



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 25, 2022

Day 36

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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Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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

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Bilous
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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Dang
Frey
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Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of visitors joining us today in the Speaker's gallery, some who have joined us and some who will join us momentarily. I see the hon. Member of Parliament for Peace River-Westlock, Arnold Viersen, and he's accompanied by summer intern Shona Arsenault. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to note that joining us in just a couple of moments will be the Member of Parliament for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan, Garnett Genuis.

Also in the gallery, a very familiar face to many in this Assembly, is the former member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the once-storied Leader of the Official Opposition. I'd invite him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Dr. Raj Sherman.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, joining us in the galleries today is Mark Allard, the vice-president for North America of Methanex Corporation, and he is a guest of the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Also joining us, please welcome Matt Osborne, president of the Alberta professional firefighters and paramedics association. He is a guest of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have an important statement to make this afternoon that I would like to make before we continue with our usual business. I would like to call forward all of the retiring pages who are here today to please join me at the dais. Some of our retiring pages are not with us today.

But as many of you will know, as a long-standing tradition of the Assembly the pages have coauthored a letter, which I will read to you today. The following will be a quote from their letter.

Mr. Speaker,

As we approach the end of Session, many of us will be moving on from the Page Program. We, the retiring Pages, would like to express our thanks for the opportunities given to us in serving the Legislative Assembly. Pages often come to the Assembly with the aspiration of assisting in the democratic process . . . and it has been our honour to do so.

We would like to give a special thanks to Kaitlynn Church and the rest of the Sergeant-at-Arms' Office for their care in overseeing the Page Program [and] to the Bills and Journals Clerks in 315, whose procedural knowledge is essential to the execution of our duties, and to the members of the Legislative Assembly Security Service, whose humour make [the] long days feel short. Finally, we express our gratitude to the Members of the Legislative Assembly . . . for their dedication in the service of their constituents, and to [the] Table Officers and the Speaker for their leadership in facilitating democracy in [the great province of Alberta].

However, we have found that the greatest joy in serving the Assembly has been the chance to work alongside our fellow Pages. We each come to the Program as eccentric students eager to engage in the political process. Through quiet mornings, hectic afternoons, and long [long] evenings, the Page Program brings our group of oddballs together and gives us a special shared experience in which we ground invaluable friendships. It is . . . the opportunity to make these friendships that we express our deepest gratitude to the Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

Joel White – Supervisory Page, Wade Sigurdson – Supervisory Page, Juliana Concini – Page Peer Mentor, Ayesha Irfan, Ayrton Alvarado, Faye Klamerus, Georgia Phillips, Grace Hlibka, Lily Semonis, Olivia Taylor, Saira Camminga, Savina Banh, Zaeem Ahmed, [and Macy Yau].

[Now, to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, a third-party, independent member, let me just say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview: I love you, mom.]

To be fair to Wade, I added that part after.

Pages, please rise. Hon. members, join me in thanking our pages. [Standing ovation]

Members' Statements

Dog-friendly Restaurant Patios

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, summer is just around the corner, and with summer comes patio season. This year grabbing a drink and food in Alberta is going to be just a little bit nicer for some of our four-legged friends. No longer shall my dog Kai and other furry friends need to be left home when families go out to enjoy the summer weather and great food Alberta has to offer.

Starting today, Albertan restaurants no longer need to go through a lengthy approval process to allow dogs onto patios. Albertans elected a government committed to cutting red tape, and we took that promise seriously. By establishing a ministry of red tape reduction, we have been able to lead Canada in reducing unnecessary government bureaucracy. This change will make it easier for Albertans to support our restaurant industry while they are out with their dogs this patio season, and we're doing this all without compromising food safety. Nonservice dogs are allowed on patios only and must be on a leash or in carriers at all times. Cutting this piece of red tape will allow our public health inspectors to focus their efforts where they are needed most and remove some of their burden.

It's policies like these that, when put together, demonstrate just how much this government is working and doing to make the lives of Albertans easier. I know that my dog Kai, an Australian cattle dog, will be very happy to join me and my family when we go to get a bite this summer out on one of the fabulous Sherwood Park patios. Mr. Speaker, Albertans should know that they have a clear choice: Conservatives on this side, who are working to make their lives simpler for Alberta families, or the socialists on the other side, who want to make life more complicated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

NDP Provincial Election Candidates

Ms Pancholi: Real leaders know that they're only as good as the people they surround themselves with, so let me tell you about some of the people on our NDP team: health care leaders like registered nurse Diana Batten in Calgary-Acadia, who knows what it takes to manage a health crisis, as does front-line paramedic Cam Heenan from Leduc-Beaumont, who is ready to fix EMS, and Dr. Luanne Metz in Calgary-Varsity, a world-renowned medical researcher and neurologist.

We have leaders focused on diversifying our economy and creating good jobs in our energy sector, like energy analyst Samir Kayande in Calgary-Elbow and sustainable energy expert Nagwan Al-Guneid in Calgary-Glenmore.

We have leaders who know how to collaborate with local voices to build stronger communities, like former councillor Druh Farrell, running in Calgary-Bow, and former councillor Rob Miyashiro in Lethbridge-East and former councillor Karen Shaw in Morinville-St. Albert. Karen also brings first-hand experience as a cattle farmer and successful entrepreneur, as does Richard Bruneau in Camrose. Richard is Métis and through his experience as well as the experiences of Indigenous candidates like Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse in Edmonton-Rutherford and Marilyn North Peigan in Calgary-Klein, we will walk a real path of reconciliation.

1:40

When it comes to our parks and natural spaces, conservationist Sarah Elmeli from Banff-Kananaskis is there to ensure that they are never ever converted into coal mines.

We'll build good schools and properly support students with Rosman Valencia in Calgary-East and educational assistant Julia Hayter in Calgary-Edgemont.

We'll take action to make sure life is more affordable with antipoverty advocate Janet Eremenko in Calgary-Currie and support small businesses with entrepreneurs like Gurinder Brar in Calgary-North East and Parmeet Singh in Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't even gotten to the group of people here with me in this House, a group dedicated to Albertans, united, focused, and ready to make life better. On our team we don't have to fight over the leader; we stand behind ours. The NDP is ready, and we are focused on what matters to Albertans. We can't wait to be Alberta's next government.

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 I started working at the youth shelter, where the goal was to keep kids alive for the night. Of course, staying alive was a starting point, but it certainly wasn't where we wanted to stop. Thankfully, our leadership at the time had the vision to shift our thinking to provide more for youth than simply keeping them alive. Recognizing their strengths and their resiliency, we knew our youth were capable of so much more, so we created opportunities to build off those strengths and to help them go on to grow and thrive in their communities.

I've recently met with homeless service providers, and I've heard stories of people being revived in the street, in Dumpsters, in camps, and inside the shelter. There is an instinct to focus completely on keeping people alive and getting people housed. "Housing first" is still a common phrase among service providers in Alberta. Overdose prevention sites and digital overdose response systems are available in most major municipalities. These can be good initiatives, and they can be a part of a comprehensive system, but they cannot be the end goal.

We often hear the saying that we need to meet people where they're at, but we can't simply leave them there. That is why this government is focused on providing a path out of addiction and into recovery, and we've taken multiple steps to create those opportunities. We've created 8,000 newly funded treatment spaces. We've removed barriers to for-fee addiction treatment. We've built recovery communities. We've created the opioid medication treatment on demand through the virtual opioid dependency program, and we've worked with service providers across this province to build a

system that helps people build a better life for themselves. Last week I was able to attend the groundbreaking event for the first recovery community in Lethbridge, that will provide 200 additional annual treatment spaces for Albertans. The excitement was huge.

Mr. Speaker, addiction continues to plague our community. The pandemic has made things worse, but there is hope in recovery. It is possible for everyone, and it is up to us to provide those opportunities for people. This government is focused on making sure people can recover from addiction and build stronger, healthier, and safer ...

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

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: After almost two months of relative peace and quiet Calgary's Beltline residents were once again disrupted by protesters over the weekend. The noise, the verbal abuse, and the views of many of these people put a chill on the entire area. Residents can't enjoy their weekend in peace, and businesses suffer from reduced foot traffic, yet the UCP government is once again silent.

It's like déjà vu. In fact, one business owner in the Beltline asked on Twitter if they were in a time machine. Just like a few months ago, the UCP has refused to act or speak out against protesters. The so-called party of law and order refuses to stand up to lawlessness, just like they did at Coutts. Instead of standing up to those who shut down our border for two weeks or more, some members of the UCP caucus chose to stand with these criminals.

In fact, the outgoing Premier tried to court many of these people in an effort to save his own job. Now that he failed to do so and was shown the door by his own party, the UCP will be caught up in several more months of internal drama instead of focusing on the priorities of Albertans. This could mean several more months of Beltline protests while our provincial government sits idly by and the residents and businesses continue to suffer. If so, this would be a failure of the government to protect the most basic right of Albertans, the right to peace and security.

We cannot allow this to continue. We need a government that will end the chaos not only in our streets but with our governing party itself. Albertans are tired of the drama and infighting within the UCP. In fact, they're just plain tired of the UCP. It's time for a government focused on what matters to Albertans. It's time for an NDP government.

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

Clifton House Seniors' Village in Calgary

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to discuss an exciting development happening in my constituency. On April 4 Clifton House, a seniors' village located in Forest Lawn, southeast Calgary, had its grand opening. Clifton House will eventually be home to a total of 175 residents and provide both supportive living and long-term care services. This will help to better support residents to age in place as their care needs develop over time.

Clifton House is located across the street from Clifton Manor, a long-term care site built in 1972. Clifton Manor's existing long-term care residents will slowly relocate to Clifton House. Clifton Manor will then be decommissioned, with long-range plans for redevelopment. The eventual redevelopment will include additional supportive living and long-term care continuing services along with affordable housing solutions for independent seniors.

The new Clifton House and the eventual redevelopment of Clifton Manor illustrate the importance of evolving with the times.

Let Clifton House be a symbol for the necessity of modernizing the continuing care system. Our seniors deserve to have facilities that allow for progression. They deserve to reside in facilities that are constantly striving to give them the best care possible.

The residents of Clifton House deserve legislation that is as modern as their new facility. Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, will now give them just that. Bill 11 will address the cracks in the legislation left from previous governments and finally reflect present-day practices and services while still allowing for the flexibility needed to address changing needs and expectations. This government will continue to strive to have our continuing care system embody that brighter future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Homelessness

Mr. Dach: Having a place to call home, a real roof over your head, a place to hang your hat is something most Albertans take for granted. For an increasing number of Albertans, however, having a stable place to call home is a distant dream.

People become homeless or houseless in Alberta for a multiple number of reasons. People don't choose to become destitute. We as a society have a responsibility to address the root causes and provide real solutions both in housing and compassionate, properly funded wraparound services to treat the underlying mental illnesses and addictions issues; sadly, something we have not seen this UCP government willing to do.

Realtors in Alberta have always fought to sustain the dream of affordable home ownership or rental in the real estate marketplace, but for too long tackling the crisis of the homeless population has been outside the scope of professional realtors' responsibilities. This needs to change, because it's a human right. Housing is a human right. Stable, affordable housing is a first step towards independent living free of mental illness and addictions. Housing the homeless is an ongoing and urgent priority and an investment which we must make as a society to support those who experience houselessness.

As an honorary life member of the Alberta Real Estate Association I call upon every one of the nearly 11,000 area members to step up and embrace a leadership role to eliminate homelessness in Alberta. Realtors have unmatched ingenuity when it comes to housing people. I call upon Alberta realtors to share their ingenuity, experience, and ideas to solve homelessness in their community with me and all Albertans. Visit albertasfuture.ca to upload your vision to help lift people out of homelessness in your corner of Alberta.

I look forward to hearing from the voices of professional real estate in Alberta. Working together, we can tackle the houselessness crisis.

Sexual Violence Awareness

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, on May 17 I had the honour of participating in two walk-and-run events to raise awareness about child abuse and sexual violence, with the Zebra Child Protection Centre and the Saffron Centre. These centres provide critical services for children and families who have been affected by abuse and sexual violence. These centres provide resources such as advocacy, education, counselling, and legal support for survivors.

After these events I decided to do more research into sexual violence as May is Sexual Violence Awareness Month, and, Mr. Speaker, I was floored with what I found. Let me share some statistics for members of this Assembly. Since 2008 14,403 cases of sexual assault against children have been recorded in Alberta;

1.8 million Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Two-thirds of women and one-third of men in Alberta will become a survivor in their lifetime. Children, Indigenous women, individuals with accessibility needs, and people from the LGBTQ community are more likely to face sexual violence in their lifetime.

Alberta's government has taken action to respond to on-campus sexual assault, sexual assault against children, and sexual assault and social context training for judges. We need to continue to support prevention services in conjunction with response services in this province.

I call on the government to continue its efforts to address this epidemic of sexual violence with more prudence and action. Albertans need the vital resources provided to them by organizations like Zebra and the Saffron Centre, yet we need to move more swiftly and adequately to prevent sexual violence in a way that is survivor-centric.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation Insurance Premium Costs

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this divided Conservative government is collapsing, and as we heard yesterday, the current Premier has no plan to change direction, so maybe the next one will. Now, for years the Minister of Finance has defended the Premier's decision to raise taxes through bracket creep. Now Canada's inflation rate is at a 30-year high. Food costs are up 10 per cent, shelter up 7 per cent. By the time the next election rolls around, Alberta families will lose around \$700 per year to bracket creep. To the Finance minister: will he reverse his own bad policy, or will he continue to defend his boss's legacy?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. Had we not sat down and provided real, sustainable fiscal management, Albertans would have very few options in the future. We made some tough decisions, but we've put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory with a balanced budget. And, yes, we will be re-evaluating the question of reindexing our personal tax system.

Ms Notley: Well, I hope so, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Minister of Finance walked into a multibillion-dollar oil revenue windfall, and his plan so far is to make inflation worse, not better.

Now, when the price of goods rises at rates like this, it's those who earn the very least who are most impacted. The minister's decision to freeze benefits as inflation rises means less support for working parents, for seniors, and for Albertans on AISH. Does the minister plan to launch his campaign on a record of taking \$3,000 a year out of the pockets of Albertans living with severe disabilities?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government took responsible decisions to ensure that our programs were sustainable in the future. We did all of that by not reducing our support for those on AISH. We maintained our AISH funding ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: . . . which is by far and away the largest in the country. That's important to every member on this side of the House because it's important to Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they took \$3,000 a year out of the pockets of severely disabled Albertans. When push comes to shove, we've seen whose side this minister is on.

Now, when our opposition raised the voices of hundreds of thousands of Albertans paying through the nose for their car insurance because of this government, the minister defended that decision to take the cap off and then went on to go to bat for big insurance companies and their big, fat profits. Why does the Finance minister think he's up to leading the province if his first instinct is to make regular Albertans pay more, lose more, while shovelling more money to profitable corporations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only members in this House who made Albertans pay more are the members opposite, when they introduced the largest tax increase in the province's history, the carbon tax. That's driven up the cost of groceries. It's driven up the cost of fuel. It's driven up the cost for seniors heating their homes. We've suspended the fuel tax. We're bringing relief to utilities, and we're positioning this economy for growth and investment attraction.

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

Government Policies

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has a historically low approval rating because he's the leader of Team Bad Ideas. For instance, we have a cost-of-living crisis, yet the Finance minister keeps taxing inflation. The Education minister is raising school fees. The Advanced Ed minister is hiking tuition. The Energy minister can't deliver utility rebates for love or money, and the parks minister is obsessed with turning K Country into Pay Country. Now that the captain of Team Bad Ideas is out, is there anyone over there who will pledge to reverse these onerous hikes on Albertans today? If not, I will.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Albertans would have no confidence in the members opposite because the members opposite, when they were in government, increased costs for every Albertan. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I heard the question; now I'll hear the answer.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Moreover, Mr. Speaker, they raised taxes on businesses. They raised taxes on individuals. They brought in the carbon tax. They sent tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province, creating a jobs crisis of epic proportion. We've reversed those policies. Investment is returning, jobs are returning, and the budget is balanced.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, now that the captain is out, here's another question for the team. We have a crisis in health care: overflowing ERs, severely delayed EMS response, doctors leaving, and front-line health care workers exhausted. They need support, resources, and stability, yet the divided Conservative health priorities under the last guy are wage rollbacks for specialists, more private surgical care, and taking insulin pumps from diabetics. Is

there anyone over there who will pledge to cancel that absurdly out-of-touch agenda and start fixing front-line health care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our agenda is to fix health care, and we are delivering on that agenda. We are investing \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that; \$1.8 billion additional funding. That's expense funding, and that is the highest level ever that we're investing in health care.

I was pleased to be able to make an announcement today in regard to expanding capacity with EMS. We are adding 19 new ambulances by September in Calgary and Edmonton. We made a commitment of \$64 million to do 20 over two years. We're accelerating that because we need to provide service for Albertans . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of these folks can claim that the Premier's resignation is about change or renewable and then continue with these bad policies, as that answer demonstrates. Again and again, it's the entire team that has to go. Prove me wrong. Is there a single leadership candidate, amongst the 20 or 30 of you, who feels that children have been failed by this backwards curriculum, who doesn't want to mine the Rockies, who believes that standing up for a woman's reproductive rights is the Premier's job? Will they stand right now and say so, and if not, why should anyone in this province believe these guys can change?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, it's a well-known fact that women's reproductive rights in this province are the same today as they were yesterday and as they will be tomorrow.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the UCP's war on health care, hospitals are partly closed today in Spirit River, Beaverlodge, Grande Prairie, McLennan, High Prairie, Wabasca, Whitecourt, Edson, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Drayton Valley, Rimbey, Rocky Mountain House, Wainwright, Hardisty, Consort, Sundre, Three Hills, Hanna, and Bassano. Albertans are waiting longer than ever for an ambulance, and children and families are lining up down the street to get into emergency at our children's hospitals. Will this Premier agree that this crisis in health care, created by his government, has gone far beyond the impact of COVID-19?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises some serious issues, and I want to speak to them. But before I do that, I want to comment on their comments on the war on health care. Quite simply, that is not the fact. We are investing in health care. As indicated earlier, we're investing \$1.8 billion over the next three years, the highest amount ever in health care in the history of this province, more than the investment by the previous government. We are hiring more health care professionals: AHS, 2,800 this year over next; nurses, 1,800 over the last two years; paramedics, 230; and even more. I'll talk about . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government went to war with health care workers, which is why tens of thousands of Albertans can't find a family doctor, leaving them nowhere to go but the emergency room if it's open. The Alberta Medical Association says that emergency medicine is now at a breaking point. Despite this crisis in health care the minister stands up once a week, tells Albertans that everything is fine, nothing to see here. Will this

Premier commit to reporting this afternoon and every week on doctor departures and recruitment, ambulance wait times, and cancelled or diverted surgeries? If not, what is it that he has to hide from Albertans?

2:00

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we put an additional \$1.8 billion in the system, the highest amount ever. I have indicated in this House that there is some strain on our health care system. We recognize that. But this is not unique to Alberta, and it's not unique to this particular time. There has been strain on our system at other times, particularly when we're dealing with influenza A. Right now we're dealing with challenges through COVID, influenza A, and a health care deficit. But here's the good news. We are coming on the downside of the sixth wave. We're going to see pressures released, and we're investing . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this minister is so tone deaf that it is no wonder Alberta's front-line health care workers are exhausted thanks to him and his government. But despite that, this government decided to go ahead and fire a trusted and experienced leader in Dr. Verna Yiu, someone who actually earned the trust of Albertans by telling them the unvarnished truth at the height of COVID-19 about the state of our health care system. Albertans have yet to hear a word from this government's new interim CEO. Will this minister commit to bringing him to his briefing this afternoon so Albertans can hear directly from the new head of AHS about the crisis this government has created in our hospitals?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate that the system is under strain, but the other side has indicated that we've put the system in crisis. Those are simply not the facts. The facts are that we are investing in our health care capacity a huge amount of dollars, and we're investing in people in terms of our health care capacity. We are actually having results. The other side left us with a huge backlog of surgeries, and we are focused, through the Alberta surgical initiative, to get those wait times down. Cataracts, which is the first area of our focus: we have reduced that to the lowest median wait times it has been even under the previous government.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government's attacks on postsecondary schools have been driving up tuition costs and literally driving students out of the province. Students are leaving at an alarming rate, students who would otherwise be starting families, businesses, buying houses, launching innovation, and helping to build our communities, but the UCP seems more concerned about balancing budgets on the backs of Albertans instead of planning for the future. What is this UCP government's message to the students that they have driven literally out of this province?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have increased investment in Advanced Education in Budget 2022. Our forecast for the current year was \$5.250 billion, up \$300 million for the current budget year. Moreover, we're investing \$600 million in skills, talent, ensuring that every Albertan has the ability to participate in the new economy, the strongest economy in the nation.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Jordan Dewever, a student who was directly impacted by this government's budget cuts to postsecondary, chose to attend another school in another province because tuition in this province was much higher and this government's actions caused the U of A rankings to go down. More and more students are being faced with this, directly contributing to the skills and labour shortages that we're seeing here in the province now, and it'll only get worse in the future without action immediately. Does this Premier understand the very weight of the terrible decisions he's made with the cuts to postsecondary? Does he understand how he is compromising all of our economic . . .

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and on behalf of my colleague I know that in Budget 2022: \$235 million in new funding over three years to Advanced Education, which included \$171 million over three years to create 10,000 new spaces at our universities, colleges, and polytechnics. Alberta remains below the national average for tuition costs. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition is \$6,567; the national average, \$6,693, so still below.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government must be held accountable for the damage that they have inflicted on postsecondary. We have not seen the level of 18- to 25-year-olds leaving this province since the 1980s. I have prepared a bill, coming out this afternoon, that will make sure that the UCP wears the long-term impacts of cuts to postsecondary, to our economy, and to our society. Will someone in that UCP government agree to sit down to discuss this bill we're bringing forward this afternoon and commit to a full study of the economic impacts of the devastating cuts to postsecondary being made by this UCP government?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member opposite is bringing forward a bill, but how hypocritical of the member opposite when they imposed the biggest tax hike in all of Alberta with the carbon tax, not to mention all of the other things that they put in place.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing tangible things to in fact increase postsecondary: \$171 million to create 10,000 new spaces, \$12 million to support existing scholarships, \$15 million to create new bursaries for low-income students, \$8 million to create new microcredential courses, \$6 million to create more internship opportunities, and so on.

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

Emergency Medical Service Response Times

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has heard the concerns of Albertans with regard to the increased pressures being placed on emergency medical services. The party opposite continues to say that we're doing nothing to address the pressures on EMS. Budget 2022, however, included a \$64 million increase to the EMS budget for AHS. In typical fashion, the opposition is once again attempting to mislead Albertans. That money should be making its way into the system, so it's a simple question. Are we taking action to address the pressures on EMS or not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We absolutely are taking action. The dollars are real, and our commitment is real, and the claims to the

contrary are simply false. I announced just this morning that AHS is using the dollars in Budget '22 to put 19 new ambulances and five support vehicles on the streets by the end of September. That includes five new ambulances in Edmonton and four in Calgary by the end of June and five more each in both cities by the end of September. To do it, they've created a hundred new permanent positions and extended 70 temporary positions. Tomorrow we'll be hearing more about the steps to address pressures . . .

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the reply. So it is a given that the claim that this government is not taking action in regard to EMS is false, plain and simple. But the opposition also claims that this government is somehow causing the pressure in the first place. I don't think there's any argument that the system is under some real pressure, but the question is: why? Why are we seeing so many patients flooding into EMS and emergency systems overall?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The pressure on the system is real, but the claim that any one government is causing it just ignores the reality. COVID-19 is impacting every province and other countries. In England, for example, they're dealing with long EMS response times for the same reasons that we are: a surge in calls starting last summer and pressure on the hospitals that delays transfers into emergency. A big factor is care that was deferred earlier in the pandemic. In 2021 emergency visits dropped by a quarter across the province. We'd never seen anything like it. On top of COVID, a late flu season and other factors are driving demand. We're responding by increasing capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister again for the reply. It is a given that the increase in call volume that is affecting emergency medical services was not caused by government policy, obviously, and our government is taking action to address this. But what about the system overall? EMS can't manage the situation on its own. What are we doing to resource the whole, entire health system to support EMS and the patients who rely on prehospital care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Response times are too long, and we need to get them back down within our targets. EMS can't fix all that on their own. We need to add capacity to the whole system, and that's exactly what we're doing. There are 800 more staff in emergency than in 2018, under the previous government; 1,800 more RNs in AHS in total; 230 more paramedics than just two years ago, before the new crews hit the streets; 1,500 new continuing care spaces opening this year. All of this is supported by a budget that is \$600 million higher this year than last year, higher than ever before, and a total increase of \$1.8 billion over the next three years.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: The current UCP government is sabotaging public education, and they're failing to fund growing school divisions and provide them with the necessary supports for disabled students, infrastructure, and staff. The Calgary board of education is dealing with the UCP's cuts to funding, and their funding cut means that

five-year-olds with speech and language delays are getting more than a million dollars less from this government. Why is the current government cutting kindergarten children's speech support in our largest school district when kids need more support, not less? When the minister puts her pin on in the morning, is she thinking that children are the first to face her cuts? Because they are.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We added \$700 million over the next three years to increase funding overall. I've got an \$8.4 billion budget, of which \$1.4 billion goes to support special-needs children and all the other supports for those most vulnerable within our education system. School divisions have authority. They get 98 per cent of the funding. They oversee their budgets, and they are making those decisions.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister should read her budget or at least the *Calgary Herald* and given that the CBE will have 1,500 more students in September but their budget is going to be less and given that grants to infrastructure maintenance and renewal were also hard hit by the UCP, with a 40 per cent slash to overall funding for this area for the CBE – the end result: they're laying off staff – and given that the UCP is so focused on each of their own individual jobs, will they at least apologize to all the people being laid off in Calgary because of this government's cruel cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member opposite would have spent the six hours that we had in estimates actually reading my budget, the Education budget, and understanding it, because there are more dollars allocated than there ever have been before. In fact, even though we only have 716,000 students, bums in seats, we're actually funding 730,000 students. We have been because we have been holding them harmless. Every school authority knows this, and they have appreciated it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the strain of growing enrolment has Edmonton public also projecting a funding shortfall for 1,700 students and given that the Ross Shep school council was told by the Education minister that more funding would be provided to Edmonton public in the future, why did the Education minister tell the Ross Shep school council that there would be more funding for Edmonton public in the future when the minister clearly failed to deliver on those 1,700 unfunded students? Will the Education minister apologize for failing to support Edmonton staff, students, and families and families all across this province?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite does not do her homework. It is unfortunate, because the member opposite, if she did her homework, would know that in 2020 the Edmonton public school division projected 4,700 more students than they actually had in their classrooms. We funded those 4,700 students because we were holding harmless. In 2021 they had 2,000 students fewer than they actually projected, which we funded. We continue to fund more students than they actually have.

Natural Gas Rebate Timeline

Ms Ganley: It has been over a hundred days since the UCP promised Albertans a natural gas rebate, a hundred days of Albertans struggling to pay their bills.

An Hon. Member: What's the price of natural gas?

Ms Ganley: Today the price of natural gas is above \$9. That's more than \$2.50 above where the natural gas rebate is supposed to kick in. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: But Albertans will have to wait until at least October to see any relief. This UCP government has waffled back and forth on whether Albertans can expect relief earlier. Once and for all, can the associate minister tell Albertans when these rebates will kick in?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're going to help people at the pumps. We're going to help people with their home heating and electricity. We are listening to Albertans. But we also want to make sure we focus on helping people with affordability by making sure that they have jobs. Right now the unemployment rate is 5.9 per cent. Now, why is that number relevant? That number is the exact same as before the NDP chased away jobs, thousands of jobs, and told people to go get a job in British Columbia. Never the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that the UCP promised electricity rebates for January through March but have completely failed to deliver so far and given that Albertans are, right this very minute, choosing between paying their utilities and buying groceries – they have no patience left for this incompetent government – and given that Albertans have a right to expect their natural gas rebates in a timely fashion, can the associate minister commit to this House that Albertans will see rebates for October in the month of October?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about electricity markets. Let's talk about why costs are so high. It's the members opposite when they were in government. They brought in the carbon tax. [interjections]

The Speaker: Oh, my goodness. All I can hear is the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, they brought in the carbon tax, increasing the cost of utilities. They prematurely went from coal to gas, costing Albertans 1.3 ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: They prematurely transferred ...

Mr. Feehan: The biggest failure ...

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will come to order.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite cost Albertans \$1.3 billion by prematurely going to gas from coal. On top of that, they added \$7.5 billion of transmission costs that all Albertans are paying for.

Ms Ganley: Given that this UCP government has plenty of promises but absolutely zero follow-through and owes Albertans some transparency in terms of these rebates – and we've written to the Auditor General for just that – and given that Albertans are still waiting for their electricity rebates from January, one more time. The price of natural gas is above \$6.50. Can Albertans expect to see a rebate in their hands in October? Yes or no?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Chamber knows that the NDP did everything that they could to stonewall passing legislation to provide assistance to people in their homes. Let's not

forget every single cost that the NDP put onto Albertans. But right now there's hope for Alberta. Right now Alberta is back on the economy. Canadians are moving here in numbers we haven't seen in decades. After the NDP chased away people, chased away opportunities, there's hope now for the future of Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Government Policies

(continued)

Mr. Loewen: Our big tent is like a big family. We haven't always gotten along. A good patriarch needs to provide a table where we can all come together, hash things out, and make sure every member feels respected and heard. Alberta's next Premier will need to refocus this government on the things that build trust, consensus, and unite Albertans. It's time to focus on some of the good work ministers have delivered. The Minister of Transportation has focused on enhancing traffic safety and has provided timely responses to my office's inquiries. Can the minister tell us about her transportation plans going forward?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard to ensure Alberta's highway network is as safe as it can be for the travelling public. Alberta's government recently passed Bill 5, which provides protections for all roadside workers. We heard Albertans loud and clear when they told us to get rid of speed traps and fishing holes. We did just that. We are holding municipalities accountable for their use of photoradar, ensuring it's not a cash cow. Our recent budget invests \$30 million to help fill a shortage of commercial drivers, including supports for women.

Mr. Loewen: Given that in this modern world Albertans are concerned about connectivity and given that from the ability to stay in their local community while attending online classes to the wave of online business opportunities and to simply be able to take a hands-free call on highway 43 without the risk of it dropping, providing rural Internet is one of the most important things for this government to accomplish to unite Albertans, to the Minister of Service Alberta: during your travels around the province consulting Albertans, what did they tell you about their need to be connected?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased to inform this House and remind this House of Alberta's historic \$390 million commitment that we announced as a part of Budget 2022. It is a part of Alberta's broadband strategy to ensure that every single Albertan and Alberta business will have access to high-speed, reliable Internet over the next five to six years. We also have been able to track \$390 million of matching funding from the federal government to go dollar for dollar for every single dollar that we'll be putting to work. I'm especially excited to say that in the very, very near future we'll be announcing the first tranche of projects in collaboration between the Alberta government and the Canadian government. Stay tuned.

Mr. Loewen: Given that every time we eat a meal in Alberta, we need to thank our farmers and given the difficult years we've had from drought to flooding, prairie fires to hail, from increased input cost due to inflation to the reduced availability of goods to declining bee populations and the inflexible federal regulations preventing us from importing replacement hives, to the minister of agriculture. Albertans must unite behind our agriculture sector as they fight to put food on our tables. Can you tell us about your work to support this economy?

2:20

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. That member has always been a great advocate for the beekeeping industry. Historic drought from last year. We're very proud of the \$360 million AgriRecovery program that was rolled out not only for livestock producers but also for beekeepers. We continue to work with the federal government and, through them, CFIA. We've asked them for an updated risk assessment rating for the importation of northern California bees into the province. That industry has been rather decimated as of late. They're looking at bringing in bees from Italy. We're looking at all sources and continuing to work on the BRM suite.

Heritage Funding

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, throughout the term of the UCP government we have seen cuts across all ministries, including cuts to the very heart of who we are as Albertans. Since the UCP took office, cultural industries have taken a hit, particularly in the area of preservation of our history. In this area, funds available to heritage have decreased by 27 per cent. Despite a change in the minister for this portfolio there has been no change in direction, putting preservation of our history at risk. Can the Minister of Culture please tell this Assembly which parts of our history are disposable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great opportunity for me to really affirm those many organizations and institutions in our province that preserve our history and our heritage. I've been working with many of them. Quite frankly, the work they do is amazing, and we will continue to support them.

Ms Goehring: Given that one of the sites bearing the brunt of this government's budget cuts was the Ukrainian cultural centre heritage village, which reported having to cut its hours of operation because of the UCP cuts, and given that Ukraine has been invaded by Russia and that promoting our Ukrainian culture in Alberta is more important than ever – if nothing else, it demonstrates support to the community – can the minister commit that the next time he visits Ukrainian Village, he'll bring along an apology and a commitment to actually fund this vital cultural site?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, you know, this government's position is to work co-operatively with all of our different cultural groups in this province. We gave \$11.35 million to the Ukraine aid with regard to the war, additional money for them to bring in and support immigrants to Alberta. The fact that they just want to politicize it and turn it into an angry yelling thing is ridiculous. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Goehring: Given that the lack of provincial oversight and reduction in funding for historical resources means many of these rural sites are now at risk and that once they are gone, they will be gone forever and that the loss of historical sites and resources has negative impacts on local economies and tourism and given that just one year of the \$30 million war room would have ensured stable funding for heritage sites, is this government really going to continue trying to create a fight with Bigfoot when it could be

focused on supporting and promoting Alberta's diversity and rich cultural communities?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, of course we want to promote Alberta's culture, and this government is doing that, but we also want to promote and defend our largest industry and our largest employer. This government will never apologize to the NDP for standing up for the oil and gas industry. Unfortunately, when they were in government, they sold out our birthright to the Justin Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa. We will not do that; we will stand proudly with our largest industry and make sure that Alberta continues to lead the way in this country and world-wide on being the best energy provider anywhere on the planet.

Post-COVID Long-term Health Effects

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on so many Albertans, with over 4,000 having lost their lives to this deadly disease and hundreds of thousands being infected and getting sick. Alberta needs their health care system to be there for those who are sick and recovering and those who are still sick, but it's been estimated that between 5 and 30 per cent of people infected with COVID-19 could develop long COVID symptoms for years to come. That means potentially tens of thousands of Albertans who need support to fully recover from this pandemic. So what is this government doing, in the midst of the crisis it created, to support those who are dealing with long COVID?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Long COVID is an issue. We understand that. It can take many different forms. My department is undertaking a study on long COVID to better understand the effects of the pandemic on Albertans' physical and psychological health. We also offer supports both through Calgary and Edmonton sites and online, virtually, to be able to deal with long COVID. We understand it's an issue. We're investing in it, and we're going to support the health of Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government was reluctant initially to even acknowledge the existence of long-haul COVID and the impact it put on those afflicted with it and given that AHS estimates that 1 in 5 Albertans who were infected with COVID-19 could go on to have long COVID, which includes serious symptoms like brain fog, heart palpitations, sleep disturbances, and more, and given that there are currently only a handful of locations that provide care for long-haul COVID patients in Alberta, what specifically is the Health minister doing to ensure that everyone in Alberta, rural areas, all communities that are impacted by long-haul COVID can be treated promptly?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, while more research needs to be done to understand the extent and the impact of long COVID symptoms, our government and Alberta Health Services have tools and supports in place for affected Albertans. There are four specialized referral clinics for long COVID in Alberta, and AHS is establishing further supports, including physical therapy and occupational therapy. AHS has also established a post-COVID task force that has developed a number of resources to support health care providers when assessing patient symptoms for long COVID and determining their rehabilitation supports that they need to be able to address this issue.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government has continually put our health care system under severe stress with their

best summer ever, their privatization agenda, their war with doctors, and so much more and given that, despite the boasts of the Premier, many Albertans, including rural Albertans, are losing access to primary care and family doctors and given that we're seeing huge pressures on our emergency rooms and hospitals and given that this creates a worry about people not being able to have their serious long-haul COVID diagnosed and treated, can the minister tell this House what advice he has for the potentially tens of thousands of Albertans impacted by long COVID who don't have access to a family doctor, can't get into a hospital? What does he suggest they do?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as previously indicated, we understand that this is an issue. We have four clinics. Also, we're looking to provide supports to health care practitioners across the province to be able to provide supports to Albertans. We are also making significant investments and expanding the capacity in our health care system, particularly in rural Alberta. Budget 2022 included \$90 million to support rural health care and family physicians. That includes the rural, remote, northern program; rural medical education; the clerkship program; the health professions action plan; the locum program; and the rural physician on-call program.

Federal-provincial Relations and Constitutional Reform

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last October a very clear majority of Albertans endorsed the equalization referendum. A few weeks later MLAs passed the required constitutional resolution to give force to that referendum. Indeed, the 62 per cent yes vote is as good a result as any government ever received in Alberta. Albertans obviously want something done about equalization. Can the government tell Albertans if the Prime Minister and other Premiers have been informed that Albertans want constitutional negotiations on equalization to begin?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and other Premiers are meeting this week, and this will be one of the things that our Premier will raise to continue the fight with Ottawa. But that is only one of the paths that we have to be able to fight to defend our province. We cannot depend on Ottawa to protect the future of Alberta. I, for example, just returned from Washington – we'll be back there in a few weeks – where we're working with our own diplomatic corps to advance the interests of this province. There are several ways that we can continue to fight back, including just recently winning on Bill C-69 in the Alberta Court of Appeal.

Mr. Jean: That's right, Mr. Speaker. This government has done some good work on promoting Alberta's energy industry in the U.S.

But given that the most important thing we can do to help our energy industry is to get constitutional fairness in Canada – as the Premier has admitted, Canada is broken: equalization, perpetual underrepresentation in Parliament, and laws that are designed only to hurt Alberta. Constitutional negotiations can fix all of this. Will this government show that it understands the anger of 62 per cent of Albertans and demand that the rest of Canada join us in constitutional negotiations?

2:30

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has been building a coalition all across Canada to defend our constitutional rights. Alberta has been a leader in that in the last several years and will continue to be. Again, I want to reiterate that it's a great show

of leadership by our province to stand up to Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law. While the NDP wanted to support their close ally Justin Trudeau and shut down the birthright of Alberta, we went to the Court of Appeal and won, and it has been made clear that Ottawa can go home and Alberta will set the course for our future.

Mr. Jean: Constitutional change is never easy, but it also isn't impossible. Given that once negotiations start, other provinces would also want to make constitutional changes – COVID has shown that across Canada health systems are broken. Many provinces will not be able to afford to fix them because they can't print money like the feds can. Since there is good reason to believe that constitutional talks can lead to improvements to Canada, why won't we act on the strong mandate Albertans gave us in the equalization referendum and demand constitutional negotiations immediately?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The Premier is meeting with his counterparts tomorrow in Regina, bringing up these exact issues. There is much work to do, but we've made some progress. On fiscal stabilization the cap has been lifted from \$60 to \$170, meaning an additional \$500 million for Alberta every year that program triggers. But the cap needs to be removed, and we will continue to advocate with our counterparts across the country for fairness in the federation.

The Speaker: I might just remind the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche that I appreciate it may be your first question since you've returned to the House, but questions after 4 ought not to be delivered with the use of a preamble, and I think the House would agree that that was a perfect example of a preamble.

Emergency Medical Service Response Times (continued)

Mr. Nielsen: This government is unwilling to take responsibility for the crisis they've created in the health care system. For months we've heard stories and reports of EMS workers at the point of burnout because of the pressures they've been under for years, made worse by this government's attack on front-line workers. Albertans are rightly concerned about how long it will take an ambulance to arrive. Real concerns and a real crisis deserve more than the minister's empty talking points. Can the minister explain what he considers to be an acceptable wait time for an ambulance? Ten minutes? An hour? What if it never comes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are taking real action to be able to address the increase, the 30 per cent increase, in call volumes that we've had since last August. This issue has not only affected our province, but it has affected provinces across the entire country. We are taking real action. This morning I was able to announce that we're creating a hundred new emergency medical service positions and extending 70 temporary positions, which will put 19 ambulances on the street in Calgary and in Edmonton by September. This is a commitment that we made as part of Budget 2022, an additional \$64 million to be able to build capacity within our EMS system.

Mr. Nielsen: All that and you still have 60 ACP positions not ready for this weekend.

Given that this government's so-called solutions are designed to kick the ball down the road rather than actually address the crisis the government created and given that the Minister of Health shamefully attempted to downplay the parking lot medicine that occurred under his watch rather than immediately acting to ensure that such a thing never happens again in Alberta and given that this government has had three years to ensure that world-class EMTs and paramedics have the support they deserve, does the minister regret the failures of the Premier and the previous Health minister that have led us to this point?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that's simply absurd. We are investing in our EMS system. We have added 230 more paramedic positions over the last two years in addition to the 170 we just talked about recently. We have put more vans on the street. We know that there are challenges with the entire system. That's why under my ministry we appointed an advisory council. This council not only includes AH and AHS, but it includes unions. It includes representatives of the private sector and the public sector and not-for-profits to actually solve the problems. I'm looking forward to their...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that all front-line health care workers like paramedics went above and beyond during the pandemic and given that for all front-line workers this government sought to fight with them rather than support them and is even now seeking to cut the pay of advanced care paramedics and given that this is an insult and a sign that this government's word can't be trusted, will the minister rise in his seat and tell the Finance minister that now is the worst time to cut the pay of paramedics? If he won't, is it because he's hoping to keep his job in the next UCP cabinet?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all health care workers for stepping up during COVID and during these very challenging times. Our government is not only investing in expanding capacity in health care; it's investing in people. I was very pleased that AHS and UNA have been able to reach an agreement. I look forward to the ongoing negotiations that are going on between AHS and HSAA, and I'm optimistic that they'll be able to get a settlement. We are investing in our people. We are adding positions, 2,800 additional positions, in AHS. We are putting money where our mouth is with an additional \$1.8 billion over the next three years.

Disability Service Provider Funding

Ms Phillips: For months we on this side of the House have been raising the concerns from Albertans about the impact of cost-of-living increases. Disability service workers are already struggling with the impact of inflation, and now the agencies they work for are being hammered with insurance costs and higher utility bills. Many agencies fear that they may have to reduce services. These are financial problems with a financial solution, so I'm asking the Minister of Finance to commit to two things: meet with the disability service workers association and take a proposal to Treasury Board for an upward adjustment to agency contracts to reflect inflation pressure on wages and the skyrocketing cost of utilities and insurance.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, through you, to the Member for Lethbridge-West for raising this important issue. I believe that everybody in this House is concerned about the

most vulnerable in this province because Albertans are concerned with the most vulnerable. We will follow up on that specific advice, but we've also included increases in Budget 2022: a \$40 million increase for those on AISH, a 5 per cent increase for the disability services line in Budget 2022. We are committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected in this province.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that during this pandemic disability service workers went above and beyond in an incredibly difficult situation and given that at a time when we should be lifting burdens from the front lines, who stepped up so much during the pandemic, this government is doubling down on adding costs and making it harder and harder for Albertans with disabilities to get the services they need – the Minister of Finance has a budget surplus due to the price of oil – will the minister make a commitment today to adjust agency contracts for utilities, insurance, and labour costs and meet with the disability services workers to communicate with them on this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for this question. Supporting the workers in the disability sector is important for us, and our office has worked with the Alberta Council of Disability Services. We're fully aware of some of the challenges that the workers are facing. We're working on a comprehensive strategy. We're looking at the credentials. We're looking at the training opportunities. We're also looking at any other ways that we can help to raise the bar and the standard for that sector there.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that this is a moral issue and also a financial issue and given that the Community and Social Services minister's awareness is not quite cutting it and given that it is Treasury Board that makes these decisions and the Minister of Finance is also the President of Treasury Board, will the Minister of Finance commit to a one-time upward adjustment to agency contracts for utilities and insurance and a cost-of-living escalator for the wages of front-line disability services workers, and will he personally meet with Sue Manery, director of the disability service workers association, to discuss the pressures faced by the agencies and those who provide critical caring work to people with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the member opposite raising this issue. In Budget 2022 we've included a 5 per cent increase in our disability services line. We've included an increase for those that are on AISH. We recognize that there are real affordability challenges for Albertans today. That's why we brought in an electricity rebate, that's why we brought in the natural gas price protection mechanism, and that's why we've suspended the fuel tax. I'm confident that my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services will deal with the specifics of this issue competently.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Social Studies Curriculum

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong, well-rounded education is paramount to setting up children for success. Math,

grammar, and science prepare children and inspire them to create a better world while social studies ensures that children are taught valuable history and provides exposure to new cultures that ultimately broaden their perspectives. To the Minister of Education: can you provide an update on the development of the new social studies curriculum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

2:40

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. He's absolutely correct. A strong, well-rounded education helps set our children up for success. That's why we have spent the last year listening to feedback from all Albertans on the draft K to 6 curriculum. After hearing about some of the concerns that there were around age appropriateness, content load, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content as well as cultural and religious content, we released a new draft social studies design blueprint, which lays out a plan for future content changes. We are listening, and we're continuing to make changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that social studies can teach children about Canadian multiculturalism and given that a strong social studies curriculum would assist Albertans in upholding multicultural values and given that there are numerous cultures within Alberta to learn about, to the Minister of Education: can you tell Albertans about some of the cultures and religions that will be included in the updated social studies curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard plenty of feedback from Albertans on the inclusion of culture and religion in the draft K to 6 curriculum, and we have made changes based on that very good feedback. As I said before, every student will see themselves reflected in Alberta's new curriculum. When we eventually release a revised draft of social studies, there will be opportunities for teachers and students and others to explore a multitude of cultures and religions, and it will allow flexibility for classrooms to explore the diversity of all students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there will be multiculturalism taught in the new social studies curriculum and given that there is a growing population of Hindu Albertans, who have a vibrant culture that deserves to be taught in schools, and given that I strongly support including the teaching of the Hindu religion and Indian civilization in the curriculum, can the Minister of Education update Albertans on the status of the Hindu religion and Indian civilization being included within the social studies curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Like I said, the draft K to 6 social studies curriculum is currently in the draft design blueprint stage. I was honoured to meet with representatives from Alberta's Hindu community several times, and I'm proud to say that their feedback is being looked at and incorporated into the work that we're doing on the blueprint and into the curriculum as well. We want to make sure that the

students leave school with a deep appreciation for the rich multicultural fabric of our province and how this diversity has helped shape Alberta into what it is today. We are so blessed in Alberta to have so many ethnic groups here, and we are so proud to have them in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order, members. Prior to departing, if my eyes don't deceive me, I believe the former Minister of Energy and Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, Diana McQueen, has snuck into the gallery. I hope you'll join me in welcoming her.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Tourism

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and acknowledge Tourism Week, which is happening all across Canada from May 29 to June 4. As the parliamentary secretary for small business and tourism and one of the MLAs representing our mountain parks and the MLA representing the most beautiful constituency in the province, I've had the privilege of connecting with many outstanding tourism operators throughout the province. The tourism industry is a crucial economic driver for many communities in every corner of our province. In 2019 the Alberta tourism industry contributed \$8.4 billion to the province's GDP.

While we know the last couple of years have been difficult for the tourism industry, tourism operators are resilient. In fact, we are currently only second to B.C. in tourism recovery in Canada, and like the rest of the economy, tourism is still on the rebound. Total tourism spending is expected to return to prepandemic levels in the next couple of years. With the help of this government we will ensure that that happens. We've expanded Travel Alberta's mandate to a destination management organization and increased its budget by \$63 million over three years. We're investing \$3.75 million in new Indigenous tourism experiences to change perspectives and preserve culture, language, and traditions. We also continue to reduce red tape and regulatory barriers to foster growth in the tourism industry.

The growth of the tourism industry will be felt all across this province, from small rural communities to our big cities and everything in between. The future is bright for this industry, and we continue to hear all the time of new investments from the private sector to enhance Alberta's visitor economy. With the border restrictions decreasing and the beautiful weather upon us, many Albertans, Canadians, and international tourists will be visiting and taking advantage of the many sites Alberta has to offer. I encourage all people to visit and support our excellent tourism operators.

As we celebrate Tourism Week, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of the tourism industry and everyone involved in our visitor economy to Alberta's economy, culture, and social well-being.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has a statement.

Health Care System Capacity

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across this province Albertans are recovering from a tumultuous two years of a pandemic that wreaked havoc on our communities and families and left the health care system overwhelmed and vital health care workers exhausted.

As the MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat I have watched as physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, surgeons, and others worked around the clock to help those who need it most. Our health care system has been pushed to its limits, and because of a glaring lack of capacity in our system we see a dire need for reform, modernization, and transformational change.

Through historic investments in health care and capacity building, Alberta's United Conservative government is doing the work to ensure that Albertans have the care that they deserve. We need to look for more solutions, and we need to continue to build capacity. I was proud to stand with the Minister of Advanced Education in Lethbridge as he announced new dollars for Medicine Hat College so that they can train and educate more hugely needed health care aides. Another solution is to invest in infrastructure in the services that rural Albertans rely on, and this is why I was proud to stand with the Premier and the Minister of Health as we announced sustainable, predictable funding for HALO air ambulance, an essential service that was woefully ignored by previous governments.

While these are great steps to address health care challenges that are facing my constituency, there is still so much more that can be done. I know this because the constituents in Brooks-Medicine Hat have come to me with solutions every day. Mr. Speaker, no matter where you live – urban, rural, north, south, or somewhere in between – you should have access to timely, quality health care when you need it. The time for transformational change is now. We cannot continue to do things a certain way because that is the way that they have always been done. We need to look for long-lasting, meaningful solutions.

I look forward to welcoming the Minister of Health to Brooks-Medicine Hat this summer as he tours the province, consulting with rural Albertans and those who are on the front lines and know their communities best. Local decision-makers know best what their communities need, and I am grateful that the minister is planning to come down to Brooks-Medicine Hat to learn straight from them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future's final report in relation to its review of the Lobbyists Act pursuant to Government Motion 86, agreed to by the Assembly on June 15, 2021. I would like to thank all of those who made presentations and made written submissions to the committee as we conducted our review. The report will also be posted shortly on the committee's internal website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 208 Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce a bill: Bill 208, the Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act.

Yes. This bill would require the Minister of Advanced Education to conduct an economic impact analysis and publish the results in the Legislature whenever operating support for postsecondary decreases by more than 2 per cent so that Albertans may understand

all of the effects of these choices. The UCP has cut more than \$690 million from our postsecondary system, and young people are leaving the province at record rates. This is a necessary bill to allow Albertans to understand the long-term impacts of cuts to postsecondary, to our economy, and to our society in general. I hope that all members of this House will support this important effort by supporting Bill 208.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it is my pleasure as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following reports from the office of the Auditor General. One, Alberta Indigenous Relations, Alberta Labour and Immigration: Indigenous Economic Participation; and First Nations and Metis Leaders' Insights.

Two, Alberta Community and Social Services: Family Support for Children with Disabilities.

Three, Assessment of Implementation Reports: Alberta Health Services, Travel Alberta; AHS Controls over Expense Claims, Purchasing Card Transactions and Other Travel Expenses; and Travel Alberta: Managing the Risks of Cloud Computing.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: I see the Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen. I'm not sure as we haven't called an order of business. Do you have something to say?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I'd like to request that Standing Order 8(2) be waived and that the Assembly revert to Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders pursuant to Standing Order 8(1) to resume consideration of Bill 202. This precedent was set earlier today with a private member's bill. This morning the Legislature shut down an hour early, so there's obviously plenty of time to pass Bill 202 also.

Thank you.

The Speaker: For clarity's sake, this is a request for unanimous consent to do aside with those standing orders as mentioned?

Mr. Loewen: Yes.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Government Motions

Committee Referral for Publication Ban (Court Applications and Orders) Regulation

30. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:

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) regulation 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 3 months of the day on which it commences its consideration of the draft regulation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(i) this is a debatable motion. Are there others wishing to join in the debate, have questions or comments?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

Information and Privacy Commissioner

31. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:

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 the 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: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there other members of the Assembly wishing to add questions or comments to the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill is our sixth red tape reduction bill so far and moves our province one step closer to reaching our goal of cutting red tape by one-third. It makes common-sense changes that will save Albertans and Alberta businesses time and money by digitizing forms, streamlining reporting requirements, and making it easier to do business across the province, and it takes our province one step closer to cutting red tape by one-third.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For instance, we've made changes to the Animal Health Act, which will give the government flexibility to respond to large events such as the avian flu, which is currently impacting poultry producers in our province. As it stands, it is legislated that notifiable diseases be reported to the Chief Provincial Veterinarian within 24 hours, and it must be reported by phone, in person, or by fax. To be clear, we are not removing the requirement for reportable and notifiable diseases to be reported. Within regulation it is currently required, and that is not changing. The changes we are proposing will allow the minister to adjust the 24-hour requirement based on certain circumstances. For instance, if there is a rapidly spreading disease amongst livestock in the province, the minister could shorten that timeline to better control or monitor the spread.

We are also allowing producers across the province to report notifiable diseases more easily, which is a key pillar of our red tape reduction strategy. By allowing producers to use modern methods of reporting, like e-mail, we're helping to save them time while

strengthening the channels of communication, which is vital as we take action in preventing the spread of disease.

These are common-sense changes that support producers in our province, yet the members opposite try to politicize it. The changes to the Animal Health Act will strengthen our ability to respond to extraordinary circumstances in a timely manner, which is to the benefit of producers and their livestock.

Bill 21 also takes steps to ensure uninterrupted services for rural Albertans. The proposed changes in this bill will allow rural electrification associations, or REAs, to purchase one another. The move to allow REAs to purchase one another is based on feedback gathered during stakeholder engagement sessions in spring 2021. Electricity-sector stakeholders participated in the engagement, and our reforms are focused on that sector for the time being. In fact, Dan Astner, the president of the Alberta Federation of REAs Ltd., said:

We are encouraged by the proposed changes that will support REAs and increase the likelihood of ongoing sustainability. Rural Electrification Associations played a significant historical role in powering rural Alberta; we appreciate innovative industry opportunities that they may continue to play a beneficial role in a dynamic rural Alberta economy.

This is a change that REAs have been asking for for years, and we are proud that we were able to bring it forward and support rural Albertans.

But we didn't stop there. The proposed amendments would also enable rural utility associations to deliver other services such as providing fibre-optic services if allowed in regulation. The changes would support the long-term sustainability of rural utility associations, benefiting rural residents and businesses who depend on them for services, and facilitate rural economic development and diversification.

Now I will address changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The amendments being brought forward in this bill are focused on renewals, not new licences. The option to provide a longer term licence renewal will be based on the track record of the facility or foster parent. If they are consistently maintaining the high safety standards, there is an option to provide them with a licence renewal of up to three years. These changes would help staff spend less time processing annual licence renewals from facilities in good standing, would continue to fully comply with the terms of their licence and more time working with facilities who may need more help, resulting in increased safety for children in care.

After the renewal Children's Services staff will use existing practices of engaging with facility owners to ensure they continue to meet the required standard of care. For foster care providers this includes meeting with the caregiver in the home at least every three months, completing an annual evaluation, including an environmental safety check, and conducting a reassessment of the home if the foster family encounters a significant life event that may impact its continued ability to provide care.

For child and youth facilities this includes conducting annual site visits, completing the environmental safety check, and regularly reviewing the facility provider file for any signs of concerns and to ensure facility documentation is up to date. As the Minister of Children's Services has stated in this House time and time again, our government is committed to the safety of children in our care.

3:00

We've also proposed some changes to the Education Act by eliminating one very specific additional schedule that independent schools currently submit, specific to tuition. As clarified numerous times, Bill 21 does not remove the requirement for independent

schools to report information related to private sources of revenue, including tuition, to Alberta Education. This will continue to be required as part of the audited financial statements they provide annually and is in addition to a new requirement for them to publicly disclose financial statements to parents by either posting those online or by sharing them with parents directly, which means these schools will now be more accountable to the parents who choose to pay tuition.

Bill 21 also makes amendments to the Provincial Parks Act and Public Lands Act, which will result in more flexibility when managing our provincial parks and public lands while maintaining standards and protecting the environment. Despite what has been said by the members opposite, there will continue to be public stakeholder and Indigenous engagement on regulations, directives, rules, codes, and standards as required. These changes are limited to setting technical, operational, or administrative requirements and guidelines.

We are also making changes to the Pharmacy and Drug Act to give the Alberta College of Pharmacy the flexibility in its oversight of pharmacies which will allow for a more pointed response to changes in the health care environment such as natural disasters, pandemics, or drug shortages. Given the many obstacles we faced in the last two years due to the pandemic, the changes prepare our health care system for the future, ensuring Albertans continue to have access to the services they require.

Now, one part of Bill 21 that I'm particularly excited about and that I'm sure municipalities and businesses across the province are excited about are the changes to the Municipal Government Act. These amendments could be a game changer for mobile businesses across the province. Right now businesses are required to get a business licence for each jurisdiction they operate in, costing them time and money. However, the proposed amendments will allow municipalities to work together to only require one licence for multiple jurisdictions. This would be a significant change for businesses like food trucks, photographers, mobile pet groomers, and many others who take their business on the road. Paul McLaughlin, the president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, said:

Supporting a healthy business community is a priority for municipalities in local and regional economic development efforts. Reducing red tape and barriers to utilizing intermunicipal business licences and other regional approaches to economic development is an important step in allowing municipalities to play a larger role in growing their local and regional economies.

While some of the members opposite can't face it, cutting red tape makes a tangible difference for Albertans and Alberta businesses, and this is a great example of how we can get government out of the way and support our province's economic recovery.

We're also making other simple, common-sense changes that will make life easier for Albertans. For example, we've made changes to the Residential Tenancies Act that will allow Albertans to receive their security deposits back via e-transfer. Prior to this proposed change Albertans had to either get their security deposit back in person or by a cheque in the mail. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I think most Albertans have, for the most part, limited their use of cheques and handling cash. Almost everything we do now can be done online, so giving tenants and landlords the ability to streamline this process and use modern technology is a win-win.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one aspect of Bill 21 that is important to all Albertans is the change to the Local Authorities Election Act. These amendments take important steps to protect the private information of Albertans who choose to run for office and their donors. As it stands, there is no legal obligation for a municipality to redact

private information such as home address or phone number. While it's common practice to redact this information, these changes are ensuring that it must be done while still requiring that the donors' names and the amount donated are still disclosed. It's about striking the right balance between privacy and transparency.

As many of us in this Chamber have been doxed, we understand just how important this change is. People shouldn't fear their safety because they ran for office or donated to a candidate. There is no reason that information like a person's home address or phone number should ever be publicly disclosed. I know that on this side of the House we strongly support the privacy of Albertans. I'm not sure if the members opposite can say the same, given their action of hacking the private information of Albertans, but I do hope they support this part of the bill.

Bill 21 also brings forward changes to the Railway (Alberta) Act. The Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke at length about how these changes could impact short-line rail operators and how this wasn't asked for. To be perfectly clear, this change has nothing to do with short-line rail operators. The proposed amendment is to support heritage railway operators, which are not the same thing. Heritage railways operate in whole or in part within a historical park, contain rolling stock or structural facilities manufactured in 1965 or earlier, operate at 30 kilometres per hour or slower, and travel fewer than 240 kilometres per day. They aren't hauling grain, as the member opposite suggested, which is exactly why we brought these changes forward. It doesn't make sense to have heritage railways following the same operating rules as larger industrial railways that haul things such as minerals and agricultural products. These changes will not impact the safety of Alberta's rail lines, but what they will do is help bolster Alberta's tourism industry.

The safety of Albertans is and will continue to be of the utmost importance. Despite what the members opposite may think, cutting red tape isn't about removing safety standards; it's about making Alberta a better place to live, work, and raise a family. The more red tape we cut, the more we ensure Alberta is the destination of choice for investors. We're committed to making Alberta the freest and fastest moving jurisdiction in North America by getting government out of the way so that our businesses can continue to invest and create jobs, fuelling the province's economic recovery.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this afternoon and provide some final comments here in third reading on Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I know the minister is very, very excited about the bill and some of the red tape bills that have come before it and all the red tape they've been cutting.

I would have to argue that there are aspects along the journey that, I would suggest, are not red tape reduction. Maybe that's why we're on the second associate minister for this ministry. As I've mentioned before, as fun as it sounds, when Albertans were able to go out and cut their own Christmas tree, they still had to fill out all the forms to do that. They just saved the \$10. I would be very hard pressed to call that red tape reduction.

What I'm not hard pressed to say is that Bill 21 is yet another piece of omnibus legislation, something that I know the former Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was very much against when serving in opposition in the 29th Legislature. So it was always

interesting to see these pieces of legislation come forward in omnibus form, that which he supposedly said he was very much opposed to seeing. Of course, with Bill 21 it's unfortunate that we maybe haven't heard some of those comments reiterated about this current one that we have in front of us.

Nevertheless, as was mentioned, we have 16 different acts that are being affected, none of which, you know, can be grouped together all in one group because they encompass nine different ministries, so it's the perfect example of omnibus legislation. But this is what we've come to expect from the red tape ministry, something that has been costing Albertans and will cost Albertans by the end of this Legislature somewhere between \$10 million and \$15 million.

It's been very, very difficult to establish, really, who's in charge of red tape reduction. Is it the minister in each ministry? Is it the associate minister? Is there collaboration? The reason I bring that up around the collaboration, of course, is what we saw in terms of the confusion here in the bill that's before us around the proposed changes to education and statements when the bill was first released by the red tape minister and then quickly corrected by the Education minister.

3:10

I'm certainly willing to provide, you know, kudos where it's due. That was cleared up, but the fact that it happened to begin with tells me that perhaps the language that's contained in Bill 21 around those changes to education was confusing to begin with. So looping back around to the collaboration: was there collaboration between the red tape minister and the Education minister? Was this all led by the Education minister and then just simply handed down, like we've seen many pieces of legislation that have been handed down, to the red tape ministry to bring forward?

I mean, at one point in time we saw the former red tape minister present a piece of legislation to the public, and when reporters started asking all kinds of questions about it, as they should – I just thought they were great questions. Nothing nefarious about it or trying to lead him astray. All we kept getting was pointing fingers around: "Well, you'll have to ask that minister. You'll have to ask that minister, and maybe you should ask that minister over there." If it's your bill, you should be able to answer the questions to it. That's why, when I saw that confusion around the different statements at the beginning of seeing this bill, I couldn't help but start to ask questions, and it did take us a little while to get those answers.

One of the things that led us off here in the opening remarks in third reading here for Bill 21 – one of the things I heard was "common-sense changes." This is a buzzword, of course, that we've heard on a bit of a regular basis. I bring that up because I want to start to direct our attention around some of the changes with public lands and parks. My friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who is the environment critic, had some very significant concerns with regard to that piece of the proposed legislation.

For one, there is significant leeway that is being provided to the environment minister around making decisions about how these lands could potentially be used. One of the, I guess, examples that caught my attention very, very quickly was the proposed feedlot at Pigeon Lake. You know, some of the background information that I was hearing around the consultations that he has done with residents in that area – they are very, very engaged on this issue. There are certainly significant concerns potentially about contamination of Pigeon Lake itself, and we really haven't seen some good answers provided around that.

It's unfortunate. Obviously, Committee of the Whole is usually the best time to be able to kind of walk through those types of

things, and all it was was answers like: well, the NDP just hate business, and they don't want to see the province grow and create jobs. No. We're asking these questions because these are the questions that are coming up by Albertans in the area that's being affected by this.

When you couple that with these almost unprecedented changes that are being proposed for what the minister can do, the minister can pretty much bypass almost everything around that. I think Albertans are very rightly concerned around that. If there are ways that we can, you know, create a safe environment for that lake, reduce if not eliminate any potential contamination, I don't think there's anything wrong with having that open discussion around that and including the residents in that area for that instance.

You know, we always hear, again, one of the buzzwords, around consultation. A lot of times it seems I'm either seeing a model of consul-told or we're only listening to the people that tell us what we want to hear. I mean, the MLA responsible in that area wasn't even in attendance. I heard it was standing room only for a Saturday night of a long weekend. That's just how engaged the residents are on this. Kudos to them for paying attention to this.

We've also seen some changes, as was mentioned earlier, around the Animal Health Act. I don't know if it's just bad timing, coincidence – I don't know – as we're seeing cases of avian flu growing in the province and then some of the changes that are being suggested. Of course, the minister has said that there are no changes in terms of the reporting timelines, that it's just simply being moved into the regulations, which means, then, that changes could be made after that without actually coming into the House for any kind of review or debate. Certainly, from what I've seen in previous actions by this government, I can't help but have to call that into question as to what the purpose potentially might be.

You know the example, of course: the removal of the Lougheed coal policy and trying to move forward with coal mining in the eastern slopes, which potentially would put a lot of Albertans' drinking water at risk. We've certainly seen an example, just to the west of us, where there was a significant leak and the hazard that that has created. We certainly don't want to repeat such a thing, especially since, as we know, there's been some significant investment in southern Alberta around irrigation, something that's critical to those areas and the farming that goes on down there. It would be an absolute shame to have all of these changes and upgrades there only to find out now that the water that they're going to use is contaminated. Again, Mr. Speaker, you can't help but have to start to ask the questions, at least to do my due diligence.

I do want to share the changes around the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the potential extension of the renewals up to three years. I know, from my past, that when there are changes that are being extended, sometimes it allows for an area of a window where, if we have people that, for instance, are being checked on a yearly basis now and they know they're not going to get checked for three years, things can slowly become lackadaisical. So I have to voice that concern around that. My hope is that those changes will continue to be very closely monitored, especially here in the beginning, when they start, because, as we know, in this province we've gone through a very significant past year with regard to the death of kids in care. I would highly caution the government, moving forward on that, to stay on top of that.

I know we've seen some other changes, which, again, I'm not necessarily against. One of the highlights in the opening remarks by the red tape minister was around the changes to the Railway Act. Again, if there are fingers being pointed to one of my colleagues, blowing it out of proportion, I would have to question, then: was the language clear enough so that there wasn't any room for interpretation? Over the course of this 30th Legislature I've

persistently and consistently seen that instead of having the best language we could have, the clearest language we could have – again, not about us. It's got to be about: 20 years down the road, when we're all gone, when we're not here to answer any questions, can somebody read that same language and come to the same conclusion, without even having to go back and read the debate and listen to the debate, and understand what's going on? If we're not actually hitting that mark, then we haven't created the best language that we possibly can.

3:20

Obviously, my colleague, in his critic role, was reading through that and, again, started to ask questions and probably through his consultation had those questions come up, so just trying to perform our duties as opposition, making sure that there's clarity around these kinds of things.

Changes around the MGA: I would probably tend to agree with the red tape minister that these changes allowing licences to cross municipal borders would definitely be a good thing. I think municipal governments will be pleased to be able to do that, but it's probably one of those cases where, you know, the municipalities are happy to get good news when it seems they tend to get a lot of bad news: the big-city charters being ripped up, funding that they need for critical infrastructure projects or addressing things like homelessness and houselessness falling considerably short.

As I've argued even earlier today, you know, when we seem to have \$1.3 billion to bet on an election or tens of millions of dollars to chase a cartoon Bigfoot, then I would suggest we probably have money to supply these kinds of things and allow municipalities, who are the front line, who are dealing with, you know, the people – and I still get calls, nonetheless, about potholes or their back lanes and things like that. So definitely probably some good news for municipalities. I'm sure they're going to say: hey, how about giving us some more of this kind of treatment, because we kind of like that?

Changes around the Pharmacy and Drug Act. Again, one of those: any kind of good news we can get. Our health care system is in crisis. The past couple of years, through the pandemic, have been very, very taxing on Albertans, on Canadians, on the entire planet. But, again, let's not forget where we came from. We started things like ripping up the contract for doctors, going after nurses, going after other health care professionals. We saw changes to things like diagnostic imaging, where instead of a chiropractor or a physiotherapist or an audiologist being able to order these things directly, they now have to go through the extra step of going to their family physician, getting that X-ray ordered, then eventually going back to have it read, and then, hopefully, that can get shared with their other health care professionals, for instance their chiropractor, and then they can finally get the care that they need. That in itself is the definition of red tape.

When that change was made, I did of course ask the former red tape minister what the thoughts were around that. Was there any consultation with the ministry? I got absolutely no answer, so I can only conclude that for our \$10 million or \$15 million, as I mentioned earlier, we're not getting any communication; hence why I'm coming back to Bill 21 and why I question the communication between the Education ministry and the red tape ministry.

It's, again, one of those cases where we have a sandwich where some of the layers are good, but some of the other layers aren't. There are, I guess, significant barriers that I have with regard to that. It's not something where I can simply say: well, because there are all these other good things, let's just ignore the bad. I can't ignore the bad. I simply can't. You know, for that, I find myself

unable to support Bill 21 here in third reading. I would suggest to other members of this House that they not support it as well, but I certainly look forward to hearing their comments through the course of third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise at third reading of Bill 21, the bill that speaks to all the other bills and impacts all the other bills. I have always really struggled with the red tape reduction philosophy of putting legislations together that are not related to each other whatsoever into one big piece of legislative change. We see in this piece of legislation 16 different pieces of legislation that are being changed, different sections within those pieces of legislation, and many of these pieces of legislation never talk to each other or will ever meet the same ministry. I think that that is a problem.

It is a problem for a variety of different reasons, the first reason, obviously, being the fact that when you look at this bill, you know that it's very, very thick. It does not give a lot of confidence, I would say, in the willingness of the government to be open and transparent about what they're actually trying to do. You have to go through pages and pages and pages of this bill to find the piece of legislation that is being changed, to look at that section of the piece of legislation that is being changed, then go back and find the other legislation that it is changing and look at it in that way.

That is not typically how legislation is drafted or how it typically works. Usually you would see a bill that is just a small, little piece of a bill, and you would see the pieces of legislation that are being changed. It would only be one piece of legislation. It's very easy, then, for people who want to look at that legislation to be able to compare it to what is being changed. This does not do that.

What I don't understand, when we look at this bill, is how we move from pieces that deal with municipalities, with the local authorities act, to looking at the Cooperatives Act, which deals with co-operatives, to looking at the Education Act, to looking at impacts to the Children's Services legislation, to looking at things that deal with Environment and Parks, the tenancies act, surveying, pharmacies, provincial parks, public lands. None of these bills are supposed to talk to each other and be in the same piece of legislation.

There are reasons why we have different ministries. There are specific expert areas that you need to be able to look at and work on, and when you look at legislation, you need to be able to look at the fact that – when you look at the Provincial Parks Act, when you make a change to it, it will have a waterfall effect through the whole piece of legislation. It will impact regulations. Therefore, having public lands and provincial parks together makes sense. But having the tenancy act in the same piece of legislation that deals with where people are going camping does not make any sense.

The question then becomes: why is the government choosing to do it this way? Well, the government will say that it's housekeeping. I think what Albertans will say is that it's about trying to hide transparency and being honest with Albertans about what they're actually trying to accomplish. I think the parks changes specifically would be a prime example of that. When we look at the changes under Bill 21 with the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act, there are significant changes that are given to the minister to be able to arbitrarily change what is going on in our parks.

The minister has said: well, all it does is allow me to be able to put up sign locations and warning signs without having to turn it

into a big thing. I think I disagree. In fact, I might agree with him in the sense that it could be about putting up signs and that he doesn't want to have to go through the process of consulting with those areas that are being impacted and going through a thorough consultation, because as the minister he would know.

3:30

But a sign could say something like, "ATVs are not allowed in this area; off-road vehicles are not allowed in this area," or the sign could say that they are. Well, that makes a significant change. We could go from not being able to ride an ATV through a creek because the sign says "No" to the sign all of a sudden being removed, and all of a sudden you can ride your ATV through a creek that you weren't allowed to ride it through a little while ago. That's an interesting change that the minister could make.

The minister could also decide to put up a sign that says, "This area now has a fee that you must pay to camp here" whereas a couple of days prior to that, that area may have been considered part of the Crown land that was not necessarily needing to have a fee attached to it. The minister could say that this is about signs. It could just be about signs, or it could be about signs that say some very interesting things that change the whole landscape of that area that is specifically impacted in the area that comes to provincial parks, Crown land areas.

I think that we can fundamentally agree on signs. I think the intention of those signs: we will both probably disagree as to what the intention of that is. But this bill will now give that power to the minister to be able to do that, so there may have been some honesty from the minister in regard to the sign locations and being able to put up signs. The full intention of what those signs would have meant maybe was not as open and transparent as I think we would have liked to have happened. I think this is where the fundamental problem happens with this bill. The government will implement a small change, and they will rationalize that small change with a very simplistic argument and then expect Albertans to just trust them with it: "Trust us. Trust me that I'm just going to put up a sign and the sign will not have a significant impact on the area."

The struggle that I think Albertans have and has been very clear, especially when it comes to the development in areas that protect our waterways and our parks, is that Albertans can't trust this government. We saw it clearly with coal. We've seen it with the Kananaskis pass. All of a sudden there's a fee that is now being attached to camping in Crown land areas, with the understanding that that \$90 fee, that a family now has to pay to be able to use Kananaskis, would help to hire more fish and wildlife officers and enforcement of those areas to ensure that if there were parties happening or people weren't being respectful to the landscape, those areas were being cleaned up appropriately, that that land was being protected, and that people that were being found to disrespect the landscape would face fines.

What we've heard most recently, I believe – and my colleague from Lethbridge might be able to help me out – is that I think we've lost something like 16 fish and wildlife officers most recently, layoffs, which is counter to the argument that we heard from the government when the Kananaskis pass was introduced. In fact, the \$90 Kananaskis pass: the government generated a lot of revenue off those passes last summer – during COVID the only thing you really could do was get outside – with that commitment, and in fact we saw a clawback in the staffing supports that the government promised that that pass was going to be used for.

Again, I think that some of the stuff in Bill 21 – I mean, I want to be fair to the government, because I believe that, you know, I can stand here and criticize forever. I mean, I could, and as opposition I try to be helpful at some point. I want to be fair that Bill 21 has

some good stuff in it, but the struggle is that this piece is really bad. How does the government expect the opposition to vote in favour of a bill that actually has some good things in it, and then they slide in this really, really bad thing?

This is the problem, again going back to what I was saying at the beginning of my argument, when you stick a whole bunch of bills together and a whole bunch of pieces of legislation, 16 pieces, and you say: okay; opposition, you need to now vote in favour of this because you should, and look at all the good stuff that's in here. Well, the problem is that with all the good stuff that's in here, with this one piece that's really bad when it comes to Environment and Parks, it just kind of annihilates the opportunity to try to be supportive and work with the government. It's put this one piece in there, which is why you shouldn't put 16 pieces of legislation into one bill, because the minute that you do that, you take away any opportunity to be able to actually get the support that you need, well, that you should want, and be able to say that these things are good.

The co-operatives piece: there's some weird language in there. I'm not really a big fan of the fact that we would be encouraging more foreign investment in co-operatives. I mean, the whole intention of a co-operative is to try to have local investment and be really – like, to support the co-operative movement in Alberta should be about bringing Albertans together to build co-operatives. I guess that piece I'm not a big fan of, but there are some other pieces to support the co-operatives that I actually like, and I would have been happy to look at an amendment for that at one point if it hadn't been that it was part of a bill that had already 16 other pieces of legislation in it.

The licensing requirements that the minister actually spoke about I also find very curious and interesting because the associate minister during her speech was talking about: "Well, yeah, it's going to be a licensing requirement for foster parents and group homes under Children's Services. Like, for children in care it will now be every three years, but don't worry because the checklist will still be required to happen, and the home inspections will still be required, and all of these things will still be required." Okay. I worked with licensing when I was a social worker in Children's Services. I understand the process. I used to do home assessments for new foster parents. That's part of the licensing requirements. The only thing that would be changing, then, is that the sign-off by a licensed staff, the staff that is part of the licensing unit, would be done every three years.

The issue I have with that: if the checklist is still happening and the annual checks are still happening, and if there's a life change, like a new child is added or there's a new marriage or whatever, that is part of licensing, and that would be updated. If all of that is still happening, then why is the government changing it from one year to every three years? Everything that is required for a licence is actually going to still continue to happen.

It goes back to my prior argument that I made when we were in second reading, which is: it's about money. If you don't change the level of a licence for a foster parent or a group home, you don't have to pay the same amount of per diem to a foster parent or a group home staff because you will say that they don't have the same licensing requirements, because licensing is from level 1 to level 3 or specialized if you have a medically fragile child in your foster home. You get paid as a foster parent a little bit more a day based on your licensing level because your education level is higher usually, because you have more complex needs of the child in your home. Therefore, your odds are that you probably would be buying and spending things on children above and beyond what you normally would.

Let's be fair. Foster parents are not in this to make money, but they do deserve to get the supports and compensation in the sense of what they will be putting out for their kids, right? Like, if you're still buying diapers and stuff for a child that may be typically toilet trained – usually over the age of three is kind of the age level we always kind of assessed it at – then there should be supports for that. And, yes, there could be extra financial supports by the province provided to that foster parent, but there's also some expertise and understanding and training that is required to be able to support a child that may have a developmental delay.

If the licensing requirements are changing in this legislation, in Bill 21, but all of the checklist requirements, the annual inspections, all of the things, as the minister just clearly indicated in the speech – then the only thing that is not changing is the level that a foster parent will move through their licensing requirements, and I have a real problem with that because what that tells me is that we're not going to honour the expertise of foster parents and of group home staff, which means they're not going to be compensated appropriately. Once again, we can't trust this government to do the right thing.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 21, and I have appreciated the comments from my colleagues so far today. Of course, I've had a few opportunities to speak to Bill 21 but always happy to speak a little more about issues that I see coming up. Specifically, I just want to take some time to speak to the comments made by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Obviously, this is a piece of legislation that they have put forward. Unfortunately, as many of my colleagues have said before me, I find myself in the same situation, where we are faced with another piece of omnibus legislation, where there are some things, potentially many things in this legislation that we can support. Maybe they are administrative changes – maybe they are not particularly large changes – and in certain instances, like we see with the changes to the Local Authorities Election Act, for instance, changes that are essentially procedurally happening already. But for one reason or another the government feels the need to put that into legislation, and that's fair enough. Absolutely, I can see why there might be some interest there in ensuring that these best practices are moving forward, protected in legislation – then that's understandable.

But I do have some concerns particularly, again, with some of the comments that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction made specific to that issue, talking about how the opposition doesn't believe in the strengthening or the protection of Albertans' private information, and for a few reasons in particular. I mean, when we look at the history of this government and some of the decisions that they've made and actions that they've taken – and a first instance that I want to point to: looking back at actions of the previous Health minister.

We've said it previously on the record that we were very concerned with the actions that that previous Health minister had taken when in that office, using the powers of that office and of the department to gain access to the personal information of a physician, I believe, in our province and with that information, first of all, if I'm remembering correctly, using it to call that person because of a disagreement of facts or beliefs and, because of a social media post that was made, berating that physician, Mr. Speaker, and, further to that, whether through access of that office or because

maybe the minister already knew where this person lived, actually showing up to their house. So when we want to talk about protecting the private information of Alberta citizens – and for this government to act like they have a clean slate or a clean track record on this issue: I think that there's nothing further from the truth in that respect.

Further to that, when we look back at other decisions that this government has made, reflect on decisions back in, I believe, August 2021, there were discussions happening in the Legislature and in the province regarding the Babylon app offering virtual visits for Albertans to be able to access health care services over their phone. That's a reasonable request. I think, especially through the pandemic, that many Albertans are potentially accessing that, and that's fair enough. But through every step of the way, when we introduce new processes like this, we need to do our best as a government to protect the private information of citizens.

Unfortunately, through that process of allowing Babylon to start providing those services in our province, the Privacy Commissioner, from the very beginning, made it clear that not only did the government not come to the Privacy Commissioner's office, and neither did the company themselves come to ensure that they were following correctly the Health Information Act and Personal Information Protection Act – neither of those things happened – but further to that, as they continued to operate in our province, they did not ensure that they were, again, following the rules that have previously been put in place to protect the private information of citizens in our province.

Again, when we look at some of the articles that were discussed and some of the concerns that the Privacy Commissioner had flagged, particularly flagging that Telus was collecting more personal information than was necessary and using facial recognition without the patient's consent, we have a clear track record from this government of not doing everything that they can to protect the personal and private information of citizens across this province. Further to that, we saw, going through the process of the ministry process of providing vaccine passports, if I remember correctly, the compromised information that was raised through that process as well.

Again, the government is trying to move forward with initiatives which, whether we agree or disagree on them – fair enough – are not protecting the private information of citizens. For the associate minister to say that, you know, we don't support the need to protect that information is simply ridiculous, and further to that, I don't believe that they've been doing everything that they can. It's truly unfortunate because, again, some of these processes may be revolutionary, may be successful and an important piece of our health care system or our election system moving forward, but this government has failed again and again to ensure that through those processes they are protecting the private information of Albertans.

When we look at the changes, as I mentioned earlier, to the Local Authorities Election Act, I don't see any real issues with this amendment that is being proposed. It simply codifies in the legislation what already occurs in most instances and in practice and potentially even duplicates some of the protections that are already taking place in legislation. I would ask, as I'm sure has been raised before, if the government is actually seeing in certain jurisdictions in Alberta that there are these concerns of personal information being shared, if that has actually been the case, or if they're simply trying to create solutions for issues that don't actually exist.

That seems to be the case historically in other pieces of red tape reduction that we've seen come before this House, the government making amendments to legislation often on the administration side of things and procedural side of things and potentially tightening up

inconsequential parts of legislation that are already out there but then also connecting it to completely unrelated changes that are more consequential and that Albertans are rightly concerned about but being upset that not everyone can support their legislation at the end of the day because they have made such major changes and consequential changes to other parts of the legislation. We've heard that throughout this debate.

When we look at the changes in section 12 to the Public Lands Act, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that based on the history and the decisions of this environment minister and the actions that that minister has taken, people simply do not trust this government or this minister. The entire conversation around the Kananaskis pass, the K Country charges that this government is putting onto Albertans to enjoy the natural environment that Albertans have always held so dearly to their heart: they're being told by this government that they should have to pay to access such opportunities. It's truly unfortunate because beyond that, this government has not provided any clarity that this money is actually being reinvested into the places that they are collecting this money from.

3:50

Again, Mr. Speaker, the same goes for other changes that are included in here around the Provincial Parks Act. It really goes to the heart of this discussion because this government and this minister have talked about the idea that they're struggling to be able to make changes to park signs or road signs in parks and that we need to make such substantial changes to the powers that are provided to the minister. We've seen this before, and I've talked about this. We had similar conversations around Bill 10 and the powers that the government was trying to give themselves to be able to pass legislation and create it without even coming before this House at all, and we do see hints of that again in this legislation with the environment minister trying to give themselves a massive amount of power and so much more legislative authority over this process than they already have.

Mr. Speaker, there are, as has been stated, a lot of acts that are being touched on in this legislation, 16 sections amending 16 different acts, everything, as we've heard, from the Animal Health Act to the Education Act to the Cooperatives Act to the Municipal Government Act to the Rural Utilities Act, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning stated, as best as we can, it makes the most sense to be able to vote on these things separately. If these are substantial changes, which we are seeing in the case of the Public Lands Act and certain other pieces in here, we should have the opportunity to vote on these as separate pieces of legislation, because the changes that are being proposed are so substantial.

Looking further at changes to the Municipal Government Act in section 9, another opportunity where we see positive changes that I and my colleagues would very likely support if it was a stand-alone piece of legislation or amendment to that legislation, unfortunately because of the depth of changes that we're seeing from this legislation on so many different acts, it's going to truly be hard to support that even though we believe in some of the things that are being proposed in this legislation.

I think that it's also important to comment, as the Member for Edmonton-Decore did, that while we are talking about changes to the Municipal Government Act and how the province interacts with our municipalities across the province and the support that we are providing to them, this government also has a terrible track record on that front. The Member for Edmonton-Decore talked about the big-city charters and the decision of this government to go back on a substantial commitment that they made in the previous election

and in the session under an NDP government to support those proposals that we had put forward when we were in government to support municipalities in a historic way, to provide sustainable funding, to change the relationship and how that funding is shared between the big cities in our province. Unfortunately, the government went back on that decision.

Further to that, the conversation around abandoned oil wells and how we are going to reclaim those operations across our province. Hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, have been left to municipalities to try and figure out. Unfortunately, even though we have seen legislation come before this House, it's been very clear from stakeholders and municipalities across the province that we simply have not seen enough action on this, that the UCP government has not made any substantial or real commitments to ensure that that tax liability is not going to be left with municipalities, is not going to be left as a burden on taxpayers across this province.

We have seen many opportunities for this government to take substantial action on issues like these. Unfortunately, instead, what we get are piecemeal pieces of legislation like Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, which touches on many important pieces of legislation but is stopping short of actually doing some of the very important work that needs to be done across this province to ensure the long-term sustainability of our big cities and our smaller municipalities across the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, as I've said time and time again in my opportunities to rise on Bill 21, I do have substantial concerns with this legislation. While there are some, maybe even several, amendments or sections in this legislation that I see myself being able to support, there are just as many more consequential pieces that raise concerns with me, that make it very hard for me to support.

With that, I think I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this legislation again. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide comments at this late stage of both getting on in the day but also of the session on third reading of Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As discussed, this is a piece of legislation that amends 16 other statutes. You know, the red tape reduction associate ministry thingy: really, the only job here is to bring legislation into the House. It's the only real identifiable task that I can see, so it's really important that we understand what the legislation does do and does not do. Certainly, on introduction day it's really important to know what is going on in the legislation, and that was not a bar that was met with this particular bill.

When we review the acts that are in this legislation – I was just going back and looking at everything that we had, all of the business of this session. We are now on Bill 21, so I was going back through, you know, from 20 on down, and really observing that most of this is not a free-standing piece of legislation. In fact, when you look through at what is done with this particular legislation, the Animal Health Act changes, for example, in the main positive, could have either been free standing or could have been bundled with another piece of legislation that came in.

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act changes. I think we've heard from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning just what kind of potential risks they're introducing into the children in care system, so there is no question that that piece should stand on its own, and I along with, I think, the majority of Albertans would

agree with my assessment that I do not believe that the appropriate level of diligence and care has been exercised in terms of putting this into an omnibus piece of legislation.

The next section concerns the Cooperatives Act. There is no question that likely those changes could have been bundled with the Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13, or some other piece of legislation. It seems to me that that would have been the most appropriate place to put it.

The Education Act changes. You know, one day they're claiming loudly and vocally that private schools will no longer have to produce financial data and it was a big change, and then later on we had another minister saying loudly and vocally: that's not true, and it doesn't really change a whole lot. So it would seem to me that there were other Education Act amendments, and this could have been put with those that were before the House this time around or at least in Bill 15 anyway.

There was a health statutes amendment act that seemed to be administrative in nature. There was also the Continuing Care Act that this piece of legislation could have been bundled with.

There are the Highways Development and Protection Act changes within this legislation that seem to be administrative in nature, so those could have been bundled with the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, that was brought in under Bill 5.

The Local Authorities Election Act in section 7 simply codifies in legislation what already occurs in practice and deals with campaign disclosures from municipal and school board elections, so it could have been bundled with the MGA changes that, in any case, come before the Legislature pretty well every session.

The Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act changes certainly allow the minister to appoint an administrator and so on. This could have been bundled with some of the other changes under residential tenancies or the condos if it is, in fact, the Service Alberta minister that is responsible for this. I cannot remember the *desi reg* on this, but certainly we also had the Finance minister before the House with changes to some motor vehicle pieces under the Finance portfolio.

4:00

Then we come to section 9, which is the Municipal Government Act. Pretty well every session some MGA changes have to come before this House, and the Municipal Affairs minister brings these changes to this House, at least historically has been the case, so there's really no need for a red tape reduction minister here in this bill. It's just simply giving her something to do.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act changes: here, again, these could have been bundled with either the Continuing Care Act or the other health statutes amendment act, and that would have been more appropriate and certainly could have been done, therefore not doubling up on the House's time.

The Provincial Parks Act: there's no question that given the level of trust with the environment minister from the public and the fact that he has imperilled so many Calgary seats by his actions and in southern Alberta – but those should have been free-standing changes if he wanted them, similarly with the Public Lands Act changes, and he should have shepherded them through this House. But, of course, hiding them under the cover of the red tape reduction minister at least provides some level of political inoculation for someone who has certainly not done his own government any favours.

The Railway (Alberta) Act, section 13 of Bill 21: certainly, these changes are, again, somewhat perfunctory in nature, really not objectionable and could have been bundled with the transportation safety act.

The Residential Tenancies Act, section 14: there is one small change here that could have been put with the Service Alberta

minister when he brought in legislation around condominiums, and there was some other business that, I believe, he had before the House this time around. But there's no question that there was no need for a free-standing minister on this, or red tape reduction minister. The Minister of Service Alberta could have handled it.

The Rural Utilities Act: you know, we did have an electricity storage bill before the House, and this could have gone in there and had the same associate minister bring it through. Really, no need for a free-standing minister here. The whole exercise, the sort of kabuki theatre, of having a red tape reduction minister: absolutely no need for her work there.

Section 16, which is the changes to the Surveys Act – again, I would have to refresh my memory as to the *desi reg* here. It looks like survey plan with land titles, so I think that's Service Alberta, but sometimes some of these things fall under Municipal Affairs. I think, again, you know, just sort of figuring out the lines of authority here on the fly, it would seem to me that bundling that with the residential tenancies and condos bill could have been appropriate.

All of this is to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've just gone through this significant piece of legislation that amends 16 acts, found absolutely no need for a red tape reduction minister in any of this business of government, and, more to the point, have also identified that, essentially, this has been a *Seinfeld* session, a session about nothing.

There is no question that there's decent work to be had in some of this sort of administrative, or what Dave Hancock used to call evergreening, legislation. He used to say that really euphemistically, and then the Klein government would bring in something that people didn't like, but that was his way of doing it. He had some very memorable phrases. You know, this is all extremely perfunctory work that I've just identified and really nothing to get a gold star about in terms of getting up in the morning and going to work.

When I look through all of the other legislation, I've identified where this bill could have easily been tucked into other business that came before this House, with a couple of exceptions, where it would have been in the public interest to have a free-standing debate on them, that is to say the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act changes and the parks and Public Lands Act changes.

When you look back over the business before this House, really, too, here you do not see a focused agenda, focused on health care, affordability, and restoring trust in government; not at all. In fact, it took this crowd until Bill 18 to introduce electricity rebates despite the fact that the Premier at the time announced them on February 1. There is no question that what we have here is a bit of a government on autopilot, which is actually an insult to autopilot. Really, we exit this session with a Premier who has pulled a George Costanza, quit and then showed up the next day to his job, and a legislative session that has essentially been about nothing. I will remind the House of the finale of the *Seinfeld* show.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments on this bill, for which there is no need to have a minister. There's no need for an extra ministerial salary. There's no need for the fleet car. There's no need for any of it. This is a ministry of performance art, where the heavy lifting, such as it is – it's sort of a medium lifting, sort of fair-to-light lifting – could have easily been accomplished by other members of the front bench. You know, congratulations for making changes to the heritage railways. People must feel really good about their political legacy.

With that, I will provide my concluding comments on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I do see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to be brief in my remarks regarding this particular bill during third reading here. Of course, as has been expressed by many of my colleagues on this side of the House, when it comes to Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, there is so much here that we do agree with. The fact is that there are substantial changes that we could potentially support, but because the associate minister has decided to create other additions – and even in debate during Committee of the Whole we actually introduced an amendment to take those aspects out of the bill, yet the members on the other side decided to vote against that amendment. Even though we were saying, “Hey, you know, we can all get along here if you just take this one aspect of the bill out, and then we can all vote on this very happily and go home,” the members on the other side of the House decided to hold steadfast to their initial proposal, which demonstrates for everybody following us at home that this government doesn’t like to play.

Mr. Hunter: How many amendments did you pass when you guys were over here?

Member Loyola: You know, Mr. Speaker, it’s tragic . . .

The Acting Speaker: I’ll just remind all members of this House – and I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member – that if other members do wish to speak, there is the opportunity for at least three interventions of one minute each.

The individual with the call at this time, though, is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] No; it’s quite fine.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the government has demonstrated and the private members of the government caucus have also demonstrated that they’re just unyielding when it comes to actually making compromises on the bills that they have presented here in the Legislature. You know, proposed legislation after proposed legislation we have – some of them it’s been, like, “We want to refer this to committee,” but there have been other bills that we have debated inside of this House where we’ve actually wanted to make slight changes, slight modifications, that if the members on the other side of the House would have agreed to, it would’ve been easy to pass them, no problem whatsoever.

Now, of course, when it comes to this particular bill, it’s 16 sections which amend 16 different acts, and it is the prime example of an omnibus piece of legislation, which so many members on that side of the House used to light their hair on fire when we did it, when we were in government. But here they are doing it themselves, right? It’s quite hypocritical. It’s quite hypocritical that you would get up and debate and you would say that you don’t agree with omnibus pieces of legislation, that it’s not appropriate, yet here they are doing it themselves.

4:10

Now, the other aspect of this particular bill is the absolute centralization of power in the hands of the minister of environment when it comes to that particular piece. That’s the one piece that we wanted to amend, but the members on the other side of the House decided to vote it down. Just to be clear, I want to quote specifically from this bill, where it says, under directives, that “the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other

rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.” When interpreting this, you could only assume that it basically allows the minister to do anything that they want and without having a check and balance, because it’s saying that it could be done in regulation.

As we know, regulations do not need to make it into the House or need to be debated, so we’re talking about substantial changes – substantial changes – that could be made to regulation here in the province of Alberta and the opposition would not be allowed to debate it, not one bit. It would just be simply done by the minister. It wouldn’t need to be debated. In that case, then, why have a democracy at all, Mr. Speaker, if the people in government are just going to make changes any way they want through regulation and don’t need to be debated here in the House at all?

When it comes to the entire ministry of environment, this associate minister, through this piece of legislation, is basically giving the minister of environment free access. You don’t even have to deal with our democratic processes. You could basically do anything that you want, and it can be done through regulation and doesn’t have to be even debated inside of the House. That is what is happening here and what we’re so strongly opposed to.

Now, we made a slight amendment, a small change. We suggested an amendment, but this government decided to vote it down. Just take this one aspect out, and we would have agreed to support this bill. I find it hypocritical, because members when they were on this side of the House would never agree to something like this. They would never agree to something like this. They would go on and on about transparency and accountability, yet now they’re doing the exact opposite. They’re not being transparent. They’re not being accountable. There are changes that could be made by the minister of environment that wouldn’t even have to be debated inside this House, and who knows what those changes could be.

If we actually – well, this government will vote this through. I’m sure they will, regardless of our opposition.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Point of Order Anticipation

Mr. Schow: Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that in this Chamber there’s a long-standing tradition of not presupposing the outcome of a vote. The member opposite from Edmonton-Ellerslie clearly just said that the government will vote this through. We as representatives of the people are here to ensure that their voices are heard. We consult on them and vote based on a number of factors, but presupposing the vote is certainly out of order in this Chamber, and I ask that member, who is a veteran member of this Chamber, to retract, apologize, and move on in a manner that is conducive and in accordance with an elected representative.

The Acting Speaker: Was there a standing order in that? I would honestly recommend that the hon. member include a standing order in order to create the point of order.

Mr. Schow: Somewhere in section 23.

The Acting Speaker: Section 23 in totality: I’ll accept it.

I do see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you cautioned the government side that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the

floor, and still the government members were heckling the member and not letting him speak freely. Again, this is not a point of order without citing anything, just Standing Order 23. What's in 23? It's a long standing order. I think the member used House procedure, the standing orders, to again disrupt my hon. colleague while he was talking on important aspects of this piece of legislation. That was not a point of order but another attempt to disrupt my hon. colleague from speaking freely in this House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that the correct standing order is 23(e). Am I correct? I am correct. I did, unfortunately for the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, accept 23, generally speaking.

What I would do is just ask that the hon. member withdraw the comment about presupposing the will of the House, and then we can continue along with his comments.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I withdraw.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: What I meant to say is that most likely, given the track record of this government – every bill that they have presented inside of the House, they have passed. You know, regardless of amendments being made on this side of the House, they have not accepted one amendment by the Official Opposition during their tenure in government.

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Member Loyola: Unfortunately, no. I do not accept. I'm going to wrap up here. That's why I don't accept your intervention.

This is the concern that we have before us and why we are not supporting this bill: it gives just too much power to the minister of environment, and we don't know what that minister could do. Perhaps he could partially privatize some of our parks or restrict access to some of those parks. The point is that we don't know. The minister will be able to set in regulation any change that the minister desires, and none of that would actually have to enter into the Legislature as a proposed piece of legislation and therefore wouldn't be debated at all. We would have absolutely no way to counter anything that the minister of environment would wish to do in that particular instance.

That is, like I said, Mr. Speaker, the crux of my argument and why I will not be supporting Bill 21. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to be one of the final speakers on this piece of legislation. Of course, I stand to oppose this egregious legislation, and I will try to take some time to explain why it is fundamentally horrid and should be rejected by all democratic citizens in the province of Alberta. This follows up on the extremely well-articulated arguments by the Member for Lethbridge-West, who has quite clearly demonstrated that you don't need to create an omnibus bill when you actually have ministers who have responsibility for each and every single section within this bill. You could simply have those ministers bring this information forward.

It begs the question: why would you not have the minister responsible bringing forward these pieces of legislative change? The answer, in my mind, would be that it is because you are trying

to bury something, hide something within that legislation, and put in things that sound good and sound acceptable and then slip in the poison pill, slip in the thing that is so egregious that nobody would ever pass it if it was actually introduced by itself in this House.

That's exactly what we see here. We see that there are certainly times at which we could agree with sections of the legislation. Some of them are minuscule changes and could have happened in any other place. Some of them are useful changes that we could certainly have supported had they appeared in the appropriate ministry and been brought forward. But what we have here is the government making one of their, again, repeated antidemocratic moves, shifting the decision-making away from the democratic process of the House into the process of the cabinet, making decisions by writ and not being responsible to the people of the province of Alberta and transparent through the process of this elected forum here in this House.

4:20

That section, of course, that we all see and that has been spoken to quite clearly by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is the decision to give completely unwieldy powers to the minister of the environment when not only is this unnecessary, but it is dangerous and unsafe in this province. We have spent many years in this province creating a very reliable set of strictures around environmental regulation and processes by which people can speak to the environmental needs in this province. We have plans for all the areas of the province, that are created by local people and built up. Within them there are regulations that prevent people from making buildings or doing other things unless they fit with the plan.

The South Saskatchewan plan, for example, was very clear that the First Nations in the area could not build a gas station along the edge of their own community in spite of the fact that they would just be taking the small section between the roadway and their bridge. They still couldn't do it because the South Saskatchewan plan did not allow it to happen. So what we had is that we had a process that was being upheld by everybody and being respected by everybody, and when they didn't agree with it, such as in the case of the people from the Stoney Nakoda nations, they asked for a change of the plan and have been patiently waiting while that plan is slowly being re-examined and looking at: could we change the line of the South Saskatchewan plan just by a few hundred yards so that they could have a gas station in their home community?

That's what we want to see in this province. We want to see people being patient and changing the plans after due consideration. All of that has just been wiped out by this bill. What this bill has done – and let me be really clear when I say this. This bill has allowed that “the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.” That is an absolutely ridiculous breadth of power by this government, to give the minister the ability to change everything without bringing it back into this House.

I can only ask: why is it that they would wish to do this thing at this particular time? Why would they wish to take the democratic process out of this, the protection of the environment, and put it in the hands of an environment minister that has a horrendous record on the environment, an environment minister that stands up and talks about everything but the environment in this House, is not known in any way to try to protect the environment, in fact, has tried to sell parks in this province, has tried to mine the eastern slopes in this province, has tried to sell water against the wishes of people downstream in this province? We see this happening all the time.

So I have to ask: why is it that they would take this kind of legislation and create the power for a minister who clearly is not interested in the environment and is clearly not going to go forward? The answer, in my mind, must be that there is some advantage to the minister somewhere along the way, that there are groups to which he is a party and groups with which he wishes to curry favour, that he wants to be able to change the legislation without having to come into the House. He wants to be able to do this of his own right. For example, were he to be a member of, let's say, an ATV club who wanted to change their trails up into the Rocky Mountains and not obey the environmental regulations that are presently in place, they'd simply go to this minister and say: "Hey, you're part of the club. Why don't you change the rules so we can run our ATVs anywhere we want? We can rip up the environment, and there won't be any actual consequence here." That's the kind of thing that becomes available here. Now, I would expect that this minister would never choose to do that, but why would you create legislation that allows a minister to do that, to curry favour in particular areas?

One of the other things this bill does is that it allows there to be a variation in rules from one site to another site, so there's no consistent, overall pattern of environmental legislation here. There's no desire to protect the environment. What they're wanting to do is be able to go to individual groups and curry favour and say: we are going to change the rules just in your little area so that you can do these terrible things that nobody would want to have happen, but because we're going to do it in a small area, we think we can get away with it. That's what's happening here. We are moving from the democratic process of designing environmental legislation that protects all of Alberta with the same rules and allowing a minister to find little favourites along the way, to change the rules here and there for clubs that they belong to and clubs that they want to curry favour with, and as a result they will be able to forward their own ambitions, perhaps politically or whatever else they may have, but not protect the environment.

The worst thing that we can do is start to say, when we're trying to protect an environment which is literally world-wide, that we can change the protections in individual places and not worry about the consequences for the larger world and the environment around all of the province of Alberta. So this is very . . . [interjection] No. It is very suspicious to me that they would do this kind of thing, because it absolutely tells us that they're not really interested in the movement that we have had moving forward.

Mr. Williams: Discussion?

Mr. Feehan: I would love discussion if I ever thought you'd bring something forward, but not today.

Mr. Williams: Hon. member, please give way. I request again.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Feehan: I can't, because I've never heard you offer something for discussion. I must . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, although I wasn't quite sure I was able to hear it, I do believe that a point of order was called by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall . . .

Mr. Sabir: Yes. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) . . .

The Acting Speaker: Please, sir, I still have the floor. Once I sit down, then, of course, you get your opportunity to make your arguments.

Please, hon. member.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: I am rising under 23(h), (i), and (j). I understand that a member can get up and ask for an intervention, and I'm pretty sure that the member who was trying to intervene was the one who brought this provision in the standing order, but I do not believe that using that kind of language, raising one's voice in this Legislature, is good for the order in this House. That's not the way listed in the standing orders to intervene, and I think the member was clearly offside of the piece of the standing order that he brought forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this point of order reaches the threshold that you would need to rule against the hon. Member for Peace River. If there was a problem with the decibel level that he raised his voice to, then I would encourage him to direct similar comments to the Member for Edmonton-McClung and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. On numerous occasions through the last three years those members have had, well, I would just say unparliamentary outbursts that raised very high decibel levels.

Mr. Feehan: You mean like your environment minister swearing at the chair?

Mr. Schow: I do have the floor, hon. member. You're welcome to stand and finish your remarks.

Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) clearly says:

Makes allegations against another Member;

That did not happen.

Imputes false or unavowed motives [against] another Member;

That did not happen.

Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

That also did not happen.

While I recognize that interventions are a relatively new feature in this Chamber, I would encourage all members, if your interventions are rejected, to simply in a parliamentary way sit down and accept the rejection. This is not a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and let's move on.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has indicated that he has something new to add to this debate.

Mr. Williams: I withdraw unreservedly any unparliamentary volume that may have offended members opposite, and I ask only for substantive debate in the Chamber. I cannot wait to receive an intervention soon.

Mr. Feehan: Keep waiting.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Are you looking to add to the debate on the point of order?

Mr. Feehan: No. Sorry. Waiting for my return.

The Acting Speaker: I can see how this could potentially fit within (j) anyways. That said, I think that part of this – the direction that I thought it was going to go, actually, would have been to use an intervention to join debate without having been called upon by the member who currently had the floor. I think that this just stems from

a discussion that we were having in this House where the hon. member mentioned that he welcomes discussion after moments prior saying no to an intervention. However, saying no to an intervention is his right.

I think that I would just caution the whole room today that – of course, I listen to these debates with great interest. As such, if the volume can stay to a level where I can hear the person with the floor, that would be very much appreciated.

If the hon. member could please continue with his comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, can increase my own volume enough to overshout anybody, as people will know in this House.

I think I'll summarize my final point here, and that is that this is a government that has totally failed on the environment the people of Alberta. They have no plan moving forward. They have taken out all of the plans that have been put forward by previous governments in this province, and they are doing absolutely nothing to protect the environment for our children in the future. As greenhouse gases increase, it will be on this government's soul for having failed to do anything about it whatsoever. I think this legislation is part of the plan to subvert the future well-being of the environment of this province.

With those final words, I will end for today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I believe the individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the previous speakers. For the record I will accept interventions. We want to try to wrap things up here for those who believe in democracy. For those folks at home and for the fans in the stands, thank you so much for joining us here and seeing how your tax dollars are being spent while we talk about your future. The last time I checked my clock, it was about \$500 a minute of your future that we're spending right now. So I hope you understand that we should be spending this fulsomely and talking about it.

What we do have here, folks at home and in the stands, is a red tape reduction bill. Now does anybody know what red tape is? We do on this side. We campaigned on it. It's unnecessary bureaucracy and, quite frankly, lengthy regulations that slow down progress. When the fact that we have an environment minister allowed to make changes in regulations because it gives him the freedom to do so – one of the litmus tests that we have here, when I look at this regulation and this law, is if I would trust you guys on the opposite to actually do it. That's always my weather mark.

Now, here's a question that I often ask my kids: why does a mouse like cheese? Because a mouse is a mouse. A mouse likes cheese. Why does a socialist like red tape? Because they're socialists. They like to wrap things up, slow things down. There's another saying out there, too. It's like: to catch a thief, you have to think like a thief. To see how a socialist might use regulations and abuse them, maybe I can listen to some of those arguments and put them in replay back there. This is what we committed to. We're going to save those kids, that are now exiting the room, \$500 a minute of their future cost savings by going through this and actually saving the economy, getting things done.

As far as the environment, we all love it. It's called where we live. I would suggest that most folks that have worked in major industries and lived in rural Alberta have their livelihoods tightly captured to the environment, and we definitely respect it. Again, the litmus test: would I trust you with this regulation? Absolutely.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to conclude my remarks and thank those kids for coming in upstairs and seeing how their future tax dollars are being spent. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I do believe I see that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to speak to this Bill 21 and talk about red tape. There's nothing that we dislike more than red tape. I think maybe we could just get back to the definition of red tape. By definition it's rules and regulations that are excessive, unnecessary, redundant. They're rules and regulations that hinder decision-making, and they delay or create inaction.

We obviously are in a society now where we have a fairly fast-paced society, and I think we need to be able to respond to a society that's fast paced. Our business world relies on things to happen fast. There's often a joke that government operates at the speed of government. Of course, that's somewhat a derogatory term. I think that's something we could change, and one of the ways we can change that is by reducing red tape. Now, reducing red tape will help municipalities, businesses, and all Albertans to be able to get through processes so they can actually get work done, actually get to the work of the people that they represent.

Now, part of this bill is going to help municipalities move forward with economic development and revitalization by speeding up the review and approval processes for municipal community revitalization, freeway designations, new freeway access locations, and help communities get on the road to economic growth. When I look at that, I look at different projects like the industrial gateway project that the MD of Greenview is proposing south of Grande Prairie. That's a process that's been delayed a bit, and I know that the previous government had some delays in there, and now we're making some progress, finally, with that. There are businesses that are coming in and wanting to do business and set up business there, billions of dollars of investment, but because of delays, namely of the previous government, there have been billions of dollars of investment lost. Those investors went elsewhere with their money and with their investment. We need to be conscious of that and how red tape slows down production.

Look at the community of Fox Creek. I believe it was seven or eight or nine years that it took to be able to purchase a piece of provincial government land right adjacent to the town so they could develop it. That went through multiple governments where they weren't able to get that process done in time – of course, it's done now – but, again, lost millions and millions of dollars of investment. At the time that they applied for that land, I believe they said that there were about 70 businesses that were looking for property to develop in that community, and by the time they got the land, the list was zero. Those companies had gone elsewhere and done business elsewhere. We have to be able to be conscious of this.

I did have one municipal employee describe the process like this. This is what it was like going through the approval processes. It was like you wanted to make a cup of coffee, so you went to the government and said: "I want to make a cup of coffee. What do I need?" And they say, "Well, you need coffee grounds." So they go and they get the coffee grounds and come back, and it's like, "Okay; well, we're ready to make this cup of coffee now." "Well, do you have a coffee pot?" "Well, no." "Go get a coffee pot." So they go and they get a coffee pot, and they come back and they say, "Okay; we're ready to make this cup of coffee." "Well, do you have water?" It's like: "Well, I thought that was kind of given; where we're making a cup of coffee, we'd have water. But, no, we'll go get

water.” So they go get water and come back, and then they say, “Well, did you get cream?” And they’re like: “Okay. Is there anything else that we need to make this cup of coffee so when we go back, we can bring it and make this cup of coffee as fast as possible? We’re going back and forth lots here now.” “Nope; nothing else you need.” So they go, they come back with the cream, and then they say, “Well, did you get the sugar?”

This is the process of working through government bureaucracy and red tape that we need to stop. We need to be able to get past these processes. When businesses and municipalities come to government and they ask, “Okay; what do we need to do to get this project approved?” they need to be told that up front so that they can work immediately at that, bring the full package forward, and make it happen. That’s why reducing red tape is so important, because we can avoid situations like that, where governments and municipalities are held back in their desire to get projects done.

Part of this bill also talks about the REAs, rural electrification associations, which is something kind of near and dear to my heart because my family was always involved in the rural electrification associations in our community. To be able to give them an opportunity to become more sustainable over long-term periods: I think this is very important, to have this in this bill.

Part of the bill deals with making it so livestock owners and veterinarians can report animal diseases by e-mail. Again, this is something that’s long overdue. It’s good to see it in this bill here now because, obviously, in this day and age we should be able to take care of this business in a way that we deal with business elsewhere. So I think this is good, to be able to do that by e-mail and, of course, all the other means that were used before.

4:40

Having landlords be able to use e-transfers to return security deposits to tenants: again, just simplifying the process so people can do business quickly, efficiently, effectively and be able to carry on with other things.

Alberta foster parents can exercise their right to appeal government decisions affecting their foster home licence. My daughter has foster children, so when I see that and I see that the process is becoming, you know, more effective, more efficient in allowing foster parents to have some say in decisions that are made that affect not only their home but the children that they’re taking care of, I see some really good things in this bill that I really like.

It’s a fairly extensive bill. It’s a thick bill. But, again, you know, things like the Animal Health Act, being able to report animal diseases to the government by e-mail: good work there. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the changes there so that they can now appeal decisions made by a director: again, good work there.

Lots of good things in this bill. I’d like to, you know, commend the minister on this work. I think this is good work. This is what we’re here to do. When I look at some of it, though, I see some of it maybe would be fitted more for a miscellaneous statutes amendment act but, again, still needs to be done. Having it in here: great. Let’s get this work done. Let’s be able to, you know, allow businesses and municipalities and the people of Alberta to be able to move forward and not be hindered by government. Is there more work to do? Yes, of course, there’s always more work to do when

it comes to red tape. I think sometimes in government we take two steps forward, one step back. Again, we’ve just got to keep looking at it, keep listening to Albertans where they see issues, and see if we can stop these delays.

One thing that always comes to mind for me is the transfer of grazing leases. That’s been an issue for quite a while. The previous government wasn’t able to clean that up. You know, when you purchase a grazing lease in Alberta, it can take almost a year to transfer that grazing lease to the new owner. You could purchase it, let’s say, at an auction sale or something. The auction sale company does their business with it. The real estate agents take care of their business. The lawyers do their business. The finances are all taken care of. And then you wait for a year for the government to actually transfer that grazing lease from farmer A to farmer B. That’s something that we obviously need to work on. I think this government has been exploring that and working on trying to improve that situation, but these are the things that slow down business and slow down people’s lives.

Again, when we look at the definition of red tape, it’s excessive, it’s unnecessary, it’s stuff that’s redundant. It slows things down. It hinders decision-making. All those things are so important to – as a government I think it’s incumbent on us to be able to make life easier for Albertans, not make life more difficult and create barriers for process. I know that sometimes government fears making a decision in case it’s wrong, so they try to kick the can down the road and, you know, hope something changes or something comes to light that’ll help make the decision easier, but sometimes we just have to make decisions. We have to move on, and I think that’s what Albertans expect.

We need to be able to have these municipalities, when they have a project that needs to be done – if they want to replace a culvert and they’ve got to go to Environment to get permission to do that because there might be some effect on a waterway or something, that process needs to be laid out very clearly. They need to be able to get through it quickly and efficiently because time is money. The more time people spend going through these bureaucratic processes, that delays the work that needs to be done and causes other problems down the road.

Again, good work on reducing red tape. Lots more to do. Look forward to this government doing more of that.

I’ll leave my comments there. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join?

Seeing none, I will offer the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction the opportunity to close should she so choose. That is waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: Now I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to also thank all members for their participation this afternoon, but at this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:45 p.m.]

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