committee of the Whole and the changes that were being considered around the labour relations amendment. I know that a previous speaker had spoken about delaying the bill here and moving it forward, and I would remind members that during Committee of the Whole we took steps to try to separate some of that out, try to make changes around those labour relations amendments to try to save the government a lot of hassle, a lot of time, and probably a lot of money. I spoke at length and even quoted some of the federal regulations around individuals' freedom to associate, with their ability to be able to choose their own bargaining agent. This is a federal Supreme Court decision that is very, very clear. You are able to choose who you have bargain with you.

3:40

The problem with the language that's contained right now here in Bill 17 is that it goes against that. As somebody, again, who's been involved in the labour movement for a considerable amount of time, over two decades, dealing with contracts, dealing with my employer, dealing with other employers and their contracts and their language, I can tell you that this change violates that. It will be challenged, and you'll lose, and you're going to cost Albertans a bunch of money, kind of like you cost them a bunch of money betting on Trump, kind of like you cost them a bunch of money putting together a report that found no wrongdoing. I can go on and on.

Now, again, just to address some of the comments earlier around delaying the support of the House around pregnancy leave, I will admit that I feel the language could have been a little bit stronger. I'm kind of taking a little bit of an approach there where sometimes I can't always bargain the best language that I could get, but at least this was something. It was much better than nothing. It could have been better. But, see, if we'd divided these out so we could have quickly moved on that, we could have dealt with the language around the labour relations changes.

As my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods tabled earlier, the documents from, you know, the Graduate Students' Association, postdoctoral associations very clearly stating that they didn't get proper consultation – my friend quoted this, and I'll redo it again. "I have not heard anyone out there who says that we need to upset the current arrangement."

If we look at what the current arrangement is right now, it was set to expire, thereby then falling in line with the federal guidelines on this. My friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who went at length through the history of how this came forward, offering, you know, the types of labour relations language that these associations have never had before – they've never had the ability until the Supreme Court ruling around strikes and things like that. Now all of a sudden they have to try to begin to understand what labour relations is, how bargaining works, creating language, give, take, all that fun stuff of bargaining. It was very purposely put in there, an expiry date giving them a short period of time to get their feet underneath them, at which point then they have to go forward, and if the associations, with the blessing of their members, decide they want to change their

bargaining agent, they can do so, just like every other Canadian is allowed to do in this country. They have that ability to do that.

Unfortunately, I'm sorry to say, this language around labour relations proposed in Bill 17, which is why we need to send it back to committee, violates that. It goes against it. You read the language. It's plain and simple. We can quickly go back to Committee of the Whole, give the minister time to read these letters that were tabled by our labour critic around the consultation process – none of them were consulted. None of them agree with the changes. I'm saving you a bunch of headache, saving you a bunch of time. I'm saving you a bunch of money. Again, this will be challenged. You'll lose. You'll cost Alberta taxpayers that money, because I'm certain it's not going to be coming out of your pockets.

So let's just save all of that headache, quickly move this back to Committee of the Whole – we can fix this; it's not a big deal – and then we can move forward when we've got language that we can support in its entirety in all of Bill 17. But this rhetoric around trying to slow things down? No; that doesn't hold water. We attempted to try to fix this earlier, and the government members ignored that.

Now that we have the proof, I'm hoping members opposite will reconsider. My friend from Edmonton-Manning said that we can fix this quickly. You won't get a lot of push-back. We can change the language so it doesn't violate a person's ability to the right of association and choosing their bargaining agent. Their choice, not ours. It's just that simple.

I'm hoping we will hear some backpedalling a little bit. This is a good amendment, to send it back to Committee of the Whole so we can move forward with a piece of legislation that will in its entirety help Albertans. Again, as I said, I wish the language around the parental leave was just a little bit stronger. I would have been more happy with that, but at least it's a starting point. Maybe in a future Legislature, Madam Speaker, we'll get a chance to make that even a little bit stronger and protect everybody's rights around that.

I will be supporting the amendment for it to go back to committee, and I look forward to hearing more from other members of this House.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise, first of all, to speak, obviously, in favour of this recommittal amendment and to provide a couple of comments, first of all, as to process. There is no need to dilly-dally on this. We can simply send this piece of legislation back to committee real quick – we could probably do it before 4:30 – and take out the section in particular that deals with this matter in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act on that piece, specifically, with respect to being able to choose a bargaining agent for postdoctoral and other graduate students and other university staff. We can do that and send it back here into third. You know, if Parliamentary Counsel wants to have a look at it during the dinner break, that's fine. We can return at 7:30 and probably get this matter done and dusted by this evening. This is not difficult. We all are capable legislators, and where we fall down in our capabilities, we have Parliamentary Counsel to assist us.

There is no question that this can be done. It can be done expeditiously, and this attempt to use this specious reasoning that somehow, you know, this is frustrating the work of the Legislature is a completely inane assertion and ought to be withdrawn by the member who made it.

I am going to, first of all, begin with the words of a constituent of mine, Dr. Chelsea Matisz, who is the president of the University of Lethbridge Postdoctoral Fellows Association, who has written to the minister, and I know that the ULPA has also spoken to the

Minister of Advanced Education. I don't know if the two ministers have had any chance to talk about this.

Certainly, in our government, when we were making labour standards changes in response to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour decision in which we affirmed the right, which had been affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada, for postdoctoral and other graduate students and academic staff more broadly to bargain collectively within legislation and removed the prohibitions on free and fair collective bargaining that that had heretofore existed in this province, the Minister of Advanced Education was very much involved in that process and very carefully consulted, which is why we ended up with this time-limited sort of period of time in which, by request, academic staff associations and others had said: you know, can we put the brakes on this for five years until we can figure out what this means for us and how we go about this process of freely and fairly choosing a bargaining agent?

3:50

This is a group of people who, of course, didn't really even know what that meant before that, and now they do. So, certainly, there is no question that we put that in place and that had we not had an expiration date on it, those associations would have had grounds to very, very quickly have that section of the act struck down because without that expiration date it is *prima facie* unconstitutional, which is exactly what we are about to do here. Legislatures ought not do things that are, on the face of it, a Charter violation, and in this case this is, on the face of it, a violation of our section 2(d) rights, as affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police decision of January 2015.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Back to Dr. Chelsea Matisz, who is a postdoctoral fellow in neuroscience. She is the mother of a child, as well, who is deaf. She is a neuroscientist who is tremendously committed to the community. She has also had to spend her time during her postdoctoral fellowship, which is an Alberta Innovates fellowship at the University of Lethbridge, advocating for the restoration of PUF funding because she doesn't have anything better to do, being a brain scientist and the mother of two young children, one of whom she has had to go to the wall advocating for within the school system and elsewhere given the amount of supports that have been taken away from that child.

Here we are, where Dr. Matisz has also written a letter saying, "[Look.] this amendment clearly violates the rights of our members to freely associate and choose their representation." They have 30 postdoctoral workers at the University of Lethbridge, many of whom are international, from other areas of Canada, working in research laboratories, and "on top of the production of knowledge that made us pursue academic work . . . [the] members are . . . under extreme pressure to mentor, publish papers, write grants, and teach."

Postdoctoral fellows are, by their very definition, working to further their careers, and they have to do that with a tremendous amount of pressure on them. Having representation is therefore critically important. They do not have time, in Chelsea's representations to me over the last little while, to play lawyer, as she says. She is a literal brain scientist. She has another profession to undertake. Now, Chelsea writes papers such as *Neuroinflammatory Remodeling of the Anterior Cingulate Cortex as a Key Driver of Mood Disorders in Gastrointestinal Disease and Disorders*. She does not have time to mess around in collective bargaining. She would like to pay her dues and have a bargaining agent that she has freely and fairly chosen, her along with the 30 others, to concern themselves with these matters.

Now, it's really important that these folks have representation. We have just seen the extent of that importance at the University of Lethbridge, with some seven, eight weeks of labour disruption in the city, where we had neighbours set against one another. We had the community that had wedges driven within it, all because of an incredible amount of cuts cascading down onto the community and leaving the board of governors in an extremely untenable position, leaving deans and others in extremely difficult positions as they've had to navigate \$20 million worth of cuts to a town of 100,000 people. The economic impact has been devastating.

This is yet another reason why I would prefer folks at the centre for neuroscience to continue to do their work given the amount of disruption that we have already seen to their research agenda, to graduate students' and undergraduate learning conditions, to our scientific labs' general output, and to the reputational damage that has been visited upon the University of Lethbridge by this government's short-sighted cuts, that are in fact getting in the way of our ability to produce scientific research in the public interest, as Dr. Matisz does.

Now, literally this afternoon we could pass a bill that, in fact, conforms to our section 2(d) Charter-guaranteed right of freedom of association. I'm going to remind the House that the courts provide the Legislature with a great deal of latitude. For example, the expiration date that we would have put on the original legislation of some five years: the courts would not have seen that as a substantial interference because, first of all, it was at the behest of the associations themselves, and, second of all, it was time-limited for specific reasons. The court has actually been really clear on this right to freely choose our bargaining agents because

section 2(d) [of the Charter] protects . . .

And I'm reading here from the Supreme Court decision

. . . three classes of activities: (1) the right to join with others and form associations; (2) the right to join with others in pursuit of other constitutional rights; and (3) the right to join with others to meet on more equal terms the power and strength of other groups or entities.

That is, in fact, how the right to collective bargaining has been interpreted by the courts.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, the right to collective bargaining is one that guarantees a process, not an outcome. This is why it is really important to understand that associations, in the first instance, asked us for that time-limited expiration and why now having that be an indefinite thing will constitute substantial interference in the exercise of people's Charter rights.

The degree of choice required by the Charter reading from the court's decision

for collective bargaining purposes is one that enables employees to have effective input into the selection of the collective goals to be advanced by their association.

This does not.

Moreover, accountability to the members of the association plays an important role . . . A scheme that holds representatives accountable to the employees who chose them ensures that the association works towards the purposes for which the employees joined together.

They have to be able to choose those purposes. Now, the court writes that the industry culture and workplace necessarily conditions what is required to permit meaningful collective bargaining.

Whatever the labour relations model, the Charter does not permit choice and independence to be eroded such that there is substantial interference with a meaningful process.

Now, here in this legislation, as it was in the court's decision in January '15 on the RCMP members' interference in their ability to choose their bargaining agent, this is not in this piece of legislation "a case of a complete denial of the constitutional right to associate." In this legislation, as well, workers have the right to be part of an association; it is just this particular association. That is exactly the prohibition that the court strikes down in January 2015. "Not only are members represented by an organization they did not choose . . . they must work within a structure that is part of the management organization." That is what was struck down by the courts some – well, pretty well seven years ago.

So we ought not do things that we know are wrong, like, just generally in life, but also the courts have taken a very, very dim view of Legislatures who serially undertake these kinds of actions, particularly as they concern collective bargaining. In B.C. they did this a couple of times with interference in teachers' negotiations over the course of the Christy Clark government. They brought in some legislation that was clearly struck down over a period of years. They came back in and introduced the very same legislation, which very, very quickly rose through the appeal processes, and the Supreme Court struck it down in, like, two weeks or something. It was really, really quick. They said in there that Legislatures should not do this. So that's where we find ourselves now, where a Legislature is doing exactly this.

I'm going to put it on the record because when this goes to its inevitable constitutional challenge, the *Hansard* will be read by the members of the court, that this government was warned that they are doing something that is prima facie unconstitutional, and they barrelled forward with it anyway. Except what they could do is take this piece out right now and refer it back to Committee of the Whole, solve the problem – bang; done – pass the legislation, and we don't have to go through all of that headache.

And Dr. Chelsea Matisz can get back to being the brain scientist that she's good at, not having to write grouchy letters to a labour minister. This is a complete waste of her time. She should be parenting. She should be publishing articles. She should be restoring the reputation at the University of Lethbridge so we can attract more people like Dr. Chelsea Matisz to an absolutely amazing centre for neuroscience, where research and science in the public interest is happening every day that advances what we know about ourselves and about the world around us. That is what we should be doing with our time in this Legislature. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education has heard that because I told him, and I know that the minister of labour has heard these messages because those letters were tabled and he received them.

4:00

Now it's up to the government to do the right thing. They can write back to Dr. Matisz and say, "No; actually, we prefer that you waste your time," or they can say, "Yeah; absolutely, we pulled this section because it was poorly conceived." That is fine. We've already done that in this Legislature once with the electricity storage bill that came in last fall, that stakeholders didn't like. It was pulled, and it was substantially improved, and it sailed through this House, and we voted in favour of it. We can do that again, or we can persist in this breathtaking hubris and arrogance that is characteristic of this government and this front bench in particular and that has led to its catastrophic and historic comeuppance that was just delivered last week. I guess we can persist in that. See how it goes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, and I'm quite happy to follow the extremely well-reasoned arguments from the Member for Lethbridge-West, who has outlined very clearly that the government – if they proceed with the bill as it is in its current state, it is going to be found ultimately to be unconstitutional on a matter which has been before the Supreme Court no less than a half dozen times and had clearly been determined in this country as being a fundamental right, to choose your own representation. We can see here that this government is failing to do this. The argument that they gave for failing to deal with this issue is that they had not heard any complaints. In fact, the minister at one point said in the House, quote: let me confirm that again; there has not been a single e-mail or letter on this particular issue. You know, we were a bit surprised to hear that because, of course, we don't know what letters arrive in the minister's office, yet we've been hearing fairly regularly from organizations that they were concerned about this.

I know that it surprised me, too, because initially when I spoke to this in the House, I said that I hadn't heard some, and then subsequently because I had put that out there, people had gotten back to me and said: no; there are concerns. So I know that people are listening, I know that people are responding, and I can't imagine that they only responded to me and not to the minister.

Subsequently, we learned over this weekend that there were many people who wrote letters to this minister addressing exactly the same issue that had been addressed to me. We know that the critic for labour from the opposition side of the House, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, has actually received a number of carbon copies of letters that were sent to the minister and was able to even, just today, file seven letters that came from organizations such as members of the bargaining units at the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University.

We know that the minister may not have heard something initially about this, as I had not, but we know that subsequently there has been a significant number of people that have been coming forward and saying that this needs to be addressed and expressing their concerns and putting those concerns in writing, as apparently required by the minister.

You know, the minister's arguments for not making changes to this section of the bill certainly have been demonstrated to not be based on substantive truth. As such, it is really requisite upon this minister to go back and correct themselves, as, in fact, I have done on this particular bill, initially saying that I hadn't heard anything, but now I'm telling you that I have. That's exactly what the minister should do, should just follow the lead here on this side of the House and go back and refer this bill to the Committee of the Whole, only so that one section of this bill can be withdrawn to avoid ultimate potential constitutional challenges at the Supreme Court on this particular issue. Seems like a pretty simple thing to do.

Now, I know, of course, that some members on the government side of the House have complained that this somehow delays the legislation. Again, we've seen this sort of false narrative being presented here in this House before. Taking the time in the House to actually review a bill does not actually change the ultimate implementation of the bill in the long run. These things don't happen immediately on the day on which they're discussed. There is a process that takes a while, so putting it back into committee, having committee remove one section, and then going back to the vote: we could even do that in one day, today. It would literally make no change in terms of the day that this bill came into effect.

We've seen this kind of somewhat deceitful argument being presented by the government in the past. We know with regard to the government's attempt to subvert democracy in this House by

forcing the bill discussing the rebates for utilities through in one day without proper consideration for the various three stages, four stages including the Committee of the Whole, in the House, trying to push all that through in the same day, and of course their argument was that somehow the opposition was delaying those rebates. But in truth, anybody watching can tell that even though we didn't agree to that immediate pushing through the House on that particular day, they got through that bill within a matter of days, and it still has not come into effect some weeks later. So they're arguing that we delayed something that they haven't actually done anything with after they got it passed.

Now, even in the House today the Premier was asked about a date on which those rebates will be put out, and in fact the Premier was unable to give us a date. He gave us the classic line of in due time. I think that that tells us that when the government is saying that we are delaying something here in the House, it is not, in fact, a legitimate argument and it does not actually make a difference in terms of the implementation of the actual contents of the bill. It simply is a change in terms of the processes here in this House.

It's quite discouraging to see the government raise yet again these false arguments in which they simply do not want to hear from people in the province of Alberta, in this case people who are represented by these kinds of bargaining committees at places like the University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge, University of Calgary, and Athabasca University. The government is simply saying: we are going to pretend that there is a problem that does not exist in order to not hear you. You know, this seems to be the classic issue here. The government has routinely throughout their time in government really been loath to be open to democratic processes, in fact, have made a number of attempts to be seriously undemocratic in their administration of the business of this House.

I mean, we are still the only place in the country where the government has designed a process for, essentially, the elimination of all bills coming from the opposition side of the House. Everywhere else in Canada, including the House of Commons, opposition members can bring bills forward to the House of Commons. But in this House the government designed this very undemocratic process in which they refuse to see a bill in the House until it has gone to a committee, which they control, and then in the committee they have stopped 100 per cent of the opposition bills from moving forward and have proceeded with 100 per cent with the government-side bills. So we clearly know that they are trying to subvert democracy in this process. It has nothing to do with the efficiency of the House or anything else. It has to do statistically, quite demonstrably – they are using this to actually stop the democratic process that has been part of the Westminster system for many hundreds of years.

4:10

That just seems to be the pattern here with this government, that they don't actually support democratic processes and continually try to bring new procedures into the House in order to subvert democracy. Of course, we've seen this in terms of the number of times this government has brought in closure, which is considerably higher than any other government previously. We see this in terms of trying to, you know, essentially mislead the public by saying that a delay of discussing a bill in the House will actually delay its implementation when indeed that's not true.

I really think the government should take this opportunity to for once just stand on the side of democracy and to actually allow a discussion in the House to occur for the sake of the people of the province of Alberta. They don't even have to agree with things in the end. They can say they disagree, but they should allow democracy to occur. This is something that this government has

been essentially against since the time that they came in. You know, we certainly see this here in the House, and we certainly see that they struggle with democracy on their own side in their own private business. We get very discouraged when we see these kinds of things going on. We get discouraged when we have a Premier that's still under investigation by the RCMP for their behaviour in what should have been a democratic process in terms of getting elected.

It's really too bad because there's much about this bill that we actually would like to support. I know that there was a speaker, the Member for Peace River, who stood up to talk about this amendment and then, of course, didn't speak about the topic of the amendment at all but talked about some of the other parts of the bill that we are fully supportive of. You know, I want to say that moving this back into committee is not because we are against those portions of the bill. We would love to have separated out these pieces so that we could easily support the good things that are coming out of this bill. We certainly would love to support the sections with regard to pregnancy leave and bereavement.

I think it's very important that we recognize that this is a significant shift in terms of acknowledging the suffering of people that have gone through often very traumatic kinds of situations and the need for them to be able to be given time to appropriately grieve. We heard some very good speeches on both sides of the House about grieving and the process of grieving and the process of, you know, having to say goodbye to a family member in the case of a terminated pregnancy for whatever cause. We know that there is consent. This government could go back to the Committee of the Whole, get rid of the egregious parts, the antidemocratic, anticonstitutional parts of the bill, and move on with the good pieces that we obviously have unanimous consent on, which is something that, of course, members of the public are constantly asking us to do here in this House, and that is to work together to provide consent on both sides of the House for a piece of bill. Yet when we try to do that, the government does everything possible to try to undermine us and to stop us from actually contributing to the democratic process here in this House.

I find it very discouraging that we find ourselves yet in this place again with a government that does not wish to engage in the processes that we are all sent in this House to do on behalf of our citizens, and that is to bring ideas forward, to debate those ideas, and to use those ideas to actually inform policy in this House. It's just discouraging to see that the government has decided that they don't wish to have the Westminster system used in its effective way in Alberta like it is being used across the rest of Canada. You know, I think people in the public should come to realize that there have been numerous examples of this government acting in ways which are largely undemocratic, refusing to allow witnesses from the opposition to appear in committee, refusing in committee to allow bills to enter into the House, and then refusing in the House for us to debate all the sections of the bill. What this government would like to do is just be able to come up with its own ideas, ignore the House, and implement those ideas without any kind of a back-and-forth, democratic, opposition-based process, which is not what a democracy is. By its very definition, a democracy requires that you have the ability for voices that are opposed to government policy to be heard, and this government is just choosing to not do that on a regular basis.

I think it would be nice to see the government take an opportunity to come back to the House. You know, it would only take a short period of time here in this House. We could stop this constant request from our side to do this right now. We could go back into committee. We could have that piece finished by 6 o'clock. We

could have legal review done over the dinner hour, and then we could come back into this House later this evening to pass this bill.

You know, it's not a difficult thing to do. It's only the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to the amendment before us, put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, again, recognizing that "Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2."

I have had the opportunity to speak to Bill 17, I think likely in second reading, potentially, and I spent the majority if not all of that time discussing the piece around bereavement in this legislation. We again did hear a member of the government speak to that piece this afternoon. I don't plan to reflect on those comments too much other than just thanking the House for their indulgence and the opportunity to speak to some things that are very personal to myself but also again pointing out that the member of government stood up on this amendment and talked about the importance of these changes to bereavement.

I respect and understand where that member was coming from, but the fact is that we have two quite separate issues on the table within Bill 17. Specifically to the changes that we're seeing around freedom of association and the Labour Statutes Amendment Act changes, there are some major concerns that deserve to be addressed, and many organizations that have come forward – and those documents have been tabled, again, as previous members have stated. These associations, whether they're graduate student associations, faculty associations, postdoctoral fellow associations, are raising red flags that this government, first of all, is not respecting the, you know, constitutionally and Supreme Court protected idea of freedom of association but, above that, has not taken the time to consult with these associations through the process, which has left them with so many questions. At the end of the day, they just want the opportunity for fair representation and the opportunity to choose a bargaining agent of their choice.

When we look at some of the comments that have been made, specifically, I believe, from documents that were sent to the Minister of Advanced Education – and, of course, the opposition was included on those documents – the Postdoctoral Fellows Association of the U of A had raised concerns about high turnover, which is quite natural in these situations. From one to four years we'll see many of these people come and go, and they were raising concerns that it makes it really hard to establish a long-term association, I guess, or establish what often needs to be a large conversation that carries on for many years. They, in their documents that they sent, again pointed out the fact that these organizations often need aid from larger, established organizations, whether it's one union or another.

I think it's important that we reflect on some of the comments that have been made, and I will go over some of those, as previous members have. When we are talking about ensuring a sustainable path forward for these associations and their ability to freely associate and also just have their voices heard at the bargaining table and by this government specifically, Madam Speaker, this government has got it wrong, and that is very clear by some of the comments that have been made.

4:20

Looking at the position put forward by the president of the Athabasca University Faculty Association in their communications with the minister, specifically to the comments that the Minister of Labour and Immigration made about how the government has done such a great job of consulting, the president made it very clear that the Athabasca University Faculty Association was not consulted, you know, prior to this legislation coming forward or through the process at all.

That is a consistent message that has been sent again and again to this government, that they don't feel like they've been consulted. When we're looking at the graduate bargaining team from the University of Lethbridge, straight from the letter: "This is a clear infringement of our right to choose representation. Further, this decision is massively out of touch with the needs of, and resources available to, graduate student workers."

I don't think that these associations could be more clear that the government is going down the wrong path, Madam Speaker. Again, from the standpoint of freedom of association, from the standpoint of supporting our postsecondary institutions and graduates and people who are looking to be represented by these organizations, the fact is that again and again what we're seeing consistently from these associations is that this government has not listened to them and should put the brakes on this legislation.

Now, again, as we've heard from many members in the opposition here, we are ready and willing to go back to Committee of the Whole, take the time to get this right. Madam Speaker, we don't need a lot of time. There are some simple ways that we can get this right, move this legislation forward, and pass it so that we are supporting Albertans with the, you know, expansion of bereavement that is being considered through this legislation. The fact is that with how it's written right now, there are concerns.

Again, when we look at the documents that were put forward by students from the University of Alberta, they're, again, concerned about the lack of consultation, the need for freedom of association. There are just so many things that need to be dealt with regarding this legislation and the proposals being put forward that we need to pause this, go back to Committee of the Whole, hear some of the voices that are so desperately asking for this government to listen to them, and ensure that the legislation that is passed, if passed, is going to, first of all, support the associations across this province who are depending on clear, straightforward legislation that is protecting their constitutional right to freedom of association and, again, also ensuring that it is within constitutional parameters.

We've heard many times the discussions about the Mounted Police Association of Ontario versus Canada and the findings of that Supreme Court ruling. Unfortunately, what this government has put forward through this legislation is likely to cause some issues if it were to be challenged. When we are considering legislation before this House, I think that we should be ensuring to the best of our ability that it is going to hold up, that it is constitutional, that it is supporting, in this case, the postsecondary graduates and these associations that are regulated by this legislation. Unfortunately, at this time it doesn't seem to be the case.

We have given opportunities for this government in previous readings of this legislation to get this right. We, unfortunately, haven't been taken up on that offer up to this point, Madam Speaker, but we still have a chance here by supporting that this bill not now be read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2.

With that, again, I appreciate all the comments that have been made by the opposition here this afternoon. I've learned a lot, and I'm sure many members have.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the amendment?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to say a couple of last words on this. You know, as I analyze what is happening with Bill 17, I can see once again that this UCP government generally and this Justice minister are trying to be too clever by half and trying to set up a political situation rather than actually dealing with the issues at hand. The two issues are separate but sort of related. They're both labour issues. One, of course, is in regard to bereavement and pregnancy loss. I think that we amended this element of this bill quite well. I actually was surprised. It turned out to be an effort from both sides that bore some pretty good legislation.

Then, you know, with this other part, in regard to postsecondary workers choosing their labour representation, their union representation – again, I know that the Justice minister reached out, just like I was doing in my job as the postsecondary Official Opposition critic, to faculty associations and so forth. There were some issues that needed to be worked through, right? A lot of faculties around the province quite literally had little or no representation for a long time, and their faculty associations were not fully functioning as unions.

Indeed, we never saw a strike at all in the history of the province from faculty until Concordia University had labour action in January and I believe – was it February for the University of Lethbridge, in close succession? These things were historic, and of course they were directly connected to historic cuts by this UCP government in our postsecondary operating grants, more than \$690 million over three budgets. It was a generational and unprecedented loss of funding for our universities and colleges and polytechnics at the very time that we needed them the most, quite frankly, to help diversify our economy, to help to train and to retain a whole new generation of young people coming through from high school, and to offer retraining and upgrading and diversifying of our workforce and to build citizenship as well.

I mean, Madam Speaker, the essence of a good life and of a good society is for us to understand each other and to understand the world around us. That's what universities and polytechnics and colleges do. So all of that – the rug was pulled out from under them, with unprecedented generational cuts to postsecondaries. And some faculties said: "Hey, you know, we need to buttress our – we need to protect ourselves. We need to protect the faculties that we've built – right? – the people we've attracted from around the world, and we need to make sure that we fight back." We saw the beginnings of that with Concordia University and the University of Lethbridge as well.

Anyway, you know, the Justice minister – or the labour minister, I guess, he is now, right? People have a lot of changes over there with the ministries and so forth. You've got to keep a little running tab book. Apparently, he's the labour minister now. He thought that, well, he could pull something clever off by pairing this other legislation around bereavement with faculties choosing their labour representation. But they messed that up, too. They did not read exactly what was going on. They failed to consult people around the province, and then they wrote legislation which was fundamentally faulty and excluded postdocs and other sessional people entirely from the legislation. Even the people that initially said – and I heard the same stories from different faculty associations around the province, who said: yeah, can you maybe change this a little bit? They don't agree with it either because they did such a

poor job of this element of Bill 17 in excluding whole sections of the labour force in postsecondary education and so forth.

The whole thing just isn't working, right? The house of cards, which is too clever by half, I mean, seems to be a fatal flaw of not just this labour minister but this whole government, always trying to game everything all the time. I mean, that seems to be their, you know, default position. Rather than governing, they constantly try to game people, game one against the other, play these things. You know what? It doesn't work.

The air just went out of the balloon last week, and, you know, it seems like quite a sad crowd over there. I mentioned to our caucus meeting at lunch today that rather than looking like the government on the opposite side, it looks like a bunch of people waiting for a domestic flight over there somehow – right? – in the waiting room of the airport, looking at their watches, you know, and looking at the roof or whatever. So I guess there's always cosmic justice in this. If you try to game people all the time or some of the time, then people will realize that you can't be trusted all of the time.

4:30

Anyway, it's a good idea to go back to committee on this thing. We're trying our best to help – again, this seems to be a theme of the day – this government build legislation that, you know, we can be proud of. I mean, there are lots of elements in this bill that are really important. I think that we could work with it if we make some tweaks, bring it back to committee, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, our House leader, had suggested. I can see kind of the raw material of something we can work with, this Bill 17, in general. Those are my last thoughts on this recommittal.

You don't see recommitments too often, actually. It's kind of an interesting parliamentary procedure, and it's a clever one. Let's go for it. Let's use it. I encourage everyone to vote for it. I guess I shouldn't have said that everybody looks like they're waiting for a plane over there. We need you to vote for this thing. Recommittal: let's do it together; let's do it now.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REC1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:32 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Nielsen	Schmidt
Eggen	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Feehan	Sabir	Sweet
Goehring		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Guthrie	Panda
Allard	Hanson	Reid
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Rutherford
Copping	LaGrange	Savage
Dreeshen	Long	Sawhney
Fir	Luan	Schow
Frey	McIver	Sigurdson, R.J.
Getson	Nicolaides	Toews

Glubish Gotfried	Nixon, Jeremy Orr	Wilson Yaseen
Totals:	For – 10	Against – 30

[Motion on amendment REC1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We are back on Bill 17 in third reading. Are there speakers?

Seeing none, I will call the question on third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

4:50

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Chair: This is Bill 11's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. Certainly, you know, we in opposition were looking forward very much to this bill coming forward, because the pandemic shone a very bright light on our continuing care system in Alberta, and it did show some pretty disturbing information to us during COVID.

This was, I think, a significant opportunity for the government to actually move quickly and responsibly to make sure that residents of continuing care facilities across our province were supported and protected, because there were a lot of things that didn't go well during COVID, you know, in Alberta. According to the National Institute on Ageing we had the most outbreaks in facilities across our province of any province in Canada. Of course, that's nothing to be proud of. In fact, that's something that is a deep concern. Those outbreaks led to many residents of continuing care contracting COVID, and over 1,600 residents of continuing care facilities in our province died.

That is a great tragedy. Many of those deaths were preventable. Not all of them, but many of them were. We know that they were spread in facilities a lot of times by the very people who were working to support the residents of continuing care facilities, and there are a whole bunch of reasons for that. Certainly, many of the facilities were very ill-equipped to deal with a pandemic. They didn't know what to do. Because of the structure of our continuing care system in Alberta, you know, a large number of facilities are private, for-profit. We know that there is a tremendous amount of financialization in the sector, which means that these facilities are really seen by owners and shareholders as wealth-generating businesses. It's really about the real estate. It's about increasing their investments, being able to pay dividends to shareholders. It's not, sadly, about what it should be about. It's not about service to residents of continuing care facilities. As I said, COVID shone the light on this very brightly.

How do these private facilities, these facilities that are really operating to create profit for their shareholders, make those profits

for them? How do they make sure that that is the goal of it? One of the ways is, sadly, very much to not hire full-time staff. Oftentimes the staff – I would call them precarious. These are precarious workers. They're often vulnerable themselves, and they aren't given full-time jobs. They're only given part-time jobs, often with no benefits, so that they can keep the costs low for staffing.

Consequently, sometimes they work at more than one facility. Maybe they work in a fast-food industry. These are low-wage workers. These are oftentimes racialized people, mostly women, newcomers to our country. You know, English is oftentimes their second language. So these are workers who are often pretty vulnerable themselves, and throughout the pandemic many of them were afraid of even going into work because of the impact it would have on their families. There was just a myriad of issues.

COVID really taught us the importance of having full-time staff with benefits who had support. This is not work that is unskilled. We need to have highly skilled, trained people in these positions. I mean, they're caring for our parents. Certainly, both my parents are in different continuing care facilities. My father has pretty profound dementia, so he's in a secure unit. My mom is in, well, a lodge up in the town I grew up in, in Peace River country. You know, these are our family members, who we want to be cared for.

We were hoping with Bill 11 that that actually was the intent of this bill also, but what we found is that it is framework legislation that really doesn't give us a lot of information. You know, we were hopeful. I mean, it's been quite a bit of time since the facility-based continuing care review was completed. The government did do consultation, and they put together a report, but it's been over a year since that report came out, and now finally this legislation has come out. But guess what the legislation says. The legislation says: "We're not actually going to give you any details that we understand would make the situation better, that we heard from Albertans. We're leaving that all to regulations. Those regulations are going to come out in the spring of 2023."

So we're still waiting. We're still waiting, and people are still in a vulnerable situation in our continuing care system. Thankfully, you know, many people have been vaccinated, of course. Frail, fragile seniors who, of course, weren't vaccinated at the outset because we didn't have a vaccine for COVID-19: many of them did lose their lives. But certainly both my parents have three vaccines each. I have three vaccines, and I think they may be in line for the fourth one, actually.

As I said, sadly, 1,600 people did die in continuing care at the outset, and a lot of it was because of the way these continuing care facilities are run, where profit is the motive. In having staff only on a part-time basis with no benefits, working at many facilities so that they could cobble together some kind of full-time work to make ends meet so that they could care for their own families, sadly, many of them did transmit COVID from one facility to another, and then many residents of continuing care facilities did lose their lives because of that.

We were hoping this legislation would, you know, take bold action and take control of the situation and really address some of the issues that I'm just talking about. Certainly, we know that the facility-based continuing care review said that we actually need 6,000 – 6,000 – more staff in our continuing care system. What's happening with supporting that? What are the postsecondaries doing? What's the government's plan around that? I mean, creating 6,000 more workers is not a simple thing to do, but from their own report we know that many more staff are needed.

We know that we need improved working conditions so that people are supported in their work. You know, sadly, a lot of these staff aren't necessarily – they may be new to Canada. They're not super confident about how the labour system works in Canada.

They may not speak up about their concerns, and then they have such a large number of residents to support, and it's overwhelming for them.

We know that in continuing care facilities, I mean, that is a key thing. Our staff are so important because they are supporting our loved ones to dress themselves, toileting them, helping them in and out of bed, you know, very intimate work.

Certainly, during the time of COVID, when everybody is masked, that can be confusing and just pretty challenging. They have all these new protocols to follow because of COVID, and then that's just an extra burden on the worker without much support. A lot of times family members would help out, but of course the facilities were closed oftentimes to family members coming in. Many times family members would take on responsibilities for feeding their loved ones, helping them with the day-to-day, and certainly just the connection, the social connection.

5:00

That's a difficult thing for the workers, to be able to have that kind of time, to be able to support people. They have so many more people to support, and they have to hurry up. You know, it's very difficult to create a relationship, to create trust with the residents when there's all that kind of pressure. As I said, oftentimes they're just part-time workers, so they have to go to another job. So, yeah, everything is rush, rush.

Improving working conditions to make sure that they have the support they need: that's another recommendation from the facility-based continuing care review that could have been fleshed out more. What does that exactly mean? What does the government think needs to be improved? Certainly, we know – and we've heard this; this is something that I certainly heard a lot when I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, too – that we do need increased full-time staff. We need staff that have stable, full-time, permanent jobs. They need to be supported in that so that they cannot be worried about, you know, not having benefits or rushing to another job, whether it's within the industry or in another industry, and just be able to have that support of full-time benefits. That's also very important because these staff are crucial to the well functioning of any kind of continuing care facility.

Then the fourth recommendation is to increase the amount of home care provided. That's also a very important piece of this, to make sure that people are supported with home care and then also giving more specifics about service to people in continuing care. Of course, the recommendation that I've heard is 4.1 hours a day that staff would support them.

We were hoping for some specificity in this bill regarding some of those recommendations that came out of the facility-based continuing care review. Certainly, you know, I have no issues with any of those recommendations. Sadly, the bill itself does not articulate any of that, and I guess that's sort of a disappointment because I think we need change now. There are still challenges in our continuing care system. They haven't been alleviated. Thankfully, because of vaccination, things have calmed down in those centres, but I think the staff are still precarious.

Certainly, the for-profit model, that whole financialization of the sector continues to be a significant concern for us here in the Official Opposition. We know from many research studies, in terms of positive outcomes for residents, that public and nonprofit facilities are much superior to private facilities. So, you know, with the large number of private facilities, the for-profit motive, it's really a concern that that wasn't addressed more by this government.

We certainly know that, you know, the federal government did give money to these private agencies to support the facilities and

support workers. It came sort of through the provincial government, and there were some challenges with the provincial government, of course, getting that money out the door so that people could be supported. But we also know, too, these private operators weren't being responsible about what that money was intended for. Of course, it was to support staff, to support the residents in a very difficult time. Some of those independent private operators – guess what? – took that money and gave it to shareholders. They gave dividends to them during this time of COVID. So, I mean, that is just flagrantly clear, that with the private operators the goal isn't about seniors' care. The goal is about profit, making sure their shareholders get money. That money: the intention absolutely was to support residents in continuing care facilities and certainly support staff in them. That's very distressing for me, for sure.

I guess some of the other concerns are that, as I said, Bill 11 – we were really hoping that this legislation would take a hold of the issues that we saw really illuminated through COVID-19 and address them. You know, the UCP said, "Yes, it's coming; we're doing that" even though they sort of dragged their feet after the report. More than a year ago it was brought out, the facility-based continuing care review. But I guess it's just another demonstration, very sadly, that we really can't trust the UCP. I mean, they say that things are coming, they say that they're going to revamp the system, but unfortunately that's not really what happened.

You know, there are so many other examples of this that I find distressing. I mean, just recently the CEO of AHS was fired by the UCP. Certainly, we understand that it's to expedite the privatization of health care in Alberta, because she was standing up for public health care, which is where we stand on that issue also, and certainly the whole NDP caucus knows the importance of public health care and wouldn't be doing the many things to dismantle our public health system that the UCP is doing.

Another thing that the UCP did some time ago now is that they took grieving families' right to justice away in Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act, so loved ones of residents in continuing care facilities can no longer, you know, go to the court system for justice when they feel like their loved ones hadn't been cared for. Certainly, I remember very well that people couldn't see their loved ones and were frustrated by the decisions of many facilities, and many people died in these facilities. We heard stories of loved ones being left for extended periods of time in their own waste. Certainly, some people died – you know, these were preventable deaths – because of the wide spread of COVID-19 in the facilities.

They wanted justice. They wanted to be able to take these private operators to court, but the UCP decided, "No; we're going to protect these big privates," and they took away the citizens of Alberta's rights to seek justice through the court. I mean, that's another situation where you can't really trust the UCP. It's taking away Albertans' rights even though there is some egregious issue going on. So many grieving families reached out to me during that time, and, you know, it was abhorrent that they weren't given that kind of justice.

I already had mentioned that private operators took COVID funding for shareholders and not to support residents, so, again, that profit motive is so clear.

You know, it goes beyond just health care. Some of the things that we really can't trust this government regarding – certainly, the billions of dollars that were thrown away on a nonexistent pipeline: it was very clear when President Biden said in his campaign that he would not be supporting the pipeline, but regardless, like, money was thrown to a nonexistent pipeline. So that's also a question of competence, a question of trust of this government.

Certainly, we know the fiasco of the energy war room, the waste of millions of dollars, really: for what purpose? I mean, there's just been scandal after scandal coming out of there.

Something that is particularly upsetting to me is that the UCP fired the Seniors Advocate. I mean, I think that especially during COVID the Seniors Advocate and her office would have been very helpful to residents of continuing care facilities because that's the role of the advocate, to support seniors in their . . .

5:10

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I would like to thank the hon. member for her very important remarks regarding this piece of legislation. I think that she's got some incredible outreach when it comes to working with seniors. This was her ministry, and I know that many continue to go to her with concerns. There's definitely been no inability to advocate on their behalf, so when I hear the member talk about the concerns that have been raised and are simply not addressed in this piece of legislation, you know, I really take that to heart because I'm hearing a lot of similar concerns.

When we talk about staffing in long-term continuing care facilities, I think that's one of the biggest concerns that I hear from staff, from residents and family members of those that live in these homes. I think that when we talk about the care of seniors, we need to look at what is deserving. I think that having a place where people are stable in their employment, they have continuity of care. They have confidence in the services that they're providing. It simply creates a working space that's supportive of the staff, which then, in turn, has an incredible impact on the individuals that they're working with.

To be clear, they're working with them in their homes. This is where seniors live. It's not an organization that they attend weekly. This is their everyday home, and unfortunately we're seeing staffing issues that are not considering the type of work that these individuals are being asked to do. Like the member had acknowledged, there are many that are without full-time contracts. We live in a place where full-time employment is a requirement in order to be able to pay your bills, and if you can't achieve full-time hours in one space, you're often working multiple jobs, which creates an impact on not just the staff but the individuals that they are providing care to.

I know my experience working in group care: I had the incredible privilege to work with youth in their home. That was the first and foremost thought every day when I went to work: this is my job, but I'm going into their home. Being able to provide a place of safety and security within that context is so important. When you have staff changes that are continuous, when you have multiple staff members coming and going, it creates a space of chaos when it comes to the day-to-day lives of those that you're trying to serve.

I think that this piece of legislation had a real opportunity to take the learnings that we've seen not just in Alberta but all across Canada when it comes to the actual state of what our continuing care is. Unfortunately, none of that is reflected in this bill. I know that at the beginning of COVID we watched other provinces call on the Canadian Armed Forces to come in and assist because there was just so much happening in some of those facilities that they needed additional support. A report came out from that, and I would argue that, yes, it was based on two provinces, but I would think that the same findings could be found in homes in the province of Alberta, because I heard those stories. I heard the horrific experiences of

some individuals that are living in continuing care facilities, things like being simply understaffed.

What that means: when you're working with seniors who are vulnerable, who are heavily reliant on those that provide care for them, it can have devastating impacts on those individuals. It's not a matter of not having enough customer service at an organization or enough people to put clothes on hangers. These are everyday needs that are being dismissed and not because the staff don't want to do the work that's required, but they simply can't. There were things happening where individuals were being left in soiled linens for days. There were situations where people were asking to be assisted to use the washroom and told: no, I just changed you. The impact on an individual's well-being is huge when it comes to not being able to have the staffing in place that can actually meet their needs.

I think this government had an incredible opportunity to really look at the learnings from other provinces and to listen to those that are living in Alberta right now in these facilities and could have made some significant, meaningful change to better the life of seniors living in these homes. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this legislation.

I know that I've heard heartbreaking stories from individuals, nurses, care providers that are burnt out. They signed up to be working in the field of human services, to work with community, to really, truly be of service to those that they work with, and they're at a place where they don't feel like they have the actual capacity to do the work that they want to do. So many nurses have told me that they're simply in there distributing medication and meeting basic, basic needs. They're burning out. They're stressed out. When you put in a pandemic, that we saw unfortunately take so many seniors in continuing care – 1,600 and counting passed away from COVID. You see the impact that that has on the families, the other residents, the staff. When staff are telling me that they're working in multiple facilities and they're afraid that they're bringing COVID from home to home and then back to their family but there's nobody there that could replace them, this has trauma impact on those individuals, the trauma of residents knowing that their friends are being isolated because of COVID.

It's so much bigger than what this piece of legislation does, and I think that when we have a government that took away the opportunity for families to have justice, I'm unfortunately not surprised that we have a piece of legislation that has no action. We actively saw government take away the right for family members to have some sort of justice when it came to their loved ones in care, and this was a real opportunity to have legislation that made an impact, to be able to listen to what the families have said, to listen to those residents that live in continuing care, to listen to the staff, the pleas for actually doing something that has meaningful impact. That's not what this legislation does.

5:20

This UCP has continued to fail residents of continuing care throughout the pandemic, and I struggle to understand why. There are so many stories, that I know every member of this House has heard, of someone that's been impacted by a death of a resident, of an Albertan in continuing care, and some of those tragic deaths could have been prevented. There were decisions made by this government that didn't take into account what the health care providers were asking for, what those that are working in the facilities were asking for, what family members were asking for. Unfortunately, this legislation does nothing to mitigate any of the risk that was identified and to actually make it better for those that are working and/or living in these continuing care facilities.

I know that there's incredible trauma that's happened throughout the pandemic, just so many that are at the front line, and I would argue that those providing care in these continuing care facilities have been exposed to trauma. There's something in the social work profession, in helping services, emergency responders that's called vicarious trauma. That would have an impact on residents as well. It's not just the staff, but it's the residents that are living this day to day. These are their homes.

There needs to be some sort of action to support seniors in their home. We need to look at the staff-to-patient ratios. Right now I know of students that are working in some of these continuing care facilities that are saying that without the students there is absolutely zero possibility of meeting the basic needs of the residents. Students aren't a given, Madam Chair. Students are dependent on the postsecondary institution. It depends on how many students are registered that year. There are so many variables that it's not a guarantee that they're going to have students, and to hear students being put in these situations where they're burning out, where they're questioning whether or not this is the field that they want to be in when they're not supported by government, when they're not seeing real change or real support that has an impact: that, to me, is very, very concerning. I know what it's like to work in someone's home. I know the stress that can come along with the needs that you're expected to do as a staffperson.

To hear those concerns and to have the ability to make change: I'm just so confused why this bill doesn't provide any sort of action when it comes to those pleas. We have a government that says: "Just trust us. All of that will be in the regulations." It's really hard to take them at their word for that because we haven't seen anything that would suggest that this is being taken seriously. We saw – this UCP took away, like I said, the family's right to seek justice. What kind of message does that give to the families right now with this legislation? Just trust us? Based on their record they don't have a voice. They have no right as grieving families to seek justice for their loved ones. That's the track record that this government has.

We saw this government refuse to create an independent office for a seniors advocate. When I have individuals calling my office asking, "Who can we complain to? Who will hear our voice?" well, I know that members of our caucus are being that voice. They're sharing those stories. They're sharing those pleas. I know that the government is being included in that information because I'm CCed on it. I know that they're sending it to the Premier, they're sending it to the Health minister, they're sending it to the seniors minister, yet it's having no impact. I'm just really concerned, when we have a bill that says Continuing Care Act, why it's not taking the information and putting it into action. It's simply not doing anything to actually support the real needs that they're intending or saying that they're supporting.

When we look at the conditions and the standards of the facilities, there is just so much that needs to change. Like, we've heard in debate that, you know, COVID shone a light on some of the glaring – glaring – mistreatment and horrible working conditions and living conditions in continuing care, yet here we are debating a piece of legislation, Bill 11, that has nothing in terms of action. We've been living in a COVID world for two years. We've been hearing stories of those that are impacted and the pleas to make changes, but there's nothing in here that actually makes those changes. The UCP is saying that it provides accountability, but we haven't even seen this government be accountable for the decisions that they've been making. We know that there were promises that the UCP made that they would increase home care, the amount of hours of care for residents that they would receive, increase the proportion of full-time staff, but that's not actually in this piece of legislation, so they're not even committing to their own promises.

It fails to make any substantive or meaningful changes. I struggle when we continuously hear: "Just trust us. It'll be in the regulation." This is an opportunity to have it clear-cut, to have some sort of impact of change, some sort of action, yet it's not in this piece of legislation. I know that Albertans are struggling, and their struggles are falling on deaf ears. It's very concerning when we know, glaringly, what the concerns are: the staffing ratios, the inability to have the opportunity for full-time employment, some of the standards of care. We have the information of what could make it better, yet we're not seeing that being implemented. I struggle with why we have this piece of legislation before us when it's not really doing anything substantive to actually improve working conditions or improve quality of life for those that are living in these facilities.

There's significant risk in continuing the way that we are. We're hearing from so many across the province that have loved ones in these facilities that require significant amounts of care that as a family member they can't provide. They're relying on the support of staff to do that, and still the needs of their loved one are not being met. I have friends that – the whole family, she and her husband and her two adult children, rotates for meals for her great-aunt just to make sure she gets fed. The place where she's living doesn't have capacity to sit with her and feed her the way that she needs. She has some quite significant medical challenges and requires a lot of support, and the staff just simply can't do it, so the family every day, three times a day, rotates to make sure that their aunt is being cared for and fed.

I know that that situation isn't unique. I hear so many stories of concerns with loved ones, especially during the height of the pandemic, when visitors weren't allowed. We were hearing pleas from staff that they needed more support, they needed help, because they relied on family members and other caregivers to come in and support them. Why has that gone unactioned? How can those that are working in health care trust a government that has made no significant change to support them in the work that they do? I just feel so . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

5:30

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank the hon. members across the way for their comments on Bill 11 and their passion and compassion for Albertans and improving the continuing care system. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs asked the question: why do we have this before us? I'd like to comment on that because on this side of the House we have the same passion and the same compassion for Albertans, for seniors, those living with disabilities, those in our continuing care system, and that's what this bill is all about. It's about improving it. I want to talk a little bit about what this bill does and what it's intended to do and what it's supposed to do, and then I'll talk a little bit about what it doesn't do and address some of the concerns raised by the other side, because it's really important that we frame this correctly.

What this bill does is that it provides one overarching piece of legislation that will provide consistency and alignment across the continuing care system. It will start a major transformational change to existing policy and practice, and this includes a number of things, Madam Chair. It includes replacing the multiple acts with one piece of modern legislation for continuing care and allows us to bring together not only multiple acts but be able to reform multiple regulations and policies to be able to enable transformation. It will improve transparency and accountability to Albertans regarding how the continuing care system is governed.

It will enable a person-centred, flexible, and innovative system of care for Albertans. It will establish a consistent approach, an alignment of legislated requirements and services across our entire continuing care system. So what will happen, Madam Chair, is that an individual won't have to move rooms because they're going from one level of care to another one. They can stay in the same room and the care can be brought to them, for example.

It's going to address gaps in the current legislation, and this framework is exactly that: it is a framework. Bill 11 brings everything together so that we can start the transformation, particularly in regard to getting the regulation and the policy in place.

I want to just comment a little bit about the intent behind it because it goes to the preamble, which is an important part of the bill because it actually signals what we're trying to accomplish. Many of the things – I think we can agree on both sides of the House that these are important, you know, that we do this to be able to improve our continuing care system. I'll just highlight a few of them.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that the delivery of continuing care and the design of the continuing care system in Alberta are based on a person-centred approach;

[where] the quality of life of continuing care residents and clients is the highest priority for the Government of Alberta . . .

[where] family and friends who act as caregivers play a significant role . . .

[and also where] staff who provide continuing care enhance the quality of life of residents and clients and [are] well-trained and supported [and that this is] vital to the continuing care system.

So all of these principles are highlighted in the preamble, and that's the core of what this framework is for.

Now, I do appreciate comments from the other side because it seems to be that the debate is not about what's in the bill and the framework, but it's what's not in the bill. Madam Chair, I've mentioned in this House before, and I'll say it again. You know, some of the items that are being talked about – for example, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned that the number of continuing care spaces needs to be enhanced. There needs to be some more detail or a framework regarding staffing models or how many hours of care are provided. There needs to be a movement – and this is all highlighted in the facility-based continuing care report – towards home care. Well, all of this is currently covered in regulation and/or policy. That's the appropriate place for that. It never has been in any of the existing acts, right? We do need to update the regulations once we pull it all into one place, and we are committing to Albertans to do that. It's not in the acts as they exist today; it's in regulation and policy, and that's the appropriate place for it, Madam Chair, because as things change, we need to modify this. I point out to members across the way that when they were in government, they didn't put it into an act. That is the appropriate place for it, to be in the regulation and to be in policy.

Madam Chair, we are taking action. Not only does it need to be in regulation or policy; quite frankly, changes to support the transformation of our continuing care system need to be budgeted for, and Budget 2022 does that. We allocated \$1.7 billion for community care, an increase of 7.6 per cent, or \$122 million. We allocated \$1.2 billion for continuing care, an increase of \$16 million, or 1.3 per cent, from the previous year. To the point raised by members across the way, home care: we increased home care by \$81 million, or a 12.1 per cent increase from the previous year, and that is simply just the start.

In addition, we recognize that there need to be more continuing care spaces as the population is aging, and we need to invest in that.

Madam Chair, last year's budget provided for 1,500 spaces to be created this year. In Budget 2022, in addition to that, we added another \$204 million over the next few years to build more continuing care spaces, \$91 million to complete the Bridgeline Riverside continuing care centre in Calgary, another \$142 million over two years for the Gene Zwodzesky centre in Edmonton.

Madam Chair, we are taking action. We understand that we need to transform our system, and the place to take action is getting the framework right – so that's this bill – and then investing into home care, continuing care, community care, which we're doing through Budget 2022, and then updating the regulations, updating the policies associated with this.

I appreciate the passion on the other side of the House in terms of, you know, focus on improving our continuing care system. We feel that same passion on our side of the House, right? That's why we launched the facility-based continuing care review. That's why we budgeted an additional \$200 million in Budget 2022 not only on the expense side but also on the capital side, and that's why we need to move forward with this Bill 11 to be able to start this up. This is the framework that enables transformation, so I would ask members on the opposite of the House to support this as it is and to vote in favour of it so we can get it done, we can get it done quickly, because you're right: we need to move and move now. So let's support this, let's get this passed, let's move to the next stage in terms of regulation and policy, and our government will continue to take action to support seniors and to support those with disabilities.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise to continue on some of the comments here around Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I appreciate the minister getting up and sharing some thoughts. In one of the comments there, I noticed that he pointed out that he doesn't feel that we're talking about the bill and what's in the bill. I've always said that you look at the language. What does it say? What doesn't it say? What are you saying about it? Now, here's the challenge, because we're not talking about what's in the bill: it's because these things will affect what is in this bill.

Let's start with one of the things that he mentioned around that report my colleagues from Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Castle Downs talked about, the facility-based continuing care review and some of the recommendations that were made in that, including staffing. So we're talking about increasing spacing. You know, you had talked about enabling so that if somebody needs a higher level of care, they don't have to move their room. I certainly agree with that.

You had made some mentions around accountability and transparency, and I'm going to challenge you a little bit on that. I feel that the government has struggled with that. There is a reason that the government has been labelled one of the most secretive in Canada, but we'll leave that part of the debate for another time.

One of the most critical things is that you can have the best facilities with the best equipment, with the best intentions, with the best legislation; if you don't have the people to staff it, it will start to fall apart, so all the beginning steps, all the beginning framework will be for naught.

5:40

Here's why I find myself now – you know, the labour hat is coming on – focusing around the staffing side of things. First off, I'm very, very lucky in Edmonton-Decore. I have some very, very good facilities. Can there always be improvements? Absolutely.

I've seen one, for instance, that's really taken that to the next level. But the funny thing is that they're all, every last one of them, always looking for volunteers. Certainly, nothing against – you know, thank God for volunteers and the heart that they bring to things. But if you need volunteers to run your facility, you don't have enough staff right then and there.

Now, my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview had talked about some of the precarious employment, people working part-time. If you want to kind of tie this to a little bit of an economic reason, Madam Chair, when you have people working full-time and they're making a reasonable wage and they're able to participate in the economy, you know, a wage that they can spend on a house, grow their family with, you don't have to worry about people working multiple jobs, which then opens up potentially other jobs for people. But there's this big focus on part-time employment, including in our continuing care.

Nobody could have seen this coming. Well, perhaps maybe we could have if we looked back in history across other pandemics and kind of put two and two together. But when you have employees that have to work at multiple facilities because they can only get part-time, because that facility can only afford to pay part-time, that increases your chance of transmission when this pandemic hit us. This is not saying that facilities weren't trying their best. I have full belief that most really did. Unfortunately, we did see examples where that didn't happen, where they didn't try their best, and people literally paid for it with their lives.

Now, when you have the proper staffing level – again, we can create the framework legislation where, for instance, as the minister mentioned, if you now start to need a higher level of care, you don't have to move rooms. Great idea. I'm fully onboard with that. But if you don't have staff to be able to handle it, you're still going to run into problems.

That brings me to a story that I just heard last week, on Wednesday. I have full permission from my constituent to tell this story. It's actually two parts: one about his father, one about his mother, and the result of the shortfalls in continuing care. Now, had there been a seniors advocate perhaps, maybe there would have been somebody bringing these forward together already. I know that the government felt that folding that into the Health Advocate was a great idea: cutting red tape and saving money. It has negatively impacted seniors. I'm telling you this. I've heard it too many times now, as has my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs, I've been CCed on the e-mails. It's not working. Seniors, the people that built our province, need that voice. That's not in this piece of legislation. That will help improve continuing care.

Ken, my constituent, recently talked about his mother in one of the facilities. Now, it's ironic because she spent her career in continuing care helping people, trying to make sure they can get dressed, that they can eat, that they can go to the bathroom. To then finally wind up where he visits her one day – and she's in her room. It's dark because the curtains haven't been, you know, opened up. She's got her hands covering her face, and as he walks in, she puts her hands down, realizes it's her son: thank God you're here. She's covered in food because there wasn't enough staff to give her the level of needs that she required.

This is not to blame staff. Staff are doing the best they can. But if you are pulled in too many directions, as my colleagues have mentioned, not only do you get frustration, exhaustion, and everything else that comes with that, but it's ultimately the resident that suffers. You can have all the enabling legislation that you want, Madam Chair, but at the end of the day, if you don't have enough people, you can't execute it.

He talked about his father, who passed away just – I think it was two years ago, plus or minus a couple of months. He got a call

because the facility had to inform him that they forgot about him and that he spent five hours on the toilet because there weren't enough staff. Again, I realize this is not part of the legislation that's in Bill 11, but without it, Bill 11 means nothing. It will not help.

I also heard the story – you know what, Madam Chair? I'm going to sit down for a moment because I think the minister wants to intervene. I'm going to give him that opportunity to speak, and then I might jump back up again.

The Chair: It's Committee of the Whole, so there are no interventions, but you may speak as many times as you like.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. member. I'll make this very short. The hon. member made a comment that the bill doesn't address the issues that the hon. member is raising. I actually ask the hon. member to take a look at part 4, compliance and enforcement, and also part 6, the resident and family councils, because there are elements in this bill, right? Part of the changes about transparency and accountability, especially when you talk about compliance and enforcement, provides new tools so that if there's an issue where a continuing care operator – and I appreciate, you know, that they're working very hard. But if they're not able to provide the levels of service, then not only are there tools to be able to pull their licence, in the worst case, but in other cases we can actually use administrative tools to make sure that they comply and provide the level of care that they are required to under the standards. And there are resident and family councils.

I would ask the hon. member to take a look at that in terms of the context of these issues. There are issues now, but there have been issues before – right? – and we need to have a framework in place to address them going forward.

I want to thank the hon. member for the opportunity to provide a comment even though there is an ability in the Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: You guys can talk as long as you want although be aware of the time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: The proper comment should have been: maybe I'll take my seat to listen to more discussion. I'll have to remember that for Committee of the Whole myself.

Yeah. I appreciate those comments. I know which one he's talking about, especially in terms of the family council. That's something I've certainly encouraged family members to bring forward to these facilities. I've attended some of these meetings. Again, it's coming down to staffing levels. It's not that the facilities don't want to have enough people. That's top of mind. It comes down to the money.

I'm going to be a little bit critical here of the private, for-profit facilities. I don't begrudge them, somewhat, around wanting to make a profit, but they don't wait till the end of the year to see how much money is left and that's their profit. They cut that off right at the hop, right at the beginning: that's our profit for the year, and then what's left over goes into the care. If that happens to run out, that becomes a problem. Then you see these shortfalls in staffing so that they can hit those bottom lines, because they can't actually run out of money and not be able to run their facility. So they calculate these things out.

5:50

You know, you have residents, for instance, with feeding problems. That might be swallowing. There may be other

challenges. Again, you know, I'm hearing a story from Ken about another resident in a facility where a staff member comes in, tries to feed. Whatever the reason, they just couldn't get them to eat. They put the spoon down. They walk away because they have other things they've got to do, and they've got to try to get to those. Then they come back. They pick the spoon up. They try to feed. No success. They put it down, walk away. The next thing you know, you've got the cleaning staff coming in: well, the person didn't eat. They take it away. Now that resident hasn't had anything to eat.

Again, you can have the family councils, you can have the enabling legislation, but when it comes to the people that built our province, that all of us here in this Chamber enjoy, we have to step up. I appreciate that the minister, you know, talked about the money that's being invested in continuing care and in home care, but here's where I'll challenge. As I've always said – I'll be honest; I'm not trying to start a fight; I'm not trying to be disrespectful – if we've got \$30 million a year to go chase after Bigfoot, we have money to spend on our seniors. If we have \$1.3 billion to bet on an election, we have money to spend on our seniors. We can ensure that our staffing levels are high enough so that that level of care is exemplary, so that we don't have residents with food all over them and who haven't been changed and have been there like that for hours, so that we don't have residents that get forgotten about on the toilet for five hours or more.

I appreciate the comments from the minister, but this is why we were bringing such things up, because without them, at the end of the day, like I said, you can have all the councils you want. They're going to keep bringing up the same thing: "There's not enough staff. There's not enough staff. There's not enough staff." That's always – always – what I keep hearing. We need to do better with our seniors, and I feel we had a better chance with Bill 11 to address some of those things.

Again, it's Committee of the Whole. I know there are others that want to jump up and speak to this. I'll reiterate again that I feel that the Seniors Advocate being rolled into the Health Advocate hasn't worked. It's created a bigger problem. That voice of seniors has been watered down because of that. There are absolutely way more, you know, health concerns that the advocate has to focus on – I appreciate that – but not at the expense of our seniors' voice. We could have re-examined that here in Bill 11 to bring more focus around that.

I will give way to some of my colleagues here and let them have a chance to have a say here.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. With the brief amount of time left here this afternoon, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 11 in Committee of the Whole, and I'm thankful for the comments that have been made previous to me. Of course, I've had the opportunity to speak to Bill 11 previously, but I'm always happy to take another opportunity to share some of my thoughts and concerns in this instance.

You know, I appreciate as well that the minister is willing to stand up, but what we've heard this afternoon is essentially – again, it's been repeated – that this is a framework and that so much more has to come from the regulations. First, we can look at the report that was released in May 2021, which has been talked to at length, the facility-based analysis and how we can improve these situations. Of course, since then the government has come forward with Bill 11 saying that this is addressing many of the concerns in there, and the rest, Albertans and this House – well, not this House, because it will be done through regulations. Alberta seniors, who are disproportionately being negatively impacted and dying because of

the lack of response from this UCP government: well, they have to wait an entire other year to see what those regulations might look like.

I think it's also important to reflect on the fact that this is quite possibly, if it's not called earlier, in the middle of election time, so now we have a commitment from this government that they are going to finish this process in the midst of an election. I truly find it unbelievable, Madam Chair, that this is going to be finalized by the time the next election rolls out, and I think it's truly unfortunate for all Albertans and especially the seniors who are depending on this minister to move forward with this process.

I mean, the minister stood in the House and said: well, some of the really important work, like the preamble, has been finished in this legislation. I mean, if it wasn't so sad, Madam Chair, I would have to laugh at statements like that, talking about person-centred care and family and friends playing a significant role, the minister saying that that's the core of this legislation in the preamble. It's truly unbelievable that in the year since this report has been released, they've only been able to come up with a framework and then have the audacity to tell members of this House that they need to pass this legislation so that they can move forward with the regulations. They've already said that it's going to take an entire year to pass that.

There is no accountability from this government when it comes to many things but in this instance how this government cares for and protects seniors. That, as the previous member stated, is clearly shown in the terrible decision to roll the Seniors Advocate into the Health Advocate office. Since then we've seen no accountability on that file in terms of annual reports coming on behalf of the Health Advocate, and further, of course, the person in this position is a UCP insider. I've talked to countless Alberta seniors who do not have faith in the current advocate, that question day in and day out why they don't have a senior advocating for their interests. It's quite clear, when we see legislation like this coming forward, that it's because this UCP government simply is not interested in listening to them.

We saw the minister talk about things like the resident and family councils and how important they are. The NDP agrees, and that's why we brought forward that process, the opportunity for those councils to take place in these homes. In many instances these seniors and the families felt like their voices weren't being heard, so we brought that process forward. This government and this minister are acting like it's a new process. That's simply not the case. It's the same on many of the issues that are legislated through this, that in so many cases this is simply just bringing together several pieces of legislation and not actually improving them in any way, Madam Chair.

The fact is that this government is telling Albertan seniors that they have to wait another year while day after day we are losing more of those seniors. Families are grieving people in their life that they have lost, and unfortunately this government is unwilling to take any real action on this issue, which is truly disappointing. It's been said again and again in this House that the report, that was previously tabled in May 2021, is a good report. It's something that we should be moving forward on as soon as possible. The government has had a year to make that possible, and unfortunately all we have is a framework, and we are told to wait another year, again, while Alberta seniors are dying. It's truly unfortunate.

We need to do better. Seniors deserve better. They deserve a better government, and they deserve better representatives in the government making sure that their voices are heard. They deserve an advocate, and they deserve to have many things, Madam Chair, not the least being full-time staff to support their needs. Again and again we see that the staff, the health care workers that are taking

care of these families are themselves living in poverty. How can we expect that they are able to offer their best when it comes to supporting . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The committee will be recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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