



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 12, 2022

Day 8

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Joseph Schow	Minister without Portfolio
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

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Phillips
Pon

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Bilous
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Sabir
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Yao
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Smith

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Ceci
Dach
Hunter
Loyola
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Rehn
Shepherd
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Yao

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
Ganley
Getson
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Nielsen
Orr
Sigurdson, R.J.
Singh
Turton

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 12, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Nicole Williams. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the privilege to meet with a very special guest who is joining us now in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the British consul general, Mr. Jonathan Turner. He is joined by Ms Kaitlin Boyd, head of science, climate, and energy at the British consulate general. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon I'd like to welcome a group of grade 9 students and their teacher Shayla Westman from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Dr. Elliott community school in Lyndon, Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has two school groups, I believe, to present.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. It's an honour to introduce not just one but two school groups today. I would like to welcome from Grace Martin school grades 4, 5, and 6, led by their teacher Siraj Hussain, and from Tipaskan school the grade 6s with their teacher Adrian Tsui, students who I recognize from visits at Read In Week and school visits and community events. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has an introduction.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Chamber members of the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Rachele Venne, Josie Nepinak, Cheryl Uchitil, and Meeka Otway. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, actually, constituents of yours, Mr. Speaker, but they are local business owners in the great riding of Airdrie-East. Their business is Rival Axe Throwing. We shared a parade float last weekend for the Christmas parade, and it was super fun. Bull's eye every time. Please rise and welcome Jena, Cameron, Asher, and Eleanor Storms, and Joni Daley.

Member Irwin: I'm so proud to introduce the fabulous Margaret Mooney. Margaret was the artistic co-ordinator at the Citadel Theatre from 1965 to 1998 and is a talented visual artist who has exhibited internationally. She's also the coolest person that I know. I just presented Margaret with a Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee medal. Please rise, Margaret, and accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of people visiting the Legislature today. I'd like to ask that they stand as I introduce them: Lynette Young, Tjarda Barratt, Donna Mendelson, Neil Konner, Joyce Kyncl, Christina McCharles, Dale Christian, Jody Young, Tony Blake, Ian Skinner, and Mike Northcott. If you could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Tim Arnold. Tim is a prominent businessman and volunteers in his community often. I've had the pleasure of getting to know Tim in a local coffee shop in Three Hills and can say that he is now a proud Conservative after a short stint, a long time ago, with the Liberals. That's what the coffee shop guys like to tease him about, anyways. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud to introduce to you and through you Marian Brant. Marian is the executive director of the Edmonton International Street Performers Festival and has had a long career growing the arts in Edmonton. Please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to introduce to the Legislative Assembly the chairs of the Alberta Wheat Commission and the board of the Alberta Barley Commission. We have in attendance Tara Sawyer, Greg Sears, Todd Hames, Devin Hartzler, Shawn Jatcula, Connie Matson, Tom Steve, Shannon Sereda, and Syeda Khurram. Please stand and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature members of the Alberta Funeral Service Association that have joined us here today from across the province: Eden Tourangeau, Tyler Weber, Tracy McFee, David Root, and Stu Murray. Thank you for all the important work you do helping grieving Albertans across this province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Ministerial Statements

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

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to talk about a national crisis, a crisis that we have the power to change. Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people are falling victim to an alarming level of violence across our province and our country. Earlier this year Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and a woman whom elders named Buffalo Woman lost their lives at the hand of an alleged serial murderer in Winnipeg. These Indigenous women, like too many others, had their lives cut short.

Between December 2021 and March 2022 five Indigenous women were killed in Alberta. All of these women were people with hopes. They were people who were loved. They were mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts, and now they join the thousands of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people who have been murdered in this country. May we all honour them in our efforts to bring an end to the crisis of violence against women. It's time we stand in solidarity to stop this violence and the killing of Indigenous women and girls and make this province a safer place for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for keeping the red dress on display in the Queen Elizabeth II Building for the past three years. The dress is a reminder to members and visitors about this evil and a tribute to Indigenous women and girls whose lives have been lost.

Mr. Speaker, every Canadian woman deserves safety and a chance to fulfill their dreams. Sadly, Indigenous women experience much higher rates of poverty, and they're more likely to suffer at the hands of their partners from domestic abuse. They are more likely to be forced into prostitution, making them vulnerable to monsters like Robert Pickton or the aforementioned accused serial murderer in Winnipeg. Tragically, the homicide rate for Indigenous women is six times higher than the rest of the population.

1:40

More work needs to be done. We need the right resources in place to create safer conditions. I regularly meet with female Indigenous leaders in my office who provide important supports to vulnerable women in our province. Mr. Speaker, there is an enormous need to provide the support for Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people who seek freedom from dangerous situations.

Time and again the federal government has said that they will be there for Indigenous people, particularly when it comes to reconciliation and to ending the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. They talk a big game, but, Mr. Speaker, this is a story we've come to know all too well in Alberta, a story of empty promises. Promises are empty if there's nothing to sustain them, to follow up, and that is absolutely the case here. There is simply not enough funding from the federal government, and women's lives are at stake. If there was a time to step up, this is it.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has joined the cause for safety. We are working across government to implement the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap to address violence and to increase the safety and the economic security of Indigenous women and girls. Additionally, the new Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is an Indigenous-led group that will give advice and recommendations directly to Alberta's government to help make our province a safer place. Their work has just begun, and it is the kind of work that will affect every part of our government.

It's my hope that all levels of government across Canada will take note of this incredibly important work and follow suit. Members of the council are here in our gallery today, and I'm honoured to be in their presence. I've gotten to know them all, and their stories are heartbreaking. Their expertise and their commitment is much needed. May we all follow their lead in creating a safer, more secure future for Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people across our province and our country.

Member Irwin: If you won't search the landfill, then we will: those are the words of Kera Harris, the daughter of Morgan Harris, who was murdered by a Winnipeg serial killer along with three other Indigenous women: Morgan, Mercedes Myran, Rebecca Contois, and one other woman who, at the request of elders, we will now refer to as Buffalo Woman instead of unidentified woman. Until her name is known, we honour her. My heart breaks for all who knew and loved these women and for their communities that bear the grief daily.

This is not an isolated case in Manitoba but a systemic issue that continues to occur across this country. Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than any other women in Canada – 12 times – and according to the Native Women's Association of Canada Alberta has the second-highest number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit people across our country.

We must do more. Multiple governments, both federal and provincial, have launched panels and working groups. We must all push so that their recommendations become implemented. We must acknowledge that the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit crisis is rooted in Canada's historical and ongoing abuse of Indigenous peoples and that the inaction of the police when family members report missing relatives has only fuelled the crisis further.

This has to stop. Kera and the many family members have been clear: they are fed up with the lack of action. It's time to listen to those words; it's time to act.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Grande Prairie.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As others have risen today to speak, I will do the same. There remains a crisis in this country of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The recent devastating murders of Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and Buffalo Woman by an alleged serial murderer in Winnipeg highlight this sad and continuing phenomenon. According to Statistics Canada homicide rates for Indigenous women and girls are at minimum – at minimum – six times higher than for nonindigenous women and girls. Attacks on Indigenous women and girls represent attacks on personhood, on womanhood, and on Indigenous identity, and they must end.

Mr. Speaker, in 2020 the government of Alberta appointed the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, or MMIWG for short. This group was formed of Indigenous community experts and advocates for the rights of women along with Members of the Legislative Assembly, including myself. As a woman and mother from the north being appointed to this working group and walking alongside these women was a tremendous honour.

Since submitting the working group's final report, 113 Pathways to Justice, an Alberta MMIWG road map was created and is in

ongoing implementation, and the newly appointed Premier's Council on MMIWG was formed. The council members are leaders, experts, and advocates for violence prevention and family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and 2S-plus people.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government remains committed to the safety and dignity of Indigenous women and girls, and we will continue to work tirelessly towards the prevention of violence perpetuated against them, investing in the resources these women need like shelters, housing, and health supports in order to end this devastating cycle of violence. To the families of the missing and murdered I say: you will not be forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Care System

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Universal Health Coverage Day. Every December 12 we take the opportunity to raise awareness of the need for a strong, resilient health care system and universal health coverage, but this year I want to use it to talk about Alberta's health care system and the threats that it faces, most prominently from that side of the House.

First, it should go without saying that Alberta has the finest front-line health care workers in the world, bar none. They've been faced with huge obstacles, unfathomable pressures, and crisis after crisis but continue to go above and beyond to protect our hospitals, clinics, EMS, really every aspect of patient care, but they've had to deal with a government that has accused them of being entitled and overpaid, even accused them of manufacturing a capacity shortage. They've had to deal with a government that threatened them, mused about slashing their pay, threatened to fire them, or chose to ignore them and a Premier that would rather lend credibility to a conspiracy theorist who called vaccines a bioweapon than encourage Albertans to simply get their flu shots.

On International Universal Health Coverage Day I want to promise those fighting for our public health care that help is on the way. In May 2023 they will have the chance to vote for a government that supports health care for all, not a Premier that considers making you pay out of pocket to see your family doctor, a new government that will work with front-line health care workers and launch the largest recruitment campaign in Alberta history to ensure they are supported. We will end the UCP's accusations, blame, and insults and return to science, stability, and support.

Alberta health care is for all Albertans, and they should be able to access the care they need whenever and wherever they need it. The UCP has failed to deliver that, but an NDP government will not let Albertans down. We will end the chaos in Alberta health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gull Lake and Invasive Carp Species

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, Gull Lake is one of the province's most beautiful and visited lakes. It is home for some Albertans and a major tourist attraction and economic driver, with many campgrounds and beaches. Its preservation is of the utmost importance. For decades the lake's level was declining until a pumping system was installed in the 1970s, bringing in water from the Blindman River to ensure the water level of Gull Lake remained stable. This system worked; Gull Lake's water level stabilized.

The lake now faces a new threat. Invasive species, fish in this case, are a problem across our province. Invasive Prussian carp are now in the Blindman River, the source of the lake's stabilization pumping

program. Pumping has been suspended to avoid pumping carp into the lake. These are aggressive fish that reproduce extremely quickly, making them incredibly dangerous to native species. The Gull Lake Watershed Society with the previous ministry of environment has been seeking a solution. With the help of Stantec engineering and the department, a series of pilot projects were done to discover a filtration system that would safely allow the pumping to resume and keep Prussian carp out of Gull Lake.

The most recent pilot successfully filtered out carp and, more importantly, their eggs at the necessary volumes. For the health of the lake ecosystem, native species survival, preservation of many acres of wetland, beautiful beaches, tourism, the economy, and property values, restoration of the stabilization pumping system is essential and not just for this lake. Invasive carp are a threat to much of Alberta. Filtration is the best solution so far. For the protection of these pristine natural ecosystems, I call on the government to pursue the work that has begun, find a solution to restore Gull Lake's stabilization pumping and protect it from invasive carp species.

Thank you.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Cameras in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before Oral Question Period begins today, I have a brief statement I would like to make. I'd like to bring to the attention of the Assembly an incident that has taken place. As I understand it, photos were taken in the Chamber last week and later shared on social media. Members will know that there is a long-standing prohibition against taking photos in the Chamber, as indicated in the procedural memo which I sent out to all members prior to the start of session. Page 9 of the memo reads: "The use of any recording device, camera or pager, either as a standalone device or active on a Member's mobile device, is not permitted in the Chamber at any time."

Previous Speakers have been definitive in their approach to this matter, as Speaker Kowalski indicated on November 24, 2010:

The transgression goes to the very heart of the integrity of this Assembly and the right of [its] members to do their work and the security and the privacy of members in this Assembly. Cameras and the taking of pictures is strictly prohibited in this Assembly.

You may find these remarks on page 1478 of *Alberta Hansard* from November 24, 2010.

I would add to those remarks that members, as elected officials to this Assembly, have the right to privacy and to work unimpeded. They must not be interfered with in doing their work as members. I will leave you with this thought on the matter, as Speaker Kowalski had said: if members would like to have a picture of themselves in the Chamber, contact my office, and we will arrange it.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Dangerously sick or seriously injured Albertans are waiting longer than ever for an ambulance to arrive thanks to this UCP government's war on health care. Today our caucus released a FOIP that shows that the number of unfilled shifts for paramedics in Calgary and area has exploded, almost doubling since the spring. Paramedics have called for three things to fix this crisis: offer everyone a permanent, full-time

contract, get crews off shift on time, and expand harm reduction efforts. To the Premier: why has this government refused to listen to these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the reason why we put Dr. John Cowell in place as official administrator. I can tell you what front-line paramedics are telling us. Number one, they have told us that they don't want to be sitting for their entire shift at emergency waiting rooms unable to drop off patients. That's one of the things that we're going to be addressing. They want to make sure that they have more authority to triage and treat on-site. These are highly trained workers, and they shouldn't have to feel like they have to transfer a patient to the hospital every time that they can treat them with the oversight of a medical professional. And we're going to make sure that with dispatch we do more step-down to 811 so that we put less pressure on the hospitals.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of those solutions sound like what the paramedics have publicly called for in the light of day.

Meanwhile the departure of the chief paramedic last week pushes the ambulance system even deeper into crisis. It's been almost a year since the UCP commissioned an action plan, months since the report landed on the minister's desk, and the government is idle and the report remains hidden. To the Premier. These delays put Albertans' lives at risk. Paramedics have told us what needs to be done. Why is the Premier refusing to listen to them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must tell you that Dr. John Cowell has been on the job three and a half weeks, and one of the things that he's told me in my conversations with him: he says that AHS is performing better than he ever could have imagined. He's got great confidence in Mauro Chies as the leader of the departments, not only on the issue of dealing with efficient ambulance service but also dealing with emergency room wait times. Next he's moving on to looking at the surgical backlog. Those are the three priorities that we identified, those are the three priorities we're working on, and we're going to make progress.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the FOIP shows that this UCP government has made progress in doubling the number of cancelled shifts since the spring in Calgary and area. Meanwhile Dr. Trevor Theman, former head of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, former registrar of the college of physicians, says that our Bill 201 would move the health care system closer to meeting Albertans' expectations. Albertans expect an ambulance to show up quickly, and our bill would address that. With this shocking new data released through FOIP, will the Premier agree to debate the Public Health Care Delivery Standards Act today?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're in agreement in this Chamber that we needed to take action. This is the reason why we put Dr. John Cowell in place as the official administrator, so that we could fast-track and move very quickly on the issues that have been identified. We are moving quickly on them, and we are beginning to see results. In fact, I was speaking with the Health minister, and I understand that we have more paramedics on shift now than we ever have in our history. The issue that we have to address is the issue of making sure that we retain our paramedics. We have to make sure

that they have an environment that supports them, and that's what we're working on doing.

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

Automobile Insurance Premiums

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, according to a report released yesterday by Ernst & Young, Alberta drivers are paying more for auto insurance than other Canadians. A young male Alberta driver who's new to the road will pay more than \$5,900 for his insurance. That's \$700 more than he'd pay in Ontario, \$3,400 more than he'd pay in B.C. The fact is that ever since this government removed the rate cap, Alberta drivers are getting taken to the cleaners. Why does the Premier think that young Albertans should pay \$3,400 more than in B.C. to insure their vehicles, that they rely on to get to work every day?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard the Finance minister answer this question many times before, and I think what he has pointed out was that the rate cap was not as billed, that we still ended up seeing an increase in insurance premiums. Look, I've appointed a Minister of Affordability and Utilities, and if there are issues that we need to address across the whole range of affordability issues, he's been empowered to do that. If he identifies issues in auto insurance or home insurance that we need to address, then we will, but we have to maintain confidence in our investment environment here, and doing that means that we don't keep on messing around with the rules of the game.

Ms Notley: The most expensive car insurance in the country, and she won't take responsibility for it.

Now, another case study in the EY report looks at a 30-year-old woman with 14 years of driving experience who was recently at fault in a car accident. In Alberta she now pays more than \$4,800 while in B.C. she would pay just \$2,000. That's right. More than double: she's paying that here. Doesn't the Premier see that auto insurance rates are out of control and that they are hurting affordability for regular Albertans, and if so, why is there no action to deal with that in her so-called inflation plan?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, once again, in 2018, under the NDP's rate cap, premiums went up 5 per cent. The 12-month change in insurance premiums as of the end of November this year is 2.37 per cent. Now, it may well be that we have to take a look at what is happening in different age groups, and I'll take a closer look at the EY report to see if there's anything that we have to address. Our Minister of Affordability and Utilities has been charged with the task of looking at a whole range of issues to support those who are going through this difficult time of inflation, and we're going to make sure that we address these issues as they come up.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, once the cap was removed, insurance went up by more than 30 per cent. Now, there's a long history of insurance lobbyists helping members of this government get elected. And the reward? The UCP immediately removed the 5 per cent cap, and rates shot up 30 per cent or more. Insiders get the green light to rake in profits, and Alberta drivers get run over in the process. This report makes it clear: Alberta drivers are paying thousands of dollars more than they should be every year. Why won't the Premier stop standing up for her lobbyist friends and start standing up for Alberta drivers?

Ms Smith: I think there's a little revisionist history going on here, Mr. Speaker. The NDP rate cap was hard on Alberta drivers. What they forget is that drivers had to pay the full year's premium up front rather than monthly, they were denied collision and comprehensive coverage, and they were not able to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: . . . access coverage through their broker as insurance companies severed contracts with brokers. You ended up with people who weren't able to get insurance at all. Out of 2.7 million insured vehicles, 53 per cent had more than a 5 per cent increase during the 5 per cent rate cap. That is the history that we saw.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is next.

Alberta Sovereignty Act and Indigenous Rights

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier claimed on Thursday that she had a new, constructive relationship with First Nations, but today we learned the actual truth. A senior staffer in the Ministry of Indigenous Relations office stated that consultation on the sovereignty act was, quote, nonexistent. End quote. That same staffer reported that they had attempted to raise the concerns of First Nations with cabinet, but that idea got, quote, zero support from leadership. End quote. Why is the Premier so opposed to hearing from First Nations?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we did have a conversation about whether the act needed to be further amended to underscore that section 35 rights were protected, and I pointed out that in crafting the bill, that was the foundational principle. Under section 2(c) it says that nothing in the act abrogates or derogates from the rights of Aboriginals and their treaty rights as defined in section 35 of the Constitution. The point I was raising is that we already made sure that that was built and embedded in the act, and as I've been talking with First Nations chiefs, that's the point that I'm making with them.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That same staffer also reported that the Indigenous Relations minister, staff, and ministry had been shut out of the drafting of the bill from the start. And it doesn't stop there: another Indigenous Relations staffer spoke out, saying that the Premier tried to slough off the concerns about zero consultation with First Nations. Expecting Indigenous Albertans to forget about their legal right to be consulted is a level of arrogance that I would not have expected even from Jason Kenney. What other instances of violating the rule of law in the sovereignty act was the Premier hoping would blow over?

Ms Smith: We have a robust process internally for analyzing bills, that includes our cabinet policy committee process, our cabinet process, our caucus meeting, our Legislative Review Committee. There is lots of opportunity for people to engage. The point was that we already had a recognition that the bill had to comply with section 35 Charter rights, which underscore the treaty and Aboriginal rights of our First Nations citizens. I've had some great conversations in the last number of weeks as we signed an MOU last week with the KTC council on mental health, and we're going to do more of these kinds of things.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These staffers were concerned and spoke out because they're watching the government's relationship with Indigenous communities go up in smoke, something that this Premier either doesn't understand or doesn't care about. Indigenous Albertans can't trust a Premier who decides if or when their legal rights are applied. Premier, prove me wrong; stand up in this House, apologize for this illegal imposition of the job-killing, undemocratic sovereignty act on First Nations people, and withdraw this bill before it receives legal assent.

Ms Smith: I can tell you what First Nations talk to us about when we talk with them. They talk about having support for mental health and addiction. They talk about the fact that there are 78 per cent of our kids in care, that we're now going to support them in transferring services to First Nations and be supportive of that. They talk as well about bringing gasification to our rural communities so that they don't have to rely on propane, which is incredibly expensive and unreliable. They also talk about how we can work together on developing economic corridors and identifying protected lands together, and they're looking forward to working with us. Those are the things that we're going to partner with First Nations on, and I can't wait to get started.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Sabir: In or out? That is the question being posed publicly by Barry Cooper, the chief architect of the Premier's job-killing, undemocratic sovereignty act. He went on national radio last week to threaten that either the federal government bends to the will of this Premier, or there would be grounds to vote on Alberta separating from the rest of Canada. The Premier has claimed that her widely criticized bill has nothing to do with separatism. Why, then, is a key adviser and the writer of her awful legislation saying the exact opposite?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will note that Barry Cooper doesn't sit in this cabinet or in this caucus, and even though the Alberta sovereignty act was inspired by the free Alberta strategy, when I looked at that, I said: how can we make sure that we underscore our constitutional rights, make sure that we protect Indigenous rights, and make sure that we defend the Charter rights of our citizens? These are our principles in our Constitution and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that's what the genesis of the act was all about. It's the reason why Supreme Court Justice John Major has said that there is nothing unconstitutional about the bill, and it's the reason why I'm looking forward to declaring royal assent soon.

Mr. Sabir: The Premier went on the radio herself this weekend to muse that her horrible sovereignty act could be used to stop the imposition of paper straws on Albertans. That was her justification for a bill that has ignored treaty rights, creates economic chaos, and that has been cited by many as perhaps the worst legislation to ever come before this House. Albertans deserve better than this paper-thin Premier. Is she really willing to break our country apart over some straws?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think it's more absurd that the federal government intervened in our area of jurisdiction over managing our petrochemical industry, which members opposite used to support, so they could do something as frivolous as impose a ban on plastic straws. They have created uncertainty in our petrochemical industry.

They are creating uncertainty as we end up trying to do cross-border trade. They have declared plastics toxic for one reason and one reason only, because they want to intervene in our area of jurisdiction. They do this again and again and again, and it's why we're challenging them in court.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Barry Cooper and those closest to the Premier, including her own executive director, have teamed up before to write a document that called for pulling Albertans out of CPP, blowing up the RCMP, and that, in broad strokes: "sets up Alberta for independence in the event that independence must be considered." Separatist flames are being fanned from the office of this Premier. Will she stand right now and state for the record that there will be no vote on Alberta leaving Canada as long as she is in the office?

Ms Smith: I am not a separatist. I am not talking about leaving Canada. I'm talking about saving Canada. I'm talking about how we're going to be able to assert the way this country is supposed to work. We are a federalist nation. We are not a unitary state where the federal government dictates to us. We have our own areas of jurisdiction that we have the exclusive right to pass laws in, and the federal government violates it every day by declaring plastics toxic so they could take it over, by trying to enforce an emissions cap on our fertilizer, by putting an emissions cap on oil and gas.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-Glenmore is next.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cancer is an unfortunate reality that impacts us all. Whether it's us or our loved ones, almost everyone has felt the emotional blow of a cancer diagnosis in one way or another. Patients in Alberta are one step closer to receiving comprehensive cancer care in a world-class facility. This past Friday the Minister of Infrastructure announced that substantial completion of the new Calgary cancer centre had been met and has now been handed over to AHS. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what does substantial completion mean for this project, and what is the next step for the Calgary cancer centre?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The Calgary cancer centre is the second-largest comprehensive cancer centre in North America. It is bringing a ground-breaking approach to comprehensive patient care, where patients will receive tailored world-class cancer treatment. I am also pleased to say that the layout and design are patient and family focused, from patient rooms, treatment rooms, right down to the plants in the central garden.

Mr. Speaker, as we announced on Friday, this project has reached substantial completion, meaning it is ready for AHS to install the vital technology, furnishings, and other items they need to provide excellent care and services to patients.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that this project has been a long time coming for Calgary and southern Alberta and further given that the Calgary cancer centre will be the second-largest comprehensive cancer centre in North America, a true feat in both engineering and health care, and given that this centre will bring together much of the existing cancer care

in Alberta and Calgary under one roof, once again to the minister: when can we expect to see the cancer centre open its doors to patients?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary cancer centre is currently expected to open to patients in 2024. During this time AHS will fully outfit the centre with all the necessary technology, lab gear, furniture and materials, and everything else needed to be fully operational. In fact, the design of the building incorporates the easy moving in and out of vital medical devices, with portions of the roof designed to lift off efficiently and safely move in heavy technology. While the hospital is not ready to open its doors just yet, we have reached a huge milestone in the construction process and a huge milestone in providing world-class cancer care right here in Alberta.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that in 2022 we are making steady progress in preventing cancer, detecting it earlier, and treating it more effectively and given that, unfortunately, nearly half of Albertans will deal with a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime and further given that the Calgary cancer centre is needed and important not only to the city of Calgary but to southern Alberta and to our province as a whole, once more to the minister: what are the capabilities of this new centre, and what care will they be able to provide patients?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that this centre was designed to encompass a whole continuum of cancer care, from prevention and screening and early detection to research and collaboration, from development and clinical trials to patient care and education. It will be a giant step forward for patients and families, for our health care system. Projects like this are more than just bricks and mortar; they are a symbol of hope. To quote Nashrin Mitha, patient and family adviser, from our announcement: a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed, but a thing created is loved before it even exists.

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

2:10 Children's Health Care and Hospital Capacity Vaccination Policies

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ongoing crisis in children's health care is having devastating effects, effects that will get worse if not addressed immediately. Parents are terrified, looking for information on what will be done, yet it's been 300 days since the last time the chief medical officer of health has held a press conference. The social media accounts, once another source of emergency information, sit silent and still bear the name of the fired Dr. Deena Hinshaw. This is ridiculous, and children's health is suffering. Why is there a UCP-imposed gag order on the chief medical officer of health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. There is no gag order. I am very pleased to continue to work with Dr. Joffe, who has put out information for parents to be able to deal with this very challenging time, with flu, COVID, and the RSV. Also, Dr. Joffe has put out a letter to all parents in terms of providing guidance to how to manage this. I'm pleased to say as well that, you know, we've been working through

getting control over the CMOH account, and that will be active very soon.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that last week, in light of the impact of the ongoing severe viral season on Alberta's children, the pediatric section of the Alberta Medical Association recommended increased public messaging on the safety and efficacy of influenza and COVID-19 vaccines to address the pressures in children's hospitals and given that the uptake of flu vaccine is only 22 per cent across the province and increased vaccination would decrease the chance of severe outcomes, hospitalizations for children, will the Premier please simply stand, openly and unequivocally endorse the flu shot, and encourage all Albertans to be vaccinated?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I stated in this House last week, we are running a campaign to increase the coverage of flu vaccines. I'm very pleased that over the last two weeks we have increased that coverage by 3.5 per cent. Our coverage is now higher than last year at this time, at 23.7 per cent. We are continuing to run a campaign – you may have received a text message on your phone last week – we are also running radio ads, we are running television ads, and we will continue to do so and urge Albertans to make the choice to get their flu shot.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that this Premier has spent more time promoting the views of conspiracy theorist Paul Alexander than she has addressing the chaos in public health care and given that Alexander celebrated the firing of the Alberta Health Services board, bragged about being named in communications, called on the Premier to drag the board members in front of tribunals, bankrupt them and throw them in jail, and given that this rhetoric from Alexander is deeply dangerous, yet the Premier can't even stand and promote the effectiveness of vaccines in this Chamber, will she support the motion I'm bringing to this House today to promote the effectiveness of vaccines and condemn the spread of vaccine information by Paul Alexander?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as we indicated previously – and we thank very much for the tremendous work that was done by the AHS strategic board – we needed an official administrator. We appointed Dr. John Cowell to do that, to be able to focus full-time on helping to manage through the challenges that we're facing in our health care system and AHS, focusing on reducing the EMS wait times, reducing the emergency department wait times, getting more surgeries done, and pushing down decision-making. I'm very pleased that we were able to do that.

In regard to the motion that's coming forward this afternoon, I look forward to speaking to it at that point in time.

Revenue and Pension Plan Administration

Ms Phillips: The UCP have made clear that the Premier wants to set up a provincial revenue agency so we can all file our taxes two times. This again proves that the Premier and the UCP don't actually care what Albertans want because Albertans have been pretty clear that they do not want a provincial revenue agency. Why? Because it's an expensive, half-baked plan that would require a 20 per cent increase in public service workers. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce survey recently showed a strong majority of businesses believe it will be detrimental. Did the Minister of Finance actually support the sovereignty act because he wants to withhold our federal taxes? Is that what this is about?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that question is ridiculous. Something we can all count on with the members opposite is a superficial approach.

We can take a look at the approach of a rate cap on insurance – which we were questioned on – a superficial approach resulting in unintended consequences. We're going to study the possibility, the benefits, and the costs of an Alberta revenue agency. We think that we should make informed decisions.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that what's ridiculous is this Minister of Finance's flip-flopping on the sovereignty act and given that what's ridiculous is filing our taxes twice and given that what's ridiculous is taking \$200 million from our CPP, that no one asked for, to fund a revenue agency that no one also asked for – this scheme doesn't even add up and shows that this government doesn't even understand income tax or pension policy – can the Minister of Finance explain why he's willing to raid our retirement security, a proposal that individuals and businesses both oppose, to pay for a revenue agency that individuals and businesses also oppose?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of that adds up, but should we be surprised? When the members opposite were in government, they ultimately left Albertans with a fiscal train wreck. None of that added up. That's why we inherited billions and billions of dollars of structural deficit. That's why we had to make hard decisions in Budget 2019 to bring this province to fiscal responsibility, which we've done. Look, we're going to look at opportunities with respect to an Alberta pension plan and an Alberta revenue agency for the benefit of Albertans.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that that was not an answer, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the Minister of Finance doesn't want to talk about this topic.

Given that many in the business community, including prominent Calgary businessman George Brookman, past chair of Tourism Calgary, have also said that they oppose the chaos that will come from using CPP premiums to fund a revenue agency and given that the Alberta revenue agency will require Albertans to do one of their least favourite things, filing their taxes, twice and given that Albertans and business leaders oppose the creation of an Alberta revenue agency, who exactly is the Minister of Finance pandering to with this policy? Why won't he just abandon this policy? Why won't he just stand in this place and reject it out of hand?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason is that we're going to do the work. We're going to do the study so that we can make an informed decision. The member opposite rightly points out that an Alberta revenue agency collecting personal taxes may require a second tax return by Albertans. That's something we would consider. That's something that all Albertans should consider. We believe in making informed decisions. We're going to do the work and ensure that we're making decisions in the best interests of Albertans, unlike the members opposite.

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, in the last year we have seen dramatic changes across our entire health care system. One of the most critical problems that continues to plague cities like Medicine Hat is the ever-decreasing number of available doctors, snowballing the inability to see a family doctor or nurse practitioner in a timely manner. Just this last week I was informed about another seven local doctors quitting their practice, leaving the Medicine Hat region. To the Premier: is there a plan to ensure we train more doctors and medical health professionals for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As you know, human health resources is a challenge, not only here in Alberta but a challenge, quite frankly, across all of Canada and across the First World, but we are making investments to address this challenge. I'd like to speak to the \$90 million that we have invested annually for the retention and attraction of doctors, and we're continuing to invest also in our advanced education system. I'm very pleased that my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education invested an additional \$30 million to add health care capacity, and I'll speak more on that.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Given that there are not enough seats for Albertans at our medical schools and given that we are not graduating enough trained family doctors to meet our current needs, never mind our increasing population's needs, and given that I repeatedly hear from young Albertans how limited the spots are in medical programs in Alberta and given that when students end up doing their education overseas, they don't return to Alberta, again to the Premier: what is your government doing to ensure more Alberta students attend Alberta institutions to become family doctors, nurse practitioners and then return to work in communities in Alberta like Medicine Hat?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question indeed. It's critical that we support our postsecondary institutions and look at creating more spaces to ensure that more Albertans are able to access some of our incredible postsecondary institutions right here at home, right in their own backyards. Just this past spring we announced, as my colleague mentioned, \$28 million to expand spaces in high-demand health care programs, including, for example, in nursing, for health care aides, and in paramedicine. The Premier has directed the Minister of Health and me to continue that work, and we have more details coming.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that vaccine mandates struck an undeniable blow to our health care workforce and given that many of these individuals opted to go on leave, move to places like Texas or Florida, or quit altogether rather than face criticism, abuse, and vaccine mandates and given that now we continue to see rural health care facilities unable to meet huge staff shortages, again to the Premier. During your leadership campaign you promised considerable health care reform. What are you doing to ensure Alberta is adequately staffed with family doctors, nurse practitioners so our health care system can be proactive and preventative?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated, we know that we need more health care staff, particularly in rural Alberta. I was very pleased that over the course of the summer and into the fall I was able to travel to over 20 locations around the province and talk to over 1,100 individuals, many of them AHS staff. We know that they need help, and we're working very hard to do that. Not only are we investing in education, but we're also making it easier for foreign-trained health care workers to come to Alberta – changes to the college, supporting bridging education – and we'll continue to do so to get the people that we need to provide the service.

Government Procurement Policies

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, social procurement policies support local workers, businesses, and suppliers, which benefits our economy as a whole, and these policies are supported by municipalities, businesses, and worker advocates not only in Alberta but across Canada. The NDP will always stand up for Alberta workers, businesses, and suppliers. Can the minister of jobs explain why his government supports the economic harm that will come about because of their sovereignty act and why they oppose social procurement policies that would boost Alberta's economy?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we've already been clear: this Premier listened to caucus, listened to cabinet, listened to Albertans, and we made changes to the sovereignty act. Even that famous right-wing columnist Graham Thomson acknowledged just a couple of days ago in a question to David Dodge, the Toronto man, that the amendments to Bill 1 solved the issues that critics of Bill 1 were concerned about. Now even he agrees that we're on the right path. Why can't they get on the program and help us and support Albertans?

Ms Gray: Given that construction workers in this province are among the highest skilled in the world, thanks in part to the world-class training provided by their unions, and given that under current procurement policies many of these workers are seeing lower skilled workers being brought in to take their jobs, lowering wages and making it harder for Alberta tradespeople to weather this affordability crisis, and given that many are leaving Alberta to work in provinces with robust social procurement policies and labour codes that actually support workers, will the minister of jobs please explain to the Assembly why he and his government continue to oppose social procurement policies?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the NDP is reading their news releases. Our record is clear, and investors know this. In Alberta we're already at record-breaking venture capital investments this year over last year, which was a record year. We're at record levels of migration. We have the highest average weekly earnings across all the provinces. In fact, new incorporations are up 13 per cent in Alberta. I don't know where they're getting their news releases, but maybe they should start listening to the government.

Ms Gray: Given that the trade unions and businesses that employ workers to build and maintain projects throughout Alberta support social procurement policies that provide local value and benefit and given that the Business Council of Alberta and the Building Trades of Alberta have teamed up to push government to implement more social procurement and given that social procurement can ensure that subcontracting goes to local businesses, providing opportunities for smaller businesses, and given that the minister does not appear to be aware what social procurement is, will the minister commit to Albertans today that he will meet with the Business Council, with the Building Trades, learn about social procurement, and implement it?

Mr. Jean: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of our Premier. You know, she actually appointed a parliamentary secretary of procurement because she recognized this issue and we've all recognized it. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul – he's a great member – is going to work hard on this file. But let me tell you some other things that are happening. [interjection] I will meet with anybody – let's be clear – and I have met with unions, and I continue to meet with them because I'm from Fort McMurray and I'm proud of that part of our environment. But jobs in finance, insurance, real estate, renting and leasing are up 21 per cent; jobs in professional, scientific, and technical services up 16 per cent; jobs in

health care up 11 per cent. It's a good-news story. Come to Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Airline Direct Flights and Tourism Development

Mr. Bilous: Recently Air Canada announced that it will no longer provide direct flights from Saskatoon and Regina to Calgary. There is a strong connection between Saskatchewan and Alberta, including personal and business relationships. This cancellation will triple travel time and hurt businesses and tourism between our provinces, yet we haven't heard a peep out of the government. They're quick to point out any time a new flight gets added, but there have been crickets when we can't even get a good flight next door. Where is the concern from the government over this decision that will impact our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Obviously, we're concerned about flights coming in and out of Alberta and how it affects tourism and how it affects the workers being able to travel also. We have Travel Alberta working on programs, bringing actually thousands of more people into Alberta with flights and working with a program with that. We need to continue that. Of course, we'll look at all different flights coming into Alberta and making sure that we have programs in place so that we can make sure that we have people in those seats coming to Alberta again for both work and recreation.

Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Given that it's only a short flight from Saskatoon and Regina to watch the Riders play the Stamps, enjoy Stephen Avenue, or take a trip out to our beautiful mountains and given that Air Canada will no longer provide that flight – instead, people will fly to Vancouver just to come back to Calgary – and given that this will seriously hurt our tourism industry, what is the government doing to encourage competition between airlines in support of Calgary's tourism industry and our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much again for the question. Of course, we are concerned about these flights, as I mentioned in my previous answer. We have WestJet doubling seats for some of the flights within Canada, and we like to see that happening. We know that's happening now. Again, we have Travel Alberta working with our partners in the air industry to bring those flights in. Again, when we look at the things that people travel for, being able to enjoy our mountains here in Alberta and being able to enjoy sports events, we know that that travel is important, and we'll continue to work with our partners doing that.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've been speaking to the tourism sector and they've been telling me that they're desperate for workers, especially those with hospitality and culinary training, and given that this government has cut hundreds of millions of dollars from our postsecondary institutions, effectively turning off the taps of our talent pipeline, and given that this comes on top of direct flights to Calgary now being cancelled, why is the government making a bad situation worse and actively working against the success of our tourism industry and our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, when we look at our postsecondary education system, we know that – you know, I've been talking to some just recently – they are talking about bringing in people from around the world to enjoy our postsecondary education system, to be able to be trained in tourism. That's a great opportunity for us to bring people from around the world here. In other areas that have done this, 96 per cent of the people that have come in and taken those courses have stayed in the industry in that location three years later. So we know that there's success in that, and we know that we can work on that with our immigration here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Rural Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Boyle health centre has been short two nursing positions since July, resulting in hospital closures every night. This means that some Albertans may have delayed access to the urgent care they need. I understand that this is a national issue and every province is struggling with staffing shortages, especially with nurses, but the fact remains that we need more health care workers in Alberta and we need them now. Can the Minister of Health tell us what the plan is to fill these necessary nursing positions in rural Alberta right now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Making sure we have the nurses needed where we need them is one of the top priorities of this government. We need further action. We've taken action already. I spoke in regard to the tremendous work done by my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education, but we need more, and that's why we appointed a parliamentary secretary specifically for rural health. My colleague will be working with municipalities across the entire province to be able to identify other areas that we can make an investment in to make sure we have the health care professionals that we need to support Albertans' health.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one short-term solution is to contract nurses from other parts of Alberta and across Canada on a locum status to fill gaps in RN coverage and given that rural Alberta not only has to compete with the major urban centres in this province but also other provinces, can the same minister tell the members of this House what our government is doing to incentivize registered nurses to rural communities in the short term?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The hon. member is quite right. This is a nation-wide, even international issue. That's why we are investing in our advanced education system, to train more individuals here in Alberta. We are competing internationally. I was also very pleased to announce, with my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education, a streamlined process for bringing in internationally trained nurses, for also being able to provide bridging programs for those nurses when they arrive here so that those who are certified as LPNs can increase up

to RNs. We're going to continue to do the work until we get the staff that we need.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Minister. Given that constituents are contacting me with concerns that doctors and other health professionals may look at leaving the community because of the partial closure of their hospital and given that the health professionals in these areas often look to areas with more sustained work levels so they can use their full capacity to support the health system, can the minister tell residents of my community what long-term solutions this government is bringing to fix this problem?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. We understand that it is a challenge in terms of the retention and recruitment of doctors. We have more doctors than we've ever had in the province, but we still need more, and we still need them in particular areas where there are shortages, so we're continuing to invest in rural recruitment and retention – I mentioned the \$90 million – plus, in addition to that, in the rural and northern program, the recruitment and retention fund, the rural physician on-call program, the rural health professions action plan, and the rural medical education plan. In addition, we're very pleased to reach an agreement with the AMA, and we're looking at different methods of pay to be able to recruit and retain doctors.

Alberta Sovereignty Act and Capital Projects

Mr. Dach: From day one it has been nothing but chaos under this Premier. She's already had to walk back several comments that put massive infrastructure projects at risk. This includes the Premier musing that she had concerns about the Calgary green line tunnelling under downtown. In the past she has called this project "Green Line to nowhere," a "fantasy," "a catastrophically bad decision," and "of no real use to anyone." Does the Premier or the minister still agree with these past comments that create uncertainty for a vital project for Calgary's economy that puts 20,000 jobs at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is just another great example of fearmongering by the NDP. There's \$1.5 billion committed by this government to build the green line. I've spoken with the mayor of Calgary. They want to see shovels in the ground as soon as possible. This is an amazing construction project that will help Calgarians get around their great city. It's something that this government is committed to, and we're hoping to see the construction as soon as possible on the Calgary green line.

Mr. Dach: Given that the Premier has already created uncertainty around another project, the Springbank dam, that will protect Calgary's economy, and the green line, that will create 20,000 jobs, and given that the job-killing, chaos-causing sovereignty act will create even more uncertainty for investors and companies looking to bid on major transportation projects and given that business leaders, including tech investors, chambers of commerce, and a former governor of the Bank of Canada, have all expressed opposition to the sovereignty act, won't this government restore confidence and certainty in Alberta by revoking this bill so we can build important infrastructure projects that support economic growth?

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I respect my critic for transportation, but I'm not expecting this kind of softball question from him. The Springbank dam is being built. He can go there and see it for himself. It's an amazing flood mitigation project that will save Calgary in the event of another flood. It's something that the money is committed there; it is being built. Calgarians will know that they will be protected in the case of another disastrous flood, something that – we can just look at the 2013 flood. About \$5 billion of damage was caused. This is a project that Calgarians can be safe with and know that it will protect their communities.

Mr. Dach: Given that the last Premier mucked about with federal-provincial funding arrangements for major projects like the green line and stalled them and given that the radical policies of this Premier are far worse and given that the Premier is focused on a job-killing sovereignty act that could kill projects and put thousands of Albertans out of work, can the government tell working people why they are so blind to the concerns of so many who want them to stop this bill? The sovereignty act should be thrown in the garbage today.

Mr. Dreeshen: Put people out of work. Kill projects. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is just classic fearmongering by the NDP, and I wish they would stop it because Albertans – not a lot of them – do watch this question period, and when they hear inflammatory comments like that, I think – and they can go to the Springbank dam and see that it's being built. They can talk to the mayor of Calgary, know then that the green line is going to be built. When they hear stuff like that, I think it really just devalues the work that is done in this place, and I hope we can get some better questions here from the NDP.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Gravel Operations in Red Deer County

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, my guest Jody Young lives with her family in Red Deer county close to operating gravel pits. This fall AHS verified that her water well is now contaminated with lead and aluminum and is no longer potable. Her children have lead and aluminum in their blood, likely from drinking contaminated well water. Alberta Environment has been notified of the issue but has done nothing to investigate whether the gravel pit is the source of the contamination. Can the minister commit today to ordering her department to conduct a scientific investigation into this matter?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, our environment minister works very hard to make sure that we listen to Albertans and that we take their feedback and that we do good due diligence on all the work that we do. I have every confidence that she is doing the right work that is required in order to defend Albertans' interests and to ensure that the environment is protected. I appreciate the member opposite for raising his constituent's concerns, and we'll of course take a look at that.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister just said that they're listening but the minister can't even bother to stand up and answer the question and given that the gravel pit in question appears to be operating without the proper approvals in place and given that gravel pits mining below the water table require Water Act authorizations and given that this pit is full of water even during the driest times of year, suggesting that operators are mining below the

water table, will the minister commit to pausing operations at this gravel pit until the proper authorizations are in place?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the most robust environmental policies and protections in place in this entire country, and we stand by that. We will continue to make sure that we are listening to Albertans to ensure that we have and continue to have the best environmental protections in the country. That is exactly what we can expect from our minister of environment in the weeks and months to come, and I'm proud of the work that she does on this file.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, nobody should be proud of a government that refuses to enforce its own legislation.

Given that Jody Young's house is in close proximity to a proposed new gravel pit and given that the existing gravel pit appears to be operating without proper authorizations and may be causing water well contamination, will the minister at least commit to meeting with my guests today to let them make their case for pausing approvals for new gravel pits until the issues with the existing ones have been resolved?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as I said, Alberta has the most robust environmental protection policies in the country, and we absolutely do enforce them, and we will continue to enforce them. It is so important that we protect the interests of all Albertans, and we know that protecting the environment is part of how we do that. I'm confident that the minister of environment is on the right track and will continue to do the right things to respect and protect the rights of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great that Alberta is a growing province but troubling when many Albertans must wait for a long time to book a doctor's appointment or to be seen in the emergency room. Alberta needs to attract more physicians. Alberta has many skilled newcomers and international medical graduates that are ready to start their careers in AHS, but they are met with barriers that do not allow them to get certified in a timely manner. To the Minister of Health: what actions are being taken to bring more physicians to Alberta, including faster certifications of IMGs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.
2:40

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to make Alberta an attractive location for physicians, with compensation that's among the highest in Canada, financial incentives, a variety of practice settings, high-quality medical schools and facilities, and rural medical education. We're enhancing marketing efforts, pursuing both Canadian and internationally trained physicians, posting part-time positions to provide additional flexibility, and providing incentives for full-time positions as well. Collaboration is also under way with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta to prioritize and expedite assessment and licensing of international medical graduates.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertan families are struggling to provide medication for their children and given that many children are showing severe symptoms during this flu season and further given that our government recently announced the securement of 5 million bottles of children's medication, can

the same minister explain how the children's medication will be distributed across the province and when Albertans can expect the first shipment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a parent of two young children I know that this issue is top of mind for parents right across the province. Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services are working with Health Canada to obtain the necessary approvals. At this time it's estimated that Health Canada approvals will take 10 days to four weeks. Once approvals are in place, the medication will be delivered. As soon as the medication arrives in our province, it will be distributed to community and retail pharmacies so parents and caregivers can purchase it for their children. We will be working to get this medication to Alberta families as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the pandemic highlighted the importance of optimizing EMS response times and given that Albertans still have uncertainties on our EMS response times and further given that our government allocated an additional \$64 million in the 2022 budget that is specifically for Alberta's EMS, can the same minister explain what improvements have been made to Alberta's EMS thus far, what plans are under way, and what can Albertans expect for the future?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Supporting EMS has been and continues to be a top priority for this government. We are moving swiftly to reform AHS and improve EMS response times as that is a top concern of Albertans. Our AHS administrator, Dr. Cowell, is working on a plan to free up highly trained paramedics by fast-tracking ambulance transfers at the ER and finding other appropriate options for nonemergency transfers between facilities. Our new parliamentary secretary for EMS reform, the Member for Highwood, has also been working closely with front-line workers to identify ways to improve patient experience and worker safety.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Funeral Services Industry

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Losing a loved one is a difficult experience that affects us all. The decisions, the paperwork: it can all seem overwhelming for families dealing with grief while at the same time trying to ensure that their loved one's life is concluded with dignity. For those going through it, it is often difficult to balance their need to act with their feelings of grief. Albertans need calm, caring, and capable professionals to walk alongside them in their hour of need and to help bring dignity to their loved one's conclusion of life. Alberta mourners need to be provided with an opportunity to share in their grief.

The Alberta Funeral Service Association, the AFSA, is a professional organization of funeral service providers from across

the province that are dedicated to the betterment of funeral services by supporting the public as well as their members. Founded in 1928, the AFSA provides confidential business and professional relationships. They conduct all services in a dignified and respectful manner, they provide all merchandise at a fair price, and care for and show respect for all loved ones entrusted into their care with a high moral and service standard for all. These providers have strict provincial health laws to adhere to, including preneed service regulations and all other laws pertaining to their business or profession.

Mr. Speaker, many people are uncomfortable with talking about death and their fears around it, leaving them feeling alone. Death is a topic that the members of the AFSA deal with every day. They are ready to have conversations with families, no matter which stage of grief they are in, and with those interested in preplanning to remove the funeral planning process from their family's plate. Death is one of the few certainties in life. That is why having resources to turn to like the AFSA is so important.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care System

Mr. Carson: Children's health care is under crisis. That is not a point of debate but the simple truth of the situation. For over a month Albertans have seen the stories of the children's hospital struggling to deal with the unprecedented admission of sick children. We've heard the harrowing stories of nurses working with unimaginable fatigue and stress, some describing days where they are worried that someone might die in the waiting room because of the sheer volume. New structures have been built at the Alberta Children's hospital just to ensure that those waiting to be seen can have a warm place to wait.

This is a time where leadership is needed, but instead of that we have a Premier who tried to ignore a question about sick children by claiming that it wasn't on topic. We have a Premier who refuses to recommend the flu shot, a Premier who takes advice from someone who says vaccines are a biological weapon. The parents that I represent are scared, Mr. Speaker. They are worried about their children getting sick and about the prospect of long waits for emergency care should it come to that. As the father of a young son and with another child on the way I share these concerns with my constituents, and I will never stop amplifying their voices.

But I know that there is hope on the horizon. This comes from the prospect of an NDP government in May 2023 that will rebuild the health care system after years of UCP destruction. An Alberta NDP government will bring in real health care standards. We will restore respect and collaboration with front-line workers from day one. We will restore funding cuts by this UCP government. We will make significant moves to improve care closer to home in Alberta communities, and we will launch the largest health care worker recruitment campaign this province has ever seen. For those looking for health care, help is on the way. Alberta's NDP will end the chaos. We will ensure you and your loved ones will be taken care of.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a statement to make.

Energy Industries

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was fortunate enough to join the Minister of Energy in Banff for the Energy

Council's global energy and environmental issues conference. Prior to the conference I was able to tour the University of Calgary's research facility and TC Energy's control room for North America. What a great way to show delegates from the United States and colleagues from Saskatchewan the kind of innovation happening in our own backyard.

The Energy Council conference afforded us the opportunity to make it clear that Alberta's energy sector is not only essential for our province but is a key driver of the Canadian economy and a critical partner in attaining North American energy security. Our oil and gas sector continues to be a leader in responsible resource development and GHG emission reductions while rigorously adhering to social standards. In addition to oil and gas, Alberta is home to some of Canada's largest clean energy start-ups, innovators, and investors. Whether it be hydrogen production, geothermal development, petrochemical processing, or the emerging critical and rare-earth mineral sector, Alberta is quickly becoming a central hub and world-class centre for energy transition. Ultimately, Alberta's energy sector is a key contributor in creating jobs, diversifying the economy, and supporting our economic recovery and growth.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has taught us again that energy security cannot be taken for granted. Energy security and affordability have real impacts on the lives of Albertans. In order to continue to be the economic engine of Canada while supporting Albertans and our own economy, it is more critical than ever that we follow through on our government's commitment to support the responsible development and extraction of oil and gas.

What I heard this past weekend is that the world needs more reliable, responsible, and secure energy. What I hear in that, Mr. Speaker: the world needs more Alberta energy. That is clear. For too long our federal counterparts have controlled the narrative, falsely characterizing fossil fuels in ill-conceived campaigns. Events and conferences like this are an integral part of standing up for Albertans by showing the incredible products we produce and the ongoing innovation happening right here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a statement to make.

NDP and UCP Government Records

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired. I've had the privilege of serving the constituents of south and southwest Edmonton for almost eight years. When I was first elected in 2015, some were concerned about the accidental government, yet many more were filled with hope and optimism for the future. An NDP government in Alberta seems like something out of a fairy tale. In those first four years we accomplished much in and out of this Chamber: we built schools, we protected LGBTQ2S-plus children, we halved child poverty, we took real action on climate change and the environment, we invested in programs for social change like providing hot lunches in schools and affordable child care. The list went on and on.

2:50

And then Conservatives were elected in 2019. Conservatives changed course and reversed an unimaginable number of initiatives. They raised tuition, increased costs on families, lifted utility rate caps, lifted insurance rate caps, and Conservatives announced a meagre amount of new schools. They delayed and defunded hospitals indefinitely. Today Conservatives are celebrating legislation threatening Alberta's relationship with the

rest of this country, legislation denounced by experts as likely to drive away investment and harm our national interests.

How quickly things can change. Albertans are tired of this government, Mr. Speaker. They're tired of the games being played by the UCP instead of investing in initiatives that make their lives more affordable. Albertans are tired of being left out in the cold while the UCP squabble and play games.

There's one other thing, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired, yes, but they haven't given up hope. They know that there is a way, and they know that there are other options. They know that the future can be brighter. I don't know what's going to happen – nobody does – but I do know this: Albertans are motivated and ready to make real change in their lives once again.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 7, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2), sponsored by myself.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a tabling.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the requisite copies on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-West, which she referenced in her question: Alberta Businesses Not Sold on the Benefits of Ditching CPP or Creating Police Force.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2022.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Justice, Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2021-22.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 202 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Peace River rising to speak.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on my bill that I'm moving, Bill 202. This is an important piece of legislation, and it's an opportunity for us, in private

members' business, to make a meaningful impact to the Alberta income tax act. The purpose of this bill is to allow individuals a break, those who are donating, in what will be a difficult year coming up, with affordability, with an increase in everything from insurance costs to groceries to fuel and everything in between. But on top of that and maybe just as or more importantly, it's an important break for the charities themselves.

Now, I've been going around meeting with as many charities as possible. There are 76,000 registered charities, according to the Canada Revenue Agency, in the country, and disproportionately we have our fair share here in Alberta. If there's a charity, that means there's a cause behind it and there are individuals that care for it.

I want to talk a bit about the importance of charities in our society, and I want to talk a bit about the trend of what's going on with charitable giving. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, the trend of charitable giving and philanthropy has not been very good. Now, there are some redeeming qualities and silver linings in it, but over the last few decades it's notable that we've seen the average age of the donor go up. It's true that, speaking to the Calgary cancer foundation, their average donor is somewhere in their 70s now. In a few years that average donor is going to be in their 80s, and a few years after that they will have many, many fewer average donors. That is a sad state of affairs. It is sad because the work that that community does is absolutely essential – absolutely essential – to the lifeblood of this province for services rendered, for charitable love and care given to Albertans in care, especially those or their family members going through cancer. The average age of donors is going up.

So is the average dollar amount right now, but that doesn't mean more total dollars in the pot. It's a multibillion-dollar private industry in Alberta, but we see the average dollar amount going up with fewer donors. From 2009 to 2019 we saw a 22.1 per cent drop of families, of households that have been putting charitable tax donations in their tax returns. That's more than a fifth drop, close to a quarter drop in the number of households giving donations. This is impactful for the sector.

We see this trend coming – yes, it was accelerated by the pandemic, and, yes, the affordability crunch with inflation is going to make it worse, Madam Chair – but the truth is that we've seen this for decades now, that donors are getting older. Those large donations from second- and third-generation accrued wealth will be happening increasingly as the baby boom generation finishes, retires. Unfortunately, some of that demographic is now passing away. They end up in large donations to these important bodies. But this trend is continuing, and it's a problem for operational sustainability.

I spoke to the Stollery hospital today. They're one hundred per cent funded not by tax dollars but by donations. It's multimillion dollars a year, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$40 million every year fund raised purely through the generosity of Albertans. This trend has a huge impact on the health care of our children. Alberta Children's hospital is in effectively the exact same boat in Calgary. It's a good example there of the importance that charitable donations play in the livelihood of the delivering of health care services to Albertans.

But the trend isn't just limited to larger donations, fewer folks donating that are older. We also see an important difference on the other side of the demographic of donations, young Canadians. Young Canadians are donating less and less to institutionalized charities; i.e., charities that have that charitable tax status according to the CRA. Increasingly they're donating to what the philanthropic community calls causes. We see this all the time on Facebook: an important cause comes out, and they'll e-transfer money. You see

this on GoFundMe campaigns or similar websites, sort of these crowdsourced funding organizations.

And these donations now are given just to that cause, to that important cause that they highlight, something that matters to them perhaps as a millennial or a Gen Z or some of these younger generations. As they come into disposable income, as they start to have their first career, job, salary, pay – perhaps they're in a household. Perhaps they have more disposable income. Perhaps they're wondering: "My parents donated; maybe I should, too. Where am I going to donate to?"

It's not that I don't like the causes, Madam Chair. Causes are important. But the fact that we're giving less to these institutionalized charities year over year as return donors is a concern. It's a concern because so many of the services, so much of the work that is done for these charities require operational budgets, require multiyear, \$100 million, \$200 million, \$300 million capital campaigns. It requires the ability to build up expertise and staff on the administration side, never mind the delivery of the service itself. It requires the ability to build networks into each of these communities, whether you're talking about servicing the vulnerable, servicing those in health care, servicing different diverse communities, like First Nations in my community and others.

Every one of these requires long-term investment – long-term investment – that the charitable sector cannot do if they're chasing the hottest trend and the latest dollar that moves from cause to cause. The institutionalization – i.e., permanency, some wherewithal – of these charities is so important. It's instrumental, it's foundational to the ability for us to do the great work that we do. Our friends and our Albertan brothers and sisters that are out there in the charitable sector providing those services, providing charity and love for others, need that stability. They need that wherewithal. They need a route through which they can rest their operations that they know will be there year after year.

3:00

We see this trend in the charitable sector and donations in particular changing on these two ends. On the back end, when it comes to age, getting older and older, fewer and fewer families and households are donating, and we see the dollar amount increasing but not necessarily a broadening of new donors coming in to replace them. On the other side we see young donors increasingly not associated with an institution in the same way, without the permanency that we saw for our parents' generation, perhaps, or our great-grandparents' generation, where it was loyal to Queen and country and to a company. No matter what may come, they know that they have a sense of permanency. We see more and more young millennials going through a number of different jobs, at minimum seven, before they get to someplace in their career where they find permanency. We see these trends happening on the younger side of the demographic, and they're not giving in the same way they used to.

We in government need to be reactive to that. We need to be at the front end in seeing what the trends are and helping the sector by giving it the tools it needs to continue to be successful, to continue to be able to fund raise literally hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars in a fiscal year out of the generosity of Albertans. Out of the near 40 million Canadians – I learned this today – approximately 1 million of them country-wide are employed in the nonprofit or charitable sectors. That is a huge percentage of our industry, of our country focusing on this gift, on this virtue of charity. It's important and fundamental, the most important of all the virtues we have that are given to us.

Madam Chair, it is incredibly important that we pass this piece of legislation now, as soon as possible, because the sector, these

charities, and those donors are all pointing us in this direction. They're saying: build a wide base of smaller dollar donations; get these individuals into the funnel, as it's said, and move them up so that they continue to be repeat donors year over year; let those repeat dollars be dollars from new Canadians and young Canadians that continue to build a movement within charities for a generation to come. Those charities can continue to build infrastructure like hospitals and services like we've seen across the sector and in our faith communities of all different varieties.

They will be there to serve and help for every single disaster and crisis and obstacle that our province sees. We will be positioned well here, because of the forethought of this Chamber, to incentivize a broad base of those to give and to give generously and to bring them into the fold as donors and to be participatory in that gift of charity and delivery of this giant sector to average Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to hear the debate on the bill today.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 202, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. As I listened to the hon. member that brought forward this bill speak about the concerns of the sector, there are definitely a lot of areas of that that I couldn't agree with more. We know that the nonprofit sector in Alberta is simply at a tipping point in our province. They're desperate for support, for resources, and for help. We know that this sector is essential to Alberta and to our communities.

We know that this sector is not getting these needs met by government funding. They're looking for areas to be funded such as poverty reduction, mental health, cultural and language support, and so many more areas. There has been a recent report that was completed by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, or CCVO, that's titled Alberta's Nonprofit Sector: Too Essential to Fail. This report is such an important piece of information as it lays out the current state of our charitable and nonprofit sector and the damage that has been done and will continue to be done if adequate supports are not provided. Basically, it maps out the sector and has surveyed organizations across the province to get a comprehensive understanding of the state of the sector.

Some really important insights, Madam Chair, that I would like to speak to that really stood out for me in the report: they're saying that in the wake of the pandemic they're facing higher demand, a 68 per cent increase, and higher complexity, a 74 per cent increase. We know, when we're talking to Albertans, that needs right now are very high and that for the person or persons that are accessing services – nonprofits, charitable organizations – not only are there more people that are accessing these services, but their demands are more. They're more complex. They might present with one or more needs whereas perhaps prior to the pandemic they could have surfaced with just one presenting area of concern. Now the nonprofits are reporting that there are much more complex needs that are being requested by the people that they serve.

We know that our nonprofits are critical for our communities all across the province. They provide things like food provisions and basic needs. They provide settlement supports and senior supports, sports and rec, arts and culture, entrepreneurship, environmental, health, and so many more. This sector has also been incredibly damaging to women. We know that 78 per cent of people employed in this sector are women. The sector employs 285,000 people in Alberta, with a contribution of \$5.5 billion to our GDP.

When we talk about these numbers – 78 per cent women – we've heard over and over and over that the pandemic has been incredibly

difficult and largely so to women, yet we have a government that got rid of the status of women. Here we are talking about a proposed bill where 78 per cent of the employees of this sector are women. Listening to this sector, we've heard that this government has not provided the supports that they need to be able to continue to give the services that so many Albertans rely on. So many have had to close their doors because they can't operate anymore.

We've heard that another great concern in this sector is staff retention and recruitment, with more than 55 per cent of the organizations identifying that as a concern. So while we're looking at this piece of legislation, yes, it's a step in the right direction, but it's not what the sector is asking for. The sector is asking for supports so that they can actually retain their staff and recruit. It's hard because there is incredible inflation that's happening all across the province, which is creating rising costs, so it's hampering their ability to retain and attract workers. They simply don't want to put the rising costs onto clients. These are organizations that are putting Albertans first and foremost in their planning, in their services that they provide, and they're struggling.

We know that supports since the onset of the pandemic have failed to address this sector. Less than 4 per cent of the total funding for the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, or SMERG, went to nonprofits. Approximately 7 per cent of the total hires supported by the jobs now program went to nonprofits. The critical worker benefit saw uneven distribution, and some nonprofit workers were deemed ineligible for this benefit even though they provide the same services as for-profit and public providers. Programs that are designed to support the sector directly are inadequate. The funding requests to the civil society fund totalled 22 times the available budget, with fewer than 1 in 10 applicants selected.

If the member that proposed this piece of legislation, Bill 202, is speaking to organizations like CCVO or ECVO or Canadian Mental Health, he would hear that this is not the solution. Bill 202 is simply not the solution to what the sector needs. It's a positive change, and he mentioned, you know, several organizations that would say that it is a positive change, but this is not the solution that the sector needs.

3:10

There are charities within this sector, but they account for a mere 30 per cent of the organizations, Madam Chair. The current ask for this sector is immediate emergency funding totalling \$30 million for staff recruitment and retention. They are saying that these are vital – absolutely vital – funds that they need to be able to continue to provide services and for them to be able to continue to support communities and Albertans that depend on these services.

We know, Madam Chair, that Albertans are struggling. We know that the cost of living is absolutely hammering Alberta families and that so many Alberta families and individuals are reaching out to those nonprofit organizations, those charitable organizations. So the same argument that the member that introduced this is using as to why charitable donations are down is the same argument as to why individuals are accessing these services more.

Having this piece of legislation is definitely a positive – it's a wonderful first step – but it is not what the sector needs right now. We've been hearing for years that this sector needs real supports, a real strategy that will help retention and help employees come to the sector. We're losing people.

There's such a disconnect between being able to support Albertans in a meaningful way and this government. There's an opportunity here for all of the arguments that the member stated as to why this piece of legislation is needed. It would counterargue why this government needs to actually provide support and financial backing to this sector. We have so many organizations that

have come out, that have been pleading with the government. I would urge all members to read the report that was put out by CCVO, to talk about what they're really asking, what the real needs of Albertans are at this time.

I would say that we've heard loud and clear that this nonprofit sector is in a dire situation. We know that there are so many services that have no longer been available for Albertans, and we cannot allow this to happen. These nonprofits are the space where so many Albertans turn to. This is their church organizations. These are . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate in Committee of the Whole? Do I see none? Sorry. I was confused by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane running around over there. But I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie rising to speak.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak to Bill 202, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. First of all, I'd like to start off just by thanking the hon. Member for Peace River for his thoughtful work in bringing this bill forward, particularly at a time like this. When we're looking at rising costs and pressures on families and pressures on communities, I think it's really thoughtful to bring forward a bill like this to encourage those that can to give charitably and to create a financial incentive to do so. I think that it's a very timely piece of work and a timely offering. Bill 202 is actually quite simple, proposing to amend the Alberta income tax act, making it more affordable for generous Albertans who already give to give to charity by amending the act to increase the tax credit on the first \$200 of charitable donations in each tax year.

We know, Madam Chair, that charities in Alberta play a vital role in our communities by providing essential services and supports to individuals and families in need. We know – and the data shows – the power of civil society to build and support community. We know that civil society is more effective than government in responding in real time to emerging community needs and to do more with less. They always have been, and they always will be. We saw that. We saw that through the pandemic, that civil society rose to the occasion in community after community across this province as needs emerged.

So I'll say again that I'm happy to support the bill, Bill 202. I think it's timely. I think an incentivization of charitable donation is always a good idea, quite frankly. Under this legislation the nonrefundable charitable tax credit will be raised from 10 per cent to 60 per cent for donations under \$200 – that's a significant difference, Madam Chair – and combined with the federal 15 per cent, this would bring the tax credit in line with political donations at 75 per cent. I think that's important to note, too. I think it's been a polarizing time in politics, and to level that playing field for charities to have the same opportunity to be donated to and for citizens of Alberta to be compensated for that on their tax return: I think it's a great idea.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as an example, 2 out of every 5 Canadian charitable donors say their giving has dropped. I'm hoping that this bill will be a small way for Albertans, who are generally more charitable in their giving – I think Statistics Canada shows that Albertans give more than the average province – to raise those numbers back up again and to shift behaviour. Habits form over time, and when you get out of the habit of donating, I think it's important to create an incentive for people to get back into the habit. Between the global pandemic and continuing inflation, our

charitable organizations have struggled, to say the least. I think other members in this Chamber have spoken about that. There are a variety of ways to support them. This certainly isn't the only way, but I think it's a creative way and it's a simple way for our government to say, "Yes, we support the charities in our province, and we want to incentivize generous Albertans to think about giving to those charities."

Given that individual Canadian donors gave about \$10 billion to charities in 2018, the decrease in giving that's been indicated in current surveys indicates billions in lost revenue for these organizations. I'm hoping that this is one small way that our government and private members that are working on this bill can incentivize a shift in the other direction. Research from May of 2020 found that charities nationally were experiencing, on average, a 30.6 per cent decline in revenue since the start of the pandemic. So I'm hoping a few things. I'm hoping that the pandemic is largely behind us – I'm really hopeful that that's the case – and I'm hoping that we will return to some habits of giving that are more consistent with prepandemic levels as a province and, ultimately, as a country.

I was just going to tell a little story. I love WestJet. I don't know how many people in this Chamber know that, but I really love WestJet. I think that sometimes companies like that are very cutting edge in terms of the way that they incentivize good behaviour. I was delighted last night when I got my annual WestJet Christmas e-mail, which I love also, and it was: giving is receiving. They had this flight, a full flight of people, and the stewardess got on and told this really compelling story about her niece who was a child struggling with cancer. A very sad story. She did not win her battle with cancer, unfortunately. But what came out of that was a new charity and a way for other families to give to children struggling with cancer in their time of need. It was a very inspiring story.

What WestJet did is that for every mile that the flight took – or every kilometre, I guess; I'll be Canadian about it – they were giving a dollar to charity. Each person on that flight got to fill out a little card with the charity of their choice, and WestJet donated in their name for the kilometres flown on that flight. So if I was flying from Grande Prairie to Edmonton, it's roughly 450 kilometres. If my flight was chosen, then WestJet would have given \$450 to the charity of my choice. For that one flight WestJet gave, I think, over \$90,000 to charity. I just think that's remarkable.

Looking at the joy on the people's faces who came off that plane and the stories in this little video about why they chose the charities they did – they weren't expecting this; this was a total surprise to each person on that flight – what it meant to them in their communities, in their families, in their stories, I just thought it was brilliant, and it actually made me think about this bill. It's a small thing, but it gives people who may not have a lot an opportunity to give without it costing them as much, and it's meaningful to them. Each person coming off that WestJet flight talked with great passion about why they chose the charity they did and how excited they were to give back and to have some control over that. I think any time that government can get out of the way and empower citizens to support civil society, it's a win. It's a win.

Shifting these dollars from government to charities and donors strengthens civil society and it supports taxpayers in directing their dollars to the community supports that they believe address the needs of their community, and I think that's part of the power of this bill. This is giving the citizen the power to choose, and if that isn't enough, Mr. Speaker, we remember that the nonprofit or voluntary sector contributes \$9.6 billion in revenues to the Alberta economy. Sorry, Madam Chair. I called you Mr. Speaker. I apologize. Not only that, but approximately 176,000 Albertans are employed in the sector.

3:20

I just really am supportive of this bill. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it. I want to again thank the Member for Peace River for his thoughtful work on this.

Before I conclude, I just want to take an opportunity to thank all of the volunteers, all of the organizers, all of the donors from my constituency of Grande Prairie who give generously. Grande Prairie is a notoriously generous community, and I'm very, very proud to be a part of it. As a matter of fact, there's a fundraiser hosted by a famous Grande Prairie resident named Tenille Townes, and she regularly, annually, brings in between half a million and a million dollars a year at this point to keep the Sunrise House open. It's a passion in the community, and she's been the spark to that passion.

I hope that this change, if passed, will be a spark for people to ignite their own passions in their own communities right across Alberta, and I want to thank those working in the nonprofit sector in Alberta and certainly in my community of Grande Prairie for all the important work they do to support their communities, particularly in a time of need, and I want to wish them all a merry Christmas.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. Happy to support Bill 202. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, for a chance to say a few words around Bill 202, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022, which, I believe, in short, is changing the numbers by which you can apply for a return for a charitable gift and increasing that amount. Categorically I think this is a good idea. Other speakers have already outlined how many of our nonprofits and charitable organizations are experiencing some tough times – right? – which is a direct reflection of our economic circumstances where average Albertans: you know, in real terms their incomes have been reduced over the last four years and more because of inflation and because of perhaps the lowest growth rate, more like a stagnant growth rate, in the country in terms of wages. Alberta seems to be the number one province for that, which is unfortunate.

So all of the things that are associated with our economy are made more stagnant, too, when you're not moving money into the hands of the majority of Albertans, right? There are a few Albertans that are making lots of money, but most are not. Our charitable tax regime is sort of an effect of that. People have less money to donate, so we try to create ways to incentivize people to make those donations.

Yeah. I think that we are in support of this concept as well, but there are a couple of caveats, Madam Chair, that I think are very important to put on the table, the first of which – and it's a genuine concern – is that if we are giving a more generous tax return for people making donations, I hope that in no way would this incentivize this UCP government to cut their contributions to our nonprofit sector. If that's the case, then I cannot support this bill at all. Like, if this is in any way a window or a chance to open up – and I can see hand signals. That's great. That's good. I'm glad to hear that. We just have to make sure that we're not just giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

I heard the hon. Member for Grande Prairie, you know, talk about the government getting out of the way of corporations to donate. Well, that's not what we're doing here at all. In fact, it's important that we create a circumstance by which the people can make a donation. I mean, that's the government doing that job. Any change like this does not preclude our responsibility to those same nonprofits.

We know that nonprofits, I believe, are contributing at least 5 and a half billion dollars to our gross domestic product here in Alberta. I heard the Member for Grande Prairie mentioning 9 and something billion. I think that's a little bit high, but I mean the point is still made that we have more than almost 300,000 people working in the nonprofit sector, so this whole notion is a significant part of the overall province's economy, quite frankly. Of course, that's not to say anything about the tremendous services that the nonprofit and charitable sectors do supply as well. I mean, that's kind of the point of giving them charitable tax status as well. You know, we have so many different social services being delivered to Albertans through this sector, and now more than ever we need to make sure that they are being supported.

I don't know, you know, if there's a way for us to formalize this, but I certainly will say it again, as my colleagues will, emphatically I'm sure, that this change to charitable tax returns should not provide an excuse for provincial funding to the nonprofit sector, right? Those two things cannot go together, and if they don't, then I'm feeling pretty good about this bill, really, quite frankly.

The other issue that I wanted to bring up, which is very important, is that we heard other people talking about getting people into the habit of donating and keeping them in the habit of donating, so I would suggest that part of this bill is to ensure that it's put out in the front window of our provincial communications that this change has taken place so that people know that you donate \$100 and you'll get \$30 back in April when you file your tax returns – right? – something like that, so that you make it a real, tangible thing. Then once you get people on to donating to a charity of their choice, then they'll be likely to continue to do so often for the rest of their working lives. Passing this bill and then putting quite an aggressive education campaign to Albertans about this new tax opportunity, I think, really would make a difference.

The third thing I wanted to mention – and again I don't know exactly how this comes out in the wash – is just for us to lobby the federal government to pursue a similar pattern of a more generous tax return for charitable donations from the federal CRA, okay? Again, that's a more significant part of our overall tax payments that we make every year to different levels of government, so for the federal government to be similarly looking at a more generous deduction, I think, would be a really great idea. We could do this here and then use it as a signal to the federal government to make those changes for all Canadians, really, because I bet that whatever is happening with the nonprofit and charitable industry in Alberta is also happening in all the other provinces and territories, too. That's always a good way to co-operate as part of a confederation, right? You know, having those conversations with the federal government, I think, is a good idea.

Yeah. I mean, I don't want to talk too long about this bill because I know other people want to, but, again, if I could just summarize, changing the tax deduction numbers is a good idea, but in no way should it be an excuse to reduce the provincial responsibility to nonprofits and charities that we have as a government; and, two, once this does occur, that there is an education program so that Albertans can realize that there's something to be taken advantage of here for this tax year – I don't know if it's possible to do it for this tax year, but ASAP, then once you get people on to the notion of a generous tax return when they file in April, then they're more likely to create a whole new generation of donors that can help us – and, finally, to suggest that a similar change to the deductible numbers for donations from the federal government would be a nice notion to leverage this particular bill. In sum, I'm quite supportive with those three suggestions, constructive criticisms, of course, for the bill. That's it.

Thanks.

The Chair: Members to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

3:30

Mr. Gottfried: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. And great thanks to the Member for Peace River for bringing it to the House for debate and hopeful passage.

Madam Chair, Albertans are generous, and they're warm-hearted – and we've seen that so much in the past – and a moving force with respect to addressing the opportunities which community members have to support the charities and those great organizations that help to, I guess, fulfill a broader scope in our community and sometimes to meet some of the needs that aren't met by government and other organizations. It's a great initiative to see tax donations that are being increased for the under-\$200 amounts from 10 per cent to 60 per cent – of course, with the federal applications to that bringing it up to a total of 75 per cent, which also aligns with political tax credits, which I think is good. Politics and the charitable sector should be comparable, and people should be able to make the choices of where they direct their dollars.

Madam Chair, we've seen in the past – I know that there has been a marked decline in charitable donations for a number of years, but to maybe take people back to what I think was one of the world's, the globe's greatest outpourings of support was during the 2004 tsunami, Indian Ocean tsunami, which I happened to have survived by running from that wave and coming back and doing some of my own charitable work through the Red Cross at the time. As we know, not only did we get tax credits, but there were also contributions from government at that time, which we've seen through various things, including some of our support of relief efforts in Ukraine.

But this is actually going to change the landscape, change the foundational tax credit for charities to go forward, and hopefully to encourage people to get back and to embrace that heart of giving, which we know Albertans are so proud of and I think so focused on, supporting the vulnerable in our communities. But we can understand; you know, the last six or seven years have been tough from an economic perspective, from the pandemic perspective. Many people have lost their jobs and now are regaining those jobs, gratefully, thanks to many actions of our government.

This is an opportunity for us to set a foundation which says to people, not only those with the disposable income to do so, but even those that want to plan giving as part of their day-to-day budgets – I think that this is an important opportunity for all Albertans. I think we all try and teach our children that, you know, if there is an allowance or if they're earning money in the community or cutting lawns or whatever it is, to actually take a portion of that and budget that to give back to community, Madam Chair. I think that that's important for us as a lesson to pass on to future generations.

Now with this bill we have an opportunity for that to be, I think, solidified into our tax system, that people understand that charitable giving is not only something that they should do and can do, that when they're doing well, they can do more good, but that it actually can benefit them from a tax perspective at the same time and that there's a net benefit to the community, a net benefit back to them as well that supports them and encourages them to be more generous. I think that these are things that we have to embrace even as we face financial challenges, and we know some people are struggling to meet ends and hence much of the work we're doing on affordability within this particular session of our Legislature.

I'd like to sort of take a look at some opportunities and maybe just localize it a little bit more. I know that even in my own

constituency we have some groups that have been struggling, but they work hard. I'll use the Rotary Club of Calgary-Fish Creek as an example. During this past summer they raised over \$15,000 to support other charities, as we know the Rotary Club does. They take that money and they turn 100 per cent and sometimes more than that in volunteer hours back.

They hosted a pub quiz, which saw an additional \$2,000 donated to I Can for Kids. They've supported HomeSpace, which is an affordable housing provider in Calgary. They partnered with HomeSpace and other Rotary clubs in Calgary to raise over \$72,000 to upgrade eight family units of affordable housing. Recently the clubs got together to pack boxes for operation Christmas child, bringing 125 smiles to children around the world and hosting similar events to help families, kids, and other local, smaller charities. So here we have just a small organization – it's not one of the long-standing ones; it's a more recently formed Rotary Club – that does some great work. That tax credit increase, I think, will help them to raise more funds in the future.

Madam Chair, this morning I had a chance to do an announcement down at Fish Creek park in my backyard, the namesake of my constituency, and the Friends of Fish Creek were there. A new partnership has been created between them and the province in terms of some of the environmental work that they do. But the beauty of that organization is that they have over 200 regular volunteers – I think 13,000 hours of volunteering just this past year – and they do their own fundraising. So this will help organizations like that who work with us. The civil society groups that bring forward their volunteer efforts: they bring forward their fundraising efforts. They bring forward expertise and knowledge, and they complement what we do as government, which is the way it should work, when we have the public sector and the private sector and the not-for-profit sector working together.

I remember when I was in the corporate world, we went down, about 35 of us from the company I was with at the time, and we picked thistles out of the park. We did it in co-operation with the Friends of Fish Creek, who needed to make sure that they had volunteers there to supervise us, who also had some staff members there to help us. Again, you have that partnership of the public sector, the not-for-profit sector, and the private sector coming together, possibly from the private sector it can be in donations or in time from their staff to assist those groups.

Those are the types of partnerships I think that we're empowering by this type of legislation, Madam Chair. I thank, again, the Member for Peace River for bringing this forward because I think these are things we talk about all the time. How can we help people to be more generous in their communities? How can we help them to consider giving back to their communities or maybe it's to the province or maybe it's a global cause that they can contribute to? This will allow us – if we pass this and we do it right and we bring it to the attention of Albertans and say to them, "You know, you can be more generous and it's not going to cost you; net amount to you is going to be the same or less," maybe you can give more generously than you have in the past and, as importantly as I'd mentioned before, to teach future generations that that giving should be part of when they're doing well, or well enough, to be able to do some good in the community by giving back.

So, Madam Chair, I'd just like to encourage everybody in this House, in this Chamber, to support Bill 202, and I'd like to again thank the good work of the member and those who have spoken on this bill. I think that there's a common theme here, which is that we have an opportunity to encourage the not-for-profit sector to work more closely, to develop their donor bases, and to encourage those donor bases to give more generously.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'll keep my comments brief because I do know that there are other members that are wishing to speak to this piece of legislation, Bill 202, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. Now, I appreciate all the comments that the members have been making in regard to looking at trying to encourage Albertans to continue to donate to different organizations within their local communities.

One of the pieces that we've been hearing in consultation with many of the voluntary sectors is the concern around looking at having stable staffing and stable funding. Now, I recognize that the concern about, you know, supporting nonprofits and charitable organizations and being able to fund raise is an important conversation to have, but we also know that donations that go to these organizations can be inconsistent. It's very difficult for organizations to create an annual budget, to be able to provide those services, whether it be anything from mental health supports to local food banks to culture or language supports and a variety of other things, that can look at the financial budget for the year and say: well, this is what we're going to be able to provide to our local communities, and then on top of that, be able to, hopefully, fund raise to expand our supports and our services to those local areas.

Now, of course, fundraising is very important, and I don't disagree with that, but I think that as a government we do have a responsibility to ensure that that base funding is continuously available so that we can make sure these organizations know and are able to predict their future financial means. Although I appreciate the intent of the act that the member has put forward, being able to encourage Albertans to continue to support their local communities and charities, depending on whatever it is for them, I would also like to hear from the government that there is also a commitment from the government to be able to support that base funding. As we know, the base funding is important. It does ensure that the services that are being provided by these organizations are consistent and that they don't face the continuous concern about whether or not they're going to be able to function year over year over year.

What we've heard is that many of these organizations were significantly impacted over the last couple of years. Their demand for services increased during COVID, and they continue to increase as we hit the affordability crisis, with many individuals seeking supports for mental health as well as looking at supports for, you know, food costs and utility costs and things like that.

3:40

What we've been hearing is that many organizations within this sector are looking at ensuring that they have a total of \$30 million for staff recruitment and retention. Of course, as we've heard, many of these organizations, although they do depend on volunteers, also need to ensure that they have consistent staffing to run those programs and that it's not just a hundred per cent volunteer based. You know, you need that administrative component and those experts in the area to be able to provide that support.

Although the intent of the bill is good and encouraging Albertans to engage and be part of their local communities is important, we need to ensure that those basic needs are still being met through those organizations. Of course, you know, we need to be looking at settlement opportunities, seniors' supports. Many of these organizations offer sports and recreation opportunities for low-income families. They're also, you know, supporting local entrepreneurs when it comes to our multicultural communities.

Many of those services help build healthy communities and engage with those who may not have those opportunities in the same way as others. Looking at the fact that, in addition to that, we know that about 78 per cent of the individuals that work in these local communities tend to be women and that there is a substantial contribution to our GDP at about \$5.5 billion annually, the return on the investment by the government to ensure that these programs continue to function and are funded appropriately is also part of this conversation.

I look forward to seeing in the next provincial budget that that funding will be made available so that there is consistency in the programs being offered, and then, in addition and on top of that, we're able to see an increase in the donations that are being provided on behalf of Albertans that will help to expand the services that are already being provided.

Again, I think the intention of the legislation is good, but I just want to ensure that the government is also acknowledging their responsibilities in ensuring that that base funding is still available so that organizations are not solely relying on those donations annually to run the basic programs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Pon: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. It is my great pleasure to talk about this Bill 202. If there is one thing that my office hears from my constituents in Calgary-Beddington, it's all about affordability. This is why I'm so pleased to speak today to support Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. My constituents in Alberta are not only struggling to cover the inflation costs of their utility bills and groceries, but they also are being forced to deal with increases to the carbon tax, which is, of course, what the NDP and their friends in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, support. It's really sad to see the NDP support Ottawa over Alberta.

Thankfully, Madam Chair, under this UCP government Alberta's economy has rebounded from the NDP four-year disaster in office and the unprecedented worldwide pandemic. Because of the UCP government's discipline to hold the line on spending after the last four years, we are now in a position where we can offer significant relief to Albertans at the time when they need it the most, unlike the NDP, who would have kept unsustainable deficit spending and placed the burden on our children and grandchildren and all the future generations. We, this government, are helping Albertans.

Madam Chair, under Bill 2, the Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, this UCP government will provide over \$2.8 billion in relief to Albertans to help them deal with this inflation and affordability crisis. For seniors, who are much of the time on fixed incomes, and parents who are struggling to pay their overloaded grocery bills right now, this UCP government will provide a total of \$600 in monthly installments for every senior and child under 18 in a household if their family earns under \$180,000 per year.

For Albertans that struggle to pay their utility bill right now, this UCP government will provide \$200 more than originally planned in an electricity rebate from January to April of 2023, bringing the total above \$500. Albertans will also be protected from the price spike over the winter as the government of Alberta will extend the natural gas rebate indefinitely. Our government will make zero-interest loans available to providers to support the deferrals, which will ensure that nobody is forced to pay more than 13.5 cents per kilowatt hour this winter.

Madam Chair, this UCP government will also suspend the fuel tax of 13.6 cents per litre of gasoline.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, hon. member. The hon. member has a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Sabir: I rise under 23(b). The member so far is not speaking to the motion at hand. It's completely irrelevant to what we are debating here.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. This is clearly not a point of order. The Member for Calgary-Beddington is speaking to a matter that is relevant to the issues being debated. We are talking about a bill that talks about the need to provide and to support charities across the province, and she is contrasting our record versus that of the NDP. Therefore, this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Hon. members, it's that time of the afternoon. It's a good time to remind all members that we are on Bill 202 and should speak to the matter as such.

Given that, I will ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington to continue with this caution in mind.

Debate Continued

Ms Pon: Thank you, Madam Chair. This continues from January to June of 2023 regardless of the price of oil, and it will remain in place afterwards subject to the price of oil.

Furthermore, under Bill 202 AISH, the Alberta child and family benefit, income support, and the Alberta seniors' benefit will be indexed to inflation, increasing the payments to the most vulnerable by 6 per cent. This will make the best social programs in the country even better.

Albertans know that we need to share our prosperity with the most vulnerable to make sure that we are all supported. Under just the Alberta child and family benefit indexation a family of four children will receive an additional \$307 in payment per year.

With Bill 2, Madam Chair, our government will also index Alberta's personal income tax ...

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Just a clarification. We're on Bill 202, not Bill 2. I'm wondering if you have some different notes there that might be more helpful to this debate, and/or just a caution that we're on Bill 202, not Bill 2.

Please proceed. The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Pon: Thank you. My apology. I should have said Bill 202.

Our government will also index the Alberta personal income tax to inflation retroactively to 2022. This means that a significant number of Albertans will receive a refund or owe less tax after they file their income tax for this year. On top of that, Madam Chair, this will increase the number of Albertans that pay absolutely no provincial personal income tax; the number will rise by up to 95,000 Albertans, to a total of about 1.3 million.

Madam Chair, this support means that some of the most vulnerable Albertans right now will receive several thousand dollars in increased support in the next year alone. They don't need to decide between eating and staying warm anymore; Albertans will be able to do both. I know this support will make a huge difference for all of us, for all

Albertans, and I applaud this government in making this right choice to target this relief to those that need it the most.

3:50

These are just some of the ways that this UCP government will help Albertans struggling to heat their homes and fuel their tanks or put food on the table. I only listed some of the actions that our government is taking, but more is being done to help Albertans across the province. Madam Chair, this is why I'm so proud to stand up today in support of Bill 202, the inflation relief statutes amendment act . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Bill 202 is the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. One final reminder to speak to the bill, or I will have to cut your time.

Please proceed.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Madam Chair. Remind me again.

Anyways, I'm almost done sharing my thoughts with you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm proud to speak to Bill 202, the personal income tax act, as opposed to the previous speech, which was a campaign platform speech which had little relevance to this bill.

Now, I'll keep my comments brief. I know that there are a lot of members in the Chamber that also want to comment on this. I'm speaking to Bill 202. I'm pretty confident that I'm speaking to Bill 202. We've heard from a number of charitable and voluntary organizations that they're in a situation that they're referring to as quite dire as far as the need for emergency or urgent funding in order to continue to operate.

The one piece that I will agree with from the previous speaker is that high inflation is causing additional challenges for our not-for-profit and charitable sectors. It is placing a larger burden on the services and supports that many of these organizations around the province offer. We also recognize, and I appreciate there's been some comment on the fact, that many of these charitable organizations that lie outside of the two major urban centres are for some communities the only on-the-ground supports that community members can access, so it's critical that they have the resources to be able to support their communities.

Now, I am in favour of this bill. I appreciate where this is coming from as far as increasing the tax receipt portion that Albertans can get to try to incentivize Albertans to donate more. We know that Albertans are very generous, but this increase or change in the charitable tax receipt will hopefully translate into millions of more dollars from Albertans to charities that provide critical work.

What I will say is that my caution and my concern is that the government will interpret this bill as replacing the core funding that charities and not-for-profits require to be able to function, and I do not support that notion, Madam Chair. There is an absolute responsibility that the government has to ensure that our charitable, not-for-profit sector is adequately funded.

This is a way to support or provide a tool for those charities to be able to generate more dollars to provide supports, especially in light of inflation. I think immediately of organizations that support families when it comes to direct support for food, for utilities. Those are going to be facing even higher costs.

The spirit of this bill and the intention of this bill I strongly support, but again not-for-profits have – in order to fulfill their mandates, they need to be able to recruit and retain staff, and that's the crux of where they have come to the Official Opposition caucus. And I'm sure the government caucus has heard it as well, that they need some of that base funding in order to be able to hire. They cannot rely on donations to make their staffing budgets because every year there could be huge swings depending on the amount of donations that come in.

My hope is that the government will not abandon their responsibility to this sector, that they will in fact fund them and increase funding, give them predictability, long-term commitments, and use this as a tool for these entities to enhance the dollars that they get on a year-by-year basis.

With that, Madam Chair, I know other members are interested in speaking to this bill. I'm mindful of the clock, and I will take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Who can measure the value of compassion and generosity? It's because of that that I really want to highlight the importance of the passing of Bill 202, which increases the tax exemption available on the first \$200 of giving to Alberta charities. It'll encourage new people to give that maybe haven't given in the past. Maybe it'll even encourage some not-for-profits to also obtain charitable status to strengthen them. But the important thing here is that I think all Albertans understand the value of compassion and generosity, charity, if you want, in our communities so that we can continue to support one another through all the challenges of life. Civil society, in fact, is built on the free and independent action of individuals expressing their goodwill and their generosity to people around them in their neighbourhoods, in their communities.

Just a brief story from my constituency, Lacombe-Ponoka. A few weeks ago the Lacombe Police Service hosted its charity Checkstop event, which is held every year during this time. I know that nobody likes to get stopped by the police, but if you get stopped by the police and have an opportunity to express your generosity and make a donation, that's an extremely valuable thing, so kudos to the police for stopping as many as they possibly can. You know, when the men and women of our police service spend their Saturday collecting donations of food and toys and money to give to multiple charities, ranging from the Lacombe Food Bank to Big Brothers & Big Sisters, that is a good thing. The Checkstop is just one of those examples, among many, of the value that charities provide to our communities. It brings people closer together, encouraging community building between individuals and institutions while supporting those in need.

This generosity shown by my constituents is one of the reasons I'm standing here today in support of Bill 202. Charitable contributions, though, have been in decline for the last couple of years and have decreased even faster during the pandemic with the current affordability crisis. In spite of this, there's still a spirit of generosity amongst Albertans, but I really want to throw out a challenge to the constituents of Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds, and the rural areas around to donate whatever you can to support your province and your people.

I want to remind Lacombe-Ponokans that in 2014 Lacombe was recognized by the Canada Revenue Agency as the most generous community per capita of any city or town in the country, the most generous community in Canada. That was in 2014. More recently I just found an article from March of 2022 that Lacombe has slipped to third place. So my challenge to Lacombe-Ponoka residents is: we need to be back in first place. We need to find that same generosity. We need to return to the place where we are giving to our communities around us. That's my challenge to Lacombe-Ponoka. A year from now I want to

see Revenue Canada report you as the most generous community in Canada, not just Alberta, and I dare any other constituency to match it.

Just to reinforce that a little bit, I heard on the news this morning that wages generally across Canada from November of this year to November of last year are actually up 5 per cent. There's room there, my friends. I have to throw out a little bit of a statistic, though, to further raise the challenge. While we may have been number 1 and are now number 3, did you know that the per cent of annual giving to annual income across Canada is 1.5 per cent? It's not a very big number. It wouldn't hurt very many of us to give a little bit more, especially with a 5 per cent average across-the-country, I understand, wage increase over the last year. For those of you that are giving more than \$200, I know this doesn't necessarily impact you, but my challenge to you there is: hey, this is your chance to make sure that the Laurentian Liberals in Ottawa get less and that it stays in your own community. Give to your local community rather than to the Liberals in Ottawa. So that's my challenge.

4:00

We need to encourage this practice. We need to make it easier for people across the province to give so that they can get the help that's required, so that we can pay respectable wages to those who are working in these sectors. We need to make sure this all stays in our own local communities. That's what we need to be doing.

That's why I'm supporting this bill. That's why I think it's a great idea. The people of our province who donate our time as volunteers and money as donors do have an outsized impact for people who need generosity and who today may receive but tomorrow may give. One day we give; one day we receive. This is why it's so important that we Albertans show our support for all the charities in our local communities by supporting Bill 202.

Encouraging more Albertans to help these charities by increasing the tax incentive is one of the ways that as a government we are trying to help the not-for-profit and charitable sector. We introduced crowdfunding as a tool, free to use for them, a while ago. There have been government matching donation programs.

By the way, I almost forgot to say that there are also many corporations where you may work that will match your donation as well. While you may only give \$200 and you'll get 75 per cent of it back in your tax, if your corporation matches it, it becomes \$400 or maybe even \$600 in some cases. It doesn't really even cost us that much. We just need to open up our hearts and learn the practice of being charitable and giving and generous and kind to one another.

It will increase the revenue that charities receive, and it will help Albertans to be more generous than they've ever been before. From supporting seniors to newborns, from food to toys, everything in between, our not-for-profits and our charities constitute a pillar foundation in our society. As a conservative I am committed to making sure that we support the independent operation of nonprofits and charities created, really, out of the passion and the hard work, the volunteerism, the donations of individual Albertans all across our province in every community making their community a better place. That's what this is all about.

Madam Chair, this bill is important because it reduces taxes. It incentivizes generosity and compassionate society. It helps Albertans, and I believe that it can be a real support for our nonprofit and charitable sector. Any number of new donors that the passage of this bill creates is worth it. Every single dollar counts when it's committed to important causes like this. I, quite frankly, think this should be a nonpartisan bill, a nonpartisan issue. We must support each other. Our society is built on community, and community means helping others in times of need.

I believe that by increasing the capacity of that independent action, the members of the House stand for principles of generosity and goodwill, and that's something that I think we can and we should all support. There couldn't be a more timely moment as we enter the Christmas season, the holiday season. It seems like in our world these days peace and goodwill are in short supply. We can change that a little bit today by the passing of this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair. It stands for good things, and I think we can all stand for that, so let's work together for the betterment of our province and our people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 202? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to make a couple of comments here today to Bill 202. We're going to be very brief. The move towards allowing Albertans to be able to get a better break on their taxes when they give to a charity is going to be really important, and I know that in my community, where so much of the help that we give those that are less fortunate is coming through private charities, it's going to be important for us to be able to provide the incentive for Albertans to be able to do that. This will help things like Warming Hearts in Drayton Valley. It'll help things like the opportunity home. It'll help the warming centre. It'll help the shelter pods that are in Drayton Valley that cater to about a hundred homeless people.

I would just like to stand and, for a couple of minutes, ask this House to consider Bill 202 and to support it. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill? [interjection] I will decide when the question is called.

I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Premier to rise and report out of committee. Would you like to make a motion to rise and report?

Mr. Madu: Yes, Madam Chair. I ask that we rise and report on Bill 202.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: We shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 202.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

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

**Bill 203
Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties)
Amendment Act, 2022**

Mr. Toor: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 203, the Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022.

Every day Albertans across the province tragically lose their lives as a consequence of unsafe driving. Oftentimes those who perish as a result of their own unsafe driving are our youngest drivers testing the limits of their vehicles in attempts to peer pressure or to impress their friends. This heartbreaking reality is something that we as elected officials should do more to prevent. Excessive high speeding is a criminal act that does not only endanger the drivers themselves but all other Albertans who use the roadways where these crimes are being committed.

In order to protect the people of this province from these needless, preventable traffic accidents, we must act. Therefore, I am pleased to introduce this bill. The proposed bill would strengthen the penalties in place for excessive speeding in Alberta so that would-be reckless drivers are more thoroughly deterred from endangering themselves and also others while those who still violate the law are punished more severely. Alberta, quite frankly, is lagging behind other provinces when it comes to pursuing more severe penalties for excessive driving or speeding. Other provinces have rightfully strengthened their laws surrounding these crimes, and it is time for us to follow suit to help to prevent any more needless injuries or deaths.

If passed, Bill 203 would increase the maximum fine for excessive speeding to \$5,000 and introduce an automatic seven-day licence suspension for anybody caught excessively speeding. Additionally, there would be an option of a seven-day discretionary impound to be decided by law enforcement on a case-by-case basis.

The time to implement these more severe penalties is now. In the past few months alone there have been high-profile incidents both in Calgary and Edmonton. The two cities claimed the most excessive speeding and street racing that involved unavoidable accidents. Two months ago two Albertans were killed in a two-vehicle crash that authorities believe to have been the result of a street race. Even more recently, last month, I think, two vehicles crashed on the High Level Bridge here in Edmonton, both of which were involved in a street race. The saddest thing about crashes like these is that they are entirely avoidable. They're caused by reckless bravado, specifically amongst our youth.

4:10

My priority as an elected official is ensuring the safety of Albertans, and it is my conviction that passing this bill will greatly improve road safety in our province, especially in the residential areas. I'm proud to say that despite incidents like this, as I mentioned previously, Alberta still has the lowest fatality rate of any province. Most Albertans are committed to road safety as they know that acting responsibly on the road keeps us all safe. A notable exception to this rule involves those who excessively speed and others who drive recklessly.

It is so important that these people receive the punishment they deserve when they commit these crimes. Through mandatory licence suspension and discretionary vehicle impounding, drivers who commit these needlessly dangerous acts will be prevented from doing so again in the immediate future. Their friends will hear about their fine and the suspension and will rethink twice before ever going 40 K over the limit, especially in the cities of Calgary and

Edmonton. Deterrents are extremely important. Madam Speaker, it is much better if we prevent drivers from doing this in the first place more than it is to get them serious penalties. On top of this, the increased fines will further contribute to deterrence so that these drivers will not act so dangerously again after their licences and vehicles are returned to them.

As stated earlier, this bill would bring Alberta's penalty for excessive speeding more into alignment with other provinces. Ontario's excessive speeding penalties are similar to the changes proposed by this bill. Additionally, these increased penalties have been requested by police chief associations, community associations, residents, and especially the people who live in so-dense communities like Calgary-North East. The implementation of similar penalties in Ontario has been seeing results. The number of people charged for committing these dangerous crimes increased, and the laws have given police in Ontario more options to make the streets safer.

This problem has not gone unnoticed. Multiple city councillors in Calgary and Edmonton have noted the problem and need more options to deal with it. Those who have committed their lives to protecting Albertans in all areas of life, not just on the road, believe that increasing the severity of these penalties will improve road safety. When organizations like the police chief association make requests like this, I as an elected official do not take it lightly. According to research done by this association, the large portion of speeding drivers – 40 per cent, to be exact – are between the ages of 16 and 24. Evidently, this same age group also has the highest traffic casualty rate of any age group; it's almost 80 per cent.

This same age demographic is also most likely to engage in excessive speeding, especially in residential areas. When these young people engage in excessive speeding, they endanger themselves and others. In their I'll call it silly attempts to impress their friends or peer pressure or to show off, Albertans can be severely injured or even killed. These young drivers need to learn to respect the power they have when they go out behind the wheel. Without more severe penalties for acts as dangerous as excessive speeding these young people may continue to take these unnecessary risks. Parents would agree that oftentimes it is important to be strict with your children, especially when they are pursuing a course of action with consequences that they do not fully understand. If a young person is caught excessively speeding and receives the penalty outlined in this bill, they will be far less likely to commit the same acts again. Preventing the repetition of criminal behaviour works to increase community safety and to prevent death or injury that may have occurred if the penalties were less severe.

Preserving life and limb is the main motivation behind the bill. Taking every reasonable step, we can keep Albertans safe as our top priority. These penalties will increase public safety. If these penalties were not seen as effective, then their implementation would not have been called for, especially by the police chief associations. By ensuring that the penalties surrounding excessive driving are proportionate to the crime, all Albertans will be made safer. This includes young drivers who may be tempted towards recklessness, other drivers who expect . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon as critic for transportation to speak to Bill 203, the Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022. I would be hesitant to suggest that the traffic safety issues that are caused by excessive speeding are anything but a significant concern to all Albertans. We've all experienced times on our Alberta highways when somebody has gone blowing by us at a crazy high speed which scared the daylight out of ourselves and/or

our passengers and we wondered, of course, what in the heck this individual might be thinking, disorderly and irresponsible behaviour that, as the previous mover of the private member's bill has suggested, brings great harm and injury to Albertans as a result of their risky behaviour.

However, the member who brought forward this piece of legislation, as a general rule, should be reminded that, of course, any time we are looking at increasing the consequences regarding punishment or deterrents for traffic infractions, that is something that we should be considering after consultations have been done. I'm wondering if indeed the member – he alluded to certain consultations, and they seem to be rather informal attempts at consulting with members of police forces and members of the public.

[Mrs. Aheer in the chair]

I'm just wondering if indeed there were municipalities involved. He mentioned quite often the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary as places where high-speed infractions were quite prevalent, speed racing quite prevalent. Some high-profile incidents have occurred where injuries took place, unfortunately. I'm wondering if indeed the member has spoken directly to the municipal authorities in Edmonton and Calgary about these proposed changes in enforcement to the bill that he proposes in Bill 203.

Has the Rural Municipalities association been formally consulted? Other large Alberta municipalities: have they had the opportunity to express themselves to the minister in a formal way rather than an ad hoc way that it seems as though the member was describing? I wonder if the consultation took place. I think it's important to have those talks with the people involved in administering the roadways and the speeds in their particular municipalities and jurisdictions.

The Alberta Motor Association often will conduct studies and bring forth their public opinion about changes to legislation. Most recently, of course, they spoke about the blue lights on tow trucks and had some concerns about implementation there that were openly expressed publicly.

4:20

I would like the member to really inform the House as to what formal consultations took place before he came forward with the bill, the private member's bill, that he's promoting, because, of course, public safety is everybody's concern, Madam Speaker. We all want to minimize the carnage on our highways throughout the province. One of the – well, the most dangerous form of transportation, of course, is on our highways versus trains or versus buses or versus aircraft.

We certainly want to minimize it, but there can be some unintended consequences to any legislation, and I think we see kind of a glaring example here in this piece of legislation when we talk about the people who might be captured by this increase in penalties for excessive speeding, who are travelling through what would be called transition zones, coming off an exit ramp from an Alberta highway – these are going to be divided highways, Madam Speaker – and entering into a lower speed zone to perhaps transition to another highway. Quite often we don't know exactly the lengths of those ramps transitioning from the highway speed, which is currently at 110, to the 80 kilometres or less of the area of speed that you might be going to to get to the next highway.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These are what we might call fishing holes, Madam Speaker, and Albertans, of course, are rightly concerned about photoradar and the use of it. It's been called a cash cow by our former transportation minister Mason when he was the minister in the NDP government. We want to avoid sort of replicating some things like that, where

we use a transition zone as a means of capturing people who otherwise might, you know, not be breaking the law with any malice; they just didn't slow down in time to get onto the off-ramp and transition to the next highway that they were travelling to.

That may be an unintended consequence, Madam Speaker, and I don't bring this up just as a matter of bringing something out of thin air. I have already mentioned in the House once about travelling in Australia, driving a camper van down the east coast of Australia, and coming home to find in the mail some rather large speeding tickets, two of them, that happened in transition zones. I recall seeing the lights flash on the photoradar unit that was in a vehicle that was parked in that transition zone, and I certainly know and recall exactly those two incidents because I was making a normal effort to slow down, and before I knew it, I was barely off the main highway onto the roundabout or to the off-ramp, the cloverleaf, to get onto the next highway, and, boom, the photoradar went off, and a ticket resulted twice. Luckily, they were reduced because I happened to be a visitor, but in the mail the ticket that I got was, like, 750 bucks for each infraction, so that would have been a significant amount of money.

We can capture tourists who are maybe not as familiar with our roadways innocently not slowing down quick enough when perhaps on a short exit ramp transitioning from the high-speed two-lane highway to a smaller highway and ending up with a ticket that will be super hefty and perhaps an immediate suspension of their licence or impounding of their vehicle. That's one of the situations off the top, Madam Speaker, that I'd like the member promoting this legislation to consider when looking at the sort of blanket application of new penalties and deterrents for individuals who would be speeding, especially at high, excessive rates.

The UCP members, Madam Speaker, seem to be sort of at crosspurposes on a couple of their pieces of legislation, particularly private members' bills. They seem to be a little confused about what their policy should be in relation to higher speeds on highways. They're driving, as one might say, in opposite directions on this. The reason that I say that is that earlier in 2021 another private member brought forward a bill, Bill 213, and it sought to actually increase highway speeds on Alberta's double highways, two-lane highways, from 110 kilometres an hour to 120 kilometres an hour, implying that perhaps speed wasn't a contributing factor to decreased public safety. The member who brought that forward, the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, kind of argued or implied that the higher speed would actually be an improvement to public safety because individuals were going that speed anyways, and they might as well just raise the speed limit.

That is in contrast to what we see here before us today, Madam Speaker, where Bill 203 is very clearly stating that, of course, speed contributes to higher danger on the highways and endangers public safety. I wish the UCP members just might get it straight when they decide upon whether they're going to be suggesting speed injures and kills or whether it actually harms the public and public safety. I think the public kind of gets it, but there is that element of confusion in the two pieces of legislation brought forward by private members regarding the impact of speeding on our highways. That as an aside, I think it's a pretty well-accepted doctrine that higher speeds contribute to higher rates of accidents.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have so much to say. It's going to be hard to say everything in 10 minutes. With the permission of the Member for Calgary-Falconridge I hope I can help to answer some of these questions, and I want to thank you very much for bringing this bill forward.

We're not talking, Madam Speaker, about a 10-kilometre increase on the highway; we're talking about in excess of 40 kilometres an hour in an 80-kilometre zone. In fact, I believe, yes, on page 3 of the bill, that when section 158 is amended, it's specifically speaking about the \$5,000 fine if you're driving at a speed of "40 kilometres per hour over a maximum speed limit that is 80 kilometres [an] hour or less."

We're not talking about a couple of kilometres here. This isn't a cash grab for speeding or for tourists that don't happen to understand the legislation. This is, like, excessive speeding. Excessive. Significantly different. Bill 213, that was brought forward by the member from Spruce Grove, was talking about increasing the highway speeds by 10 kilometres an hour. To the point, I mean, I drive that highway pretty much every week, like the rest of you. I'm fairly certain I don't stay at 110 kilometres an hour consistently on that highway, to be truthful.

I thought I would add my voice to this simply because – I'm very grateful for this piece of legislation – this is about prevention. This \$5,000 fine is added on to fines that already exist. This is a higher fine, and as the Member for Calgary-Falconridge was speaking about, this is actually about preventing deaths, Madam Speaker. This isn't a couple of kilometres over.

I would like to just address – the Member for Edmonton-McClung was talking about fishing holes. I don't understand how 40 kilometres an hour over an 80-kilometre hour zone is in any way a fishing hole. That's not a fishing hole. It's criminal. To that point, the deaths that happen – the member had already relayed some of the numbers of the deaths that happen as a result of collisions. I want to give, actually, a few personal examples just to help illustrate why this legislation is necessary. Like I said, I just need to repeat that these aren't fishing holes. This isn't a cash grab. This is excessive speeding.

For example, not only are we engaging in education about that, but you add alcohol and drugs to this whole scenario, and in fact this excessive speeding and stunting happens when the roads are actually fairly empty. It happens between 11 p.m. and 3 in the morning. This is when the deaths are happening, and they're happening to our young people.

I'm a parent of a 24- and a 26-year-old. I remember when they got their drivers' licences how excited they were but having that conversation around, you know, speeding. This is a completely – completely – different conversation. We're looking at a 22.3 per cent fatality amongst drivers that are travelling at these speeds; 22.3 per cent.

4:30

This is not a fishing hole, Madam Speaker. This is about prevention of death and also making sure that we're engaging with the demographic that is actually finding themselves either – I mean, the folks that are involved in this excessive speeding: it's not only them. Their friends are dying. There's injury, criminality. Should they choose to do anything else in their lives and have these charges against them for the rest of their lives, particularly when they're young, it could impact everything that they do in the future.

I actually am so grateful for this legislation, to the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, because it's not only about the fine; it's actually about education. You cannot change anything if you don't have preventative measures in there to make sure that there are serious consequences for this behaviour.

In Chestermere, in fact, in my riding of Chestermere-Strathmore, there was a police officer monitoring speeds on range road 284, which is just near, actually, where I live. I don't know if the member remembers this. We share some roads between the rural constituency that I'm in and the city constituency that he's in. They caught a driver going double the limit, weaving in and out of traffic. By the time that they were able to monitor the top speed of 205 kilometres per hour – the vehicle was actually tracked at 199 kilometres per hour when he

was arrested and pulled over. Not a fishing hole, Madam Speaker; serious, serious speed violations. Fortunately, thank goodness, nobody was hurt in this, but Sergeant Bowman himself said that travelling at these speeds is outrageous and not only shows a wanton disregard for their own safety but other members of the public, and it could have ended extremely tragically.

I was just speaking, actually, to a dear friend here in the Legislature, who was just telling me a story. He was called to a case where excessive speeding ended up with them hitting somebody at a traffic light. The car exploded, and the people inside that vehicle passed away from the fire. He was there. He was on the scene. He saw it. Not a fishing hole, not an accidental tourist, not a few kilometres over the speeding limit but excessive speed, a massive difference. And it's written in the legislation. To the member again: thank you so much for clarity in this legislation.

This is about safety and a duty to care but also about educating all of us about what our responsibilities are when we take a vehicle out on the road. Vehicles are weapons when used the wrong way. There are many opportunities whereby – I don't think we realize, when we get behind a vehicle, the amount of weight and metal and steel and power and speed that you have at your fingertips. I'm 52. I've been driving for a really, really long time. There's absolutely no way I could handle those levels of speed, and I've been driving for a really long time. Full disclosure, Madam Speaker: I'm a rural kid. I've been driving a truck since I was 12, out in a field, picking up rocks. Thank God there were no humans or anybody else other than gophers out in these fields, because I probably didn't have the capacity to do that. Those were the things that we did when we were younger, hauling stuff around when we were working out on the farm.

Out on those back roads, the gravel roads out in my area, holy moly, we could get our cars up to some pretty high speeds, but fortunately for us – and this happened when I was 17. I would have been 17, yeah. We were actually pulled over by a police officer – in the rural areas by the RCMP – because the fellow that I was with that day was driving at excessive speeds. We were pulled over. Not only did he have a discussion with us, but the driver of the vehicle was forced to watch – there was a movie back in the day that we used to have to watch when we were kids that showed what happened when there was excessive speed or bad driving or alcohol and drugs involved with all of this. He was actually made to watch this movie to understand the consequences of his behaviour should he actually impact somebody else, hit another vehicle, a curb, a side, anything. In my area there are loose animals all the time, all sorts of livestock in the middle of the roads.

If we don't start here, where we have preventative measures, where we have the opportunity – losing \$5,000 is nothing compared to losing your life or another person's life or having a criminal record. Every year we have so many people who are so excited to have passed their drivers' licences, and it's so exciting, but we have a responsibility to make sure that that independence doesn't lead us towards death and destruction also. We have a responsibility to make sure that folks are protected.

According to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police 40 per cent of speeding drivers are in that young group. As the member had said earlier, this isn't about pointing fingers at a particular demographic; these are the actual statistics. So what is it that we need to do to inspire change? Not only do we need to talk to our kids about the privilege they have of being out on the road, but if we want to keep them safe, we need to make sure that there are really heavy-duty consequences. Again, it's not meaning that it's just that demographic. It's not. There are lots of people who are doing this, but we are losing our youth. These are our future leaders. These are people that might end up in this House one day. We want

to make sure that they're safe to be able to do that, but we also want to make sure that the laws of the land have severe enough consequences and penalties that, hopefully, it doesn't happen in the first place.

I'm very, very proud of my friend the Member for Calgary-Falconridge for bringing this forward and holding up that commitment. I know that you've been talking about a lot of other work that you're going to be doing along with consultation, particularly with the youth, because they need to know what it is that you're doing, and you need to be able to hear from them. I was really happy to hear about that, so thank you so much.

I just would like to share a few numbers, Madam Speaker, with you as I have a few minutes left here. In 2019 233 Albertans were killed and 15,364 were injured in traffic accidents. Out of 132,000 collisions, 120,000, 91 per cent, involved property damage; 11,700 had nonfatal injuries; and 215 people died. Between 2015 and 2019 80 per cent of those fatalities were from those collisions.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Honoured to rise and speak to Bill 203. Just a couple of things that I do want to clarify with the member. Again, we're only in second reading, so these are more questions and comments than they are anything else.

I represent the northeast, similar to the member opposite. Obviously, the writer of the bill is in Calgary, I'm in Edmonton, but our areas are similar. Now, something that happens in my riding is that if you're coming off the Anthony Henday and onto Manning freeway, it is 100 kilometres an hour on Anthony Henday. The minute you hit the exit to merge onto Manning freeway, it drops to 70. So what my colleague was trying to explain is that that's a trap, right? Like, that is the concern in the context of: if it was decided that photo enforcement sits there – which they do quite often, to be fair. They're there a lot because it's an immediate drop, right? Many people will get speeding tickets there often.

Now, the problem with this piece of legislation is that now, if they are not immediately hitting that 70, right in there, they're on that cusp. So let's say that the speed limit is 100 but they were going 110, and they're slowing down to get into that 70 zone. If they don't do it immediately when they hit that exit, they would be in this category of excess speed. They would lose their vehicle, they would get a \$5,000 fine, and all of the things would happen. So the question that I would have about that – like, again, that's my intersection; I know that intersection quite well; I hear about it all the time – is: what is the protection for the Albertan in that specific zone, where it becomes such an immediate drop?

I appreciate that what the member is trying to get at is that we're looking at people who are, let's say, within the city of Edmonton where the speed limit is 40 kilometres or 60 kilometres, which is also within my area, and people are going 120 when it's 60 kilometres an hour. But it's because they've come off the freeway and made a right-hand turn onto 167th, which is right there. There are no lights to slow them down, and they just whip right through.

And, as the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore was saying, I do have – and I hear about it often from my northeast police division – individuals who are at 3 o'clock in the morning or at 1 o'clock in the morning drag racing down 167th because there are no lights to slow everybody down, and they're going excessive, like 130, 140 in a 60. That is a fundamental problem. I don't disagree with what the member is saying, but to reinforce what my colleague was saying, there are also these weird pockets in the city where this could potentially become a problem. So the question is: what are the protections around that?

4:40

Now, the other piece that I'm curious about is that the act as it's currently written actually speaks to 50 kilometres an hour, and the member has chosen to drop it to 40 kilometres an hour. I'm curious as to why the drop and why there isn't a consistency with 50 kilometres an hour of excessive speed. The reason that I'm asking that is because if we look at what is currently drafted within the legislation, if an Albertan is getting a speeding ticket over 50 kilometres an hour, they automatically get a pink ticket and they automatically have a mandatory court appearance. If they don't appear, a warrant can be out for their arrest for failure to appear, and then six demerits will exist and a possible licence suspension and fines in excess of \$2,300. That's consistent if you're going 50 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. That's no different than a residential area or a highway, right?

What we're seeing within this piece of legislation as it's written now: it says that if it's an 80-kilometre zone or less and you're going 40 kilometres over, all of a sudden the fines go to \$5,000, there's an immediate seizure of your vehicle, and a couple of other things. The struggle with that is that it's not consistent with how the act currently reads. So you could be going down the Queen Elizabeth II highway at, like, 180 and not have your vehicle seized. You won't get the same amount of fine and – well, you still get the same demerits. Demerits are the consistent part within these two pieces of legislation. But they're inconsistent from highway driving to residential driving. So although, again, I do appreciate what the member is saying, I do think that we have to figure out a way to address the fact that people are burning through residential zones.

I have a park right by my house. The park is 30 kilometres an hour, and you see people whipping through there at, like, 60. It's ridiculous. Kids are swinging on the swings and chasing balls, and the next thing you know someone is going to get run over at the crosswalk. That is the problem, and I don't disagree with what the member is saying. That is a problem. But the question is: how are we doing the enforcement? The reality of it is that in those school zones or those playgrounds I don't actually see a lot of enforcement happening. I don't see my local department having a vehicle there every day enforcing what is going on. So how do you enforce this new piece? Like, you can write the legislation and you can say that these are the issues, but it's the enforcement component as well.

If the member is trying to address the issues in residential areas, that we're worried about kids getting run over, all of those things, like, I worry about that all the time. I have a school that is built in the worst intersection ever, where we've talked about lights and all the things and speed bumps and: how do we slow people down? The way our communities are built is that they're just like these straight drag racing opportunities because it's: how do you get people in and out of their communities? There is a planning and building of communities that is kind of the conversation and then the speed. But how do you reinforce it? Unless you're going to have a police officer sitting at these parks and these school zones every day, people are still going to be whipping through there because there isn't an issue or a consequence to those problems. So there's that piece.

I agree that maybe there isn't sufficient signage, right? In the city of Edmonton the assumption is that unless you see a sign that's marked a different speed, you should go 40. Well, when you're on a main thoroughfare of a major avenue that runs east to west, people aren't going 40. It's actually maybe a 60 zone, but you don't see a speed sign. You know, it could be 20 blocks before there's, like: oh, here's the speed zone for the day. There's, I think, some of that conversation that needs to happen around the infrastructure piece.

But my biggest concern is the inconsistency between the penalties. If I'm on a freeway and I am going 180 in a 120 zone, the only penalty I'm going to face is a pink slip that requires me to go to court, and if I don't show up, there'll be a warrant. The fact that the six demerits are the same but that there may be a possible licence suspension and that the fine is \$2,300 if you're on a highway – so if you're 80 kilometres or less and you're not following municipal rules, you actually have a significantly higher penalty. The issue is that both of those are bad driving skills, and both of those could cause fatalities, and both of those things are a problem, but it's inconsistent. I guess my question to the member – and I'm happy to hear this as we move into Committee of the Whole – is: is there a way to align the legislation to ensure that the penalties are consistent between both? If you're on the highway, you get the same penalty as you would if you're a residential driver.

Also, I do believe it is a bigger discussion around residential issues. I have a significant concern in my community about how they're widening one of my roads. We have repeatedly had EPS officers arresting people going 130 down that avenue, and the city has decided to widen it because the traffic flow – there are so many new neighbourhoods; there are so many people driving down it. Well, it's counterintuitive in a way because if it's narrower, people have to naturally slow down, right? You have to slow. Do people get annoyed because it takes forever to get down the avenue? Yeah. Is it safer? Probably, right?

What they are doing now, in fairness to the city, because we should be fair, is that they're putting lights, but the lights are going to be, like, every .5 of a kilometre, so you're going to hit a light, and then you're going to hit another light, and then you're going to hit another light. That's probably going to irritate people just as much as the narrowing of the road. Like, I'm not a city planner, so I should be cautious around this, but . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to air my road frustrations as well. I'm enjoying this debate.

Are there others to join? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the excessive speeding penalties act. I'd like to, first of all, thank the Member for Calgary-Falconridge for bringing this important issue to the Chamber. Like many have spoken about today, including the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, you know, many of us see every day or hear every day excessive speeding. I guess that's one of the reasons I'm standing up to speak today, because in my riding we hear excessive speeding many, many, many times, particularly in the summer and the spring and early fall.

Where my constituency is located, I have a lovely racetrack, actually. It consists of the ring road, and then it consists of 90th Avenue, and then it consists of 24th Street, and then it consists of Anderson Road. Many do circuits on those roads, and I think, Madam Speaker, you may have been chatting with me on the phone one night when you heard that particular noise. It's that loud, and it's annoying. Everybody will admit – you know, you hear those mufflers, you hear the excessive speed, and it's really annoying.

But I'll tell you what. As annoying as it is, I can't imagine being that family member who gets the phone call the night when the race goes wrong; you get the phone call that your loved one is at the hospital or arrived at the hospital and has passed away. Sadly, too often street racing is undertaken by younger people, and we know the statistics. We've heard all the statistics today. We were all young once. We know how much we like to challenge our limits,

you know, push the envelope, and that's all well and good until something goes wrong.

I know that there are a lot of folks who put a lot of time and money into perfecting their vehicles in order to undertake some of this street racing, but it's not a sport. If it is a sport that someone wants to participate in, they need to go to a racetrack, but our roads and our neighbourhoods are not racetracks. Unfortunately, there are those that undertake speed racing. They do treat it as some sort of a sport, and they put a lot of time and effort and money into it, and then they undertake it on our streets and on our highways.

4:50

I will say that the Member for Edmonton-Manning has raised a good point today about trying to understand how we can make the legislation consistent so that it is applicable on highways as well as roads. But in my riding I will tell you that they literally do circuits from a highway onto city streets in my neighbourhood, back onto a highway again, so I am particularly interested in seeing if we can make it more consistent.

But to say that we don't have racing within our city streets – we do. Sadly, you know, there are occasions, I am sure, where there are narrow misses of pedestrians, maybe taking a little shortcut to the 7-Eleven in the middle of the night across a boulevard, and it's too late. This is very much a safety concern. It's also about ensuring that those families out there don't lose a loved one.

Honestly, I don't know how we get through to people other than making the penalties so stiff that they actually might pay attention. Perhaps that does mean having the vehicle towed away to an impound lot. Maybe that's what it takes – sadly, I don't want to see it take a death or a life-changing injury to convince somebody to stop street racing – maybe that driver's licence suspension that's going to keep you from going to work the next day, maybe having the vehicle towed and impounded. Certainly, \$5,000 is a pretty big chunk of change for most people. Maybe that will help people understand that street racing is the wrong thing to do.

But I think the intent of this legislation is very good. I think maybe the member will be willing to work on an amendment to help us align it for highway and city streets. But I will say this as well. You know, I know that for some, having an excessive speed ticket that results in, potentially, a record is very harmful for people, but if you're doing 40-over in a school zone when kids are present – I'm not sure. Maybe somebody needs to learn a lesson there. I would hope – I would hope – that it wouldn't take too many instances of that before somebody understands.

At any rate, I won't repeat much of what's been said today except to say again: thank you to the Member for Calgary-Falconridge. I really do hope that we can ensure that we take some meaningful action to ensure that street racing comes to an end in this province and certainly, I would hope, in my own riding.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I will be offering some cautions, but I wanted it clear at the outset that I will be supporting the bill because of the reasons that have been spoken about by so many people: the danger to members of our society and particularly, as we're learning, young people in society who seem to be engaging in very dangerous behaviours such as stunting and racing on our city streets. Because of my concern for these young people and, well, for all of us, of course, both the participants and the unintended victims that unfortunately are likely to happen at very, very high speeds, we certainly want to do what we can to limit the likelihood of these kinds of things happening.

I do have a couple of cautions around the bill, though. It fits into the category of what I've often been concerned about with bills brought forward by the Conservative government, that the bills too often do not dig deep enough into the issues that they're trying to address. We often get bills that do a small, little piece towards something but don't actually work on the structural, underlying issues that need to be resolved in order for whatever we happen to be dealing with to be properly resolved, and I think this bill fits into that case. I have some sympathy for that. I know that private members' bills are a different case than government bills. I know that all the resources are not necessarily available to create a bill with greater depth, but I still think it's one of the things we should be doing in this House. We should be encouraging depth in problem resolution whenever we possibly can.

As such, I have some comments about this bill. I guess the thing that's most important is this question of deterrence. I know that the member who moved this bill has indicated that there's a hope that if somebody gets this kind of a fine, word will spread amongst their friends and family and that that will act as a deterrence to other people doing it. I must say that I certainly hope that's true. I would love to see that happen.

However, having, you know, been in the area of social sciences most of my life and been a researcher, I also know the research on deterrence. The research on deterrence indicates that the severity of the punishment is not a particularly effective mechanism for reducing a behaviour. We know that's generally true with regard to behaviour, that if you just keep upping and upping the cost of engaging in the bad behaviour, you don't actually tend to get – I mean, you certainly get some response. Don't let me limit it. But the amount of deterrence you get is considerably less than one might hope.

We know, for example, that there are a few other things that are much more effective. The likelihood of getting caught, for example, is often cited as something that is certainly demonstrated to have a greater deterrence effect so that you can actually keep fines small if the likelihood of being caught rises dramatically. That's a problematic area in our society. I know that when we put up speed traps, for example, people often object and say that they're just cash cows when, you know, I generally support them because they really do increase the likelihood of being caught. I think in this case that we haven't looked at that. What are some of the mechanisms that we can employ that will actually increase the likelihood of being caught?

[The Speaker in the chair]

The other thing that we need to understand from a statistics point of view is that we have a distinctive, statistically significant aberration in the commission of this illegal activity, and that is that it is not equally committed by people across the age ranges and genders. In truth, what we're seeing is that young males are significantly more likely to be engaged in this kind of behaviour, which tells us some important things here. It tells us that it is not the level of the fine that's allowing people to make the decision to engage in this type of behaviour or not. The distinctive characteristic that seems to be associated with the decision to engage in this kind of behaviour is actually gender and age rather than the level of the fine.

Therefore, we should be looking at responses that understand that and respond to this by addressing: what are the factors associated with gender and age that are contributing to the decision to engage in this kind of behaviour? We know from some of the brain research that goes on that younger people tend to make more irrational decisions than older people. They don't have the experience. Their brain is not fully developed, and they may not even have the mechanisms for making those kinds of decisions. We know that

males tend to also make more dangerous decisions than females. One of the things I would have liked to have seen in this act is something attached to the government's attempts to reduce speeding and stunting by addressing the kinds of things that may be associated with those factors, so that would probably mean some kind of education or relationship process.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but time for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

COVID-19 Vaccines

502. Mr. Shepherd moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly is of the view that COVID-19 vaccines are a prudent and necessary tool that allowed the economy to open more fully in 2021 and the ongoing use of these vaccines supports public health and safety and the full operation of the economy and the education system; and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) affirm its trust in the science-based research, including research and vaccine development here in Alberta, that led to the creation of COVID-19 vaccines and that has saved the lives of tens of thousands of Albertans, and
- (b) reject claims that COVID-19 vaccines are bioweapons.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm guessing that there will be those who will claim that the motion I'm bringing forward today is divisive, that it's intended solely to play political games. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised to see a government member rise and perhaps argue that shortly after I take my seat. But the fact is that there is good reason to question where members of this government, particularly the Premier, stand on the question of the COVID-19 vaccine. As noted by columnist Rob Breakenridge, shortly after the Premier declared that those who chose not to get vaccinated against COVID-19 were, and I quote: the most discriminated against group that I have ever witnessed in my lifetime. As Mr. Breakenridge noted, the Premier had not yet and still has not yet addressed any of her previous social media posts or statements on vaccination, "which included false and dangerous claims like 'the mRNAs had no obvious effect on COVID deaths and may have actually increased deaths from other causes.'"

In videos posted online, the Premier endorsed avowedly antivaccine groups like Vaccine Choice Canada, a group that has spread the discredited hypothesis that vaccinations cause autism and claimed that COVID-19 vaccines aren't necessary, as well as Taking Back Our Freedoms, whose board was advised by Paul Alexander, whose claim that the COVID-19 vaccine is a bioweapon is noted here in the motion before us. The Premier, at a forum during the recent by-election, stated that her anonymous, unknown group of medical advisers had invited Mr. Alexander for a consultation and that she was, I quote, interested in hearing what he had to say.

So, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have good reason to question just where the Premier stands regarding the science of vaccination, particularly regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and particularly given the current crisis in pediatric care as a wave of respiratory illness is sweeping through children in our province, leading to overwhelming pressure on children's hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary. This wave is driven by three respiratory viruses: influenza,

COVID-19, and RSV. For two of them we have safe vaccines that are scientifically proven to be effective in protecting against and reducing the spread of illness.

Unfortunately, the current rate of vaccination against influenza in Alberta is only just over 20 and a half per cent. While children under five and seniors are two of the groups at highest risk of serious complications due to influenza, just 12.7 per cent of children between the ages of six months and four years and 57 per cent of seniors have had their dose. The immunization target, Mr. Speaker, for both those groups is 80 per cent.

Now, clearly, we need leadership from public health, but sadly we have none. That, again, is due to the Premier's decision to leverage conspiracy and misinformation in her campaign to lead the UCP, targeting the boards of AHS and the College of Physicians & Surgeons and the former chief medical officer of health, accusing them of being lawless, blaming them for the damage done by the COVID-19 pandemic and this government's mismanagement of it. That's what prompted former AHS board member Tony Dagnone, appointed and removed by this UCP government, to speak out regarding the Premier's "dangerous rhetoric" designed to "play to her misguided followers who rant against science and academic medicine" and who warned that if the Premier "persists in vocalizing false, conspiratorial and unfounded claims, she will be responsible for putting healthcare providers, and Albertans needlessly in harms-way."

That is precisely the situation we face today as doctors, nurses, and other front-line staff at Alberta's children's hospitals are forced to beg this government to take real action to protect children in our province and ease the unprecedented pressure on the health care system, actions including increased public messaging around the safety and efficacy of influenza and COVID-19 vaccines in children to create awareness of their importance in decreasing severe outcomes and hospitalization as well as increased accessibility to vaccines, especially amongst marginalized populations, by offering school vaccine clinics or mobile vaccine services, increased messaging, Mr. Speaker, which I'm sure the minister will stand and say: indeed, we have increased our messaging.

Let's be clear. These pediatricians spoke out last week, so unless the minister has done something striking between then and now, there is work to be done. Now, increased messaging, Mr. Speaker, is a simple ask that would be well within the purview and the mandate of the chief medical officer of health, but it's been 300 days since Albertans last saw a CMOH stand at a podium and speak to the province.

Indeed, it's clear just how unseriously the Premier and the Health minister take the role of the CMOH. After they fired the previous individual, they chose to replace her with a volunteer who already holds another full-time job, a volunteer they seem studiously intent on keeping out of sight, allowing him only the occasional statement by letter and text. In the words of Dr. Paul Parks:

Seriously: while a tridemic is overflowing our EDs and hospitals, and truly harming our children, does it make sense to place our [CMOH] role on the side of the desk of an already extremely busy physician [with] a full time job already? And [with] no deputies to help?

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the two deputy chief medical officers of health have resigned in the face of the challenge they face with this Premier.

Dr. Parks goes on to say:

And this is not a criticism of the person chosen.

Indeed, I am not criticizing Dr. Joffe; neither is Dr. Parks. He says: I don't think anybody could add the job to an already full time position and be successful.

What does this say about current priority for public health?
Is it worse to pretend like this even seems reasonable?

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this government has spent more time and resources trying to promote their job-killing sovereignty act than they have encouraging and supporting Albertans to get vaccinated against viruses that are impacting tens of thousands of children across the province and crippling our pediatric health care system to the point that nurses were speaking of black Sunday, a recent day when the Alberta Children's hospital was so overwhelmed, they were worried a child could die in the waiting room.

Mr. Speaker, in jurisdictions around the world it's become an annual tradition. Indeed, it has been here in Alberta. Celebrities, community leaders, political leaders, leaders of all stripes: they take a moment to take a picture of themselves either receiving or having just received the influenza vaccine or, indeed we saw during COVID, the COVID vaccine. They post it to social media. They talk about it to the press. It's a moment of celebration of the wonders of science and the importance of each doing our part to protect ourselves and others.

I'm pretty sure every Premier of our province as well as ministers and MLAs have done this for well over a decade, but this year our Premier can't even muster a simple endorsement of flu vaccination in front of a microphone. She has refused to do so several times in this House, and as noted, she spread misinformation and doubt about mRNA vaccines, going so far as to travel to the U.S. to get the Johnson & Johnson viral vector vaccine. She spoke publicly about that, so it's not disclosing private information. Mr. Speaker, when you undermine confidence in one vaccine, you undermine confidence in all of them, like the influenza vaccine. Indeed, we saw the Premier do exactly that at a press conference a few weeks ago. She was asked if she would recommend the influenza vaccine for children. She instead talked about: well, really, it's only 50 per cent effective, and, hey, people are always going to get sick, so the important thing is just to make sure that they can get Tylenol. So her record is clear.

With this motion I am providing the opportunity for each MLA in this House to make their own record clear and show whether they stand with science and for public health, whether they stand in support of our front-line health care workers. Will they stand against the growing scourge of deliberate, intentional misinformation and delusional conspiracy theory that threatens to continue to undermine our public health care system and the very principles of public health that allow our society and our economy to function?

There is no prosperity without a commitment to science and robust public health. Mr. Speaker, I encourage every member of this House to support this motion today for the sake of the province, our health care system, our economic prospects, the health of the most vulnerable, and for the sake of our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Speaker: Motion Other than Government Motion 502. The hon. Health minister.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for putting this motion forward. There's no doubt that vaccines have fundamentally changed the course of health care. They've been integral to the development of the field of public health from the start because identifying the source of communicable diseases and how they're transmitted goes hand in hand with developing effective measures to stop transmission and help protect people from infection.

Arguably, the biggest step forward came with the creation of the smallpox vaccine, and since then, one by one, the threats of tetanus, diphtheria, rubella, meningitis, measles, polio, influenza were all

greatly diminished through the study and development of vaccines. Today parents can choose to give their children routine childhood immunizations to protect against all these illnesses, along with the annual flu vaccine, Mr. Speaker. Vaccines have changed the course of human history several times over. They contributed to the dramatic increase in life expectancy that we all take for granted today, together with advances in sanitation and other areas of health care, especially care during pregnancy and care for newborns and infants.

Here in Alberta today immunization has an important role in public health, just as it does around the world. It is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions we have, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned our children's routine immunization schedule, which helps protect them from childhood through to later in life, and our schedule begins as an infant and continues through the teenage years given the importance. These routine childhood shots have almost eliminated diphtheria and tetanus, just to take two examples.

Mr. Speaker, simply put, vaccines work. They've served us well for decades, and they've shown their value again in the past two years in helping us manage through the COVID pandemic. COVID vaccines have worked to reduce the toll that the pandemic took on our families and our communities, and by making these vaccines available, we had another tool to help manage through the pandemic. Over the past two years COVID vaccines were offered to the most vulnerable people first but eventually to all Albertans age six months and older, and we continue to offer COVID vaccines to Albertans, particularly as different forms of the vaccines are developed. We have continued to make them available to Albertans, and we will continue to do so.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, today's COVID vaccines are not the same as the ones that were first available when they first came out over two years ago, and that is why it is important to continue researching and developing so that we can prepare for whatever future disease may hit us or as COVID evolves. Alberta has tremendous research and health professionals, and we have a role to play in global efforts to get ready for the future.

We also need to take matters into our own hands so that we are less reliant on companies and countries elsewhere. That's why just over a year ago our government announced funding to grow our pharmaceutical and life sciences sector. We are investing up to \$81 million to fund four vaccine development projects right here in our province of Alberta. The impetus for this investment was our pandemic experience, and our support for science is real.

Ultimately, though, vaccination is a personal choice. COVID vaccines are being made available by the Alberta government today, Mr. Speaker, as a choice, and our government will continue to make vaccines available to Albertans in the future. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If the hon. minister would like to join in the debate, he's welcome to do so. Until then, the Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Copping: We'll continue to support Albertans in making their choice to stay up to date on their vaccines, be it routine immunizations, COVID vaccines, or influenza, Mr. Speaker.

I'll step aside, because I know – just to respond to the hon. member across the way talking about flu vaccines, Mr. Speaker, we have been very supportive of flu vaccines. In fact, over the last two weeks we've increased the rate of flu vaccinations by 3 and a half per cent. We are in the middle of running a campaign here in this province to support vaccines and support Albertans in making the choice to get vaccinated, and we will continue to do so as we are running a campaign on flu vaccines so we can support not only

Albertans in managing through the flu season but also to support the tremendous job that our front-line workers are doing across our entire health care system, particularly in the children's hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to come back to this particular motion. You know, our government has been making COVID vaccines available. We will continue to support Albertans in making their choice to get access to COVID vaccines, and we'll continue to make COVID vaccines available and support Albertans in making their choice.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I ask members of this House to support this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion Other Than Government Motion 502, and I'm happy to hear, from what I can tell from the minister, that at least the minister will be supporting this. We'll see how the Premier votes on this. Again, just looking at what we see in this motion, I think that it's pretty straightforward. In terms of understanding and reflecting on the fact that the COVID-19 vaccines are prudent and a necessary tool that allowed our economy to open more fully in 2021 and onward, the fact is that, you know, without this, of course, this tool through this pandemic, we would have found ourselves in a much different situation.

I would argue that if we had the Premier that we have now – as I reflect back, even though I had many, many concerns with the past one, I might even find myself more worried if this current Premier was the Premier at the time. Just looking back on a few of the comments that have really undermined our public health system and our public health officials, some comments from our current Premier, of course, a comment that was made – and eventually they came back and, you know, after being proven wrong, apologized and deleted the comments that they had made, so I'm thankful for that, I guess, Mr. Speaker. But the fact is that once you release these kinds of statements into the public and, again, undermine our public health care system and our health research, science-based research, as is listed in this motion, it's really hard to come back from that.

Again, the quote that I have before me: "Hydroxychloroquine cures 100% of coronavirus patients within 6 days of treatment." That was a comment that was made by our now Premier, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's truly disappointing. I don't think that we've seen much learning on the Premier's behalf when it comes to undermining science-based research and undermining the vaccine efficacy, and it's truly unfortunate. Further, we also heard the current Premier talk about the use of ivermectin as a coronavirus, or COVID-19, treatment, again, another circumstance that continues to be unapproved, first of all. But this idea of using ivermectin as a COVID-19 treatment has been discredited and debunked.

Now we find ourselves in a situation in the middle of flu season, of course, compounded with all of the other illnesses and diseases that we're dealing with, including COVID-19, and all the critic for Health and the NDP opposition have asked this Premier to do is simply make a statement saying that they believe in the efficacy of the flu vaccine, that Albertans should go out and get the flu vaccine.

The previous speaker, the minister, brought up the point around mandated vaccines. Nothing in this motion is pointing towards that, so it was interesting that the minister felt that necessary to bring forward. I thought that that was going to be followed by the minister saying that they didn't plan on supporting this motion, but thankfully that wasn't the case. Again, I hope that we do see all government members, including the Premier, supporting this.

Now, the other piece, of course, within this motion is rejecting claims that COVID-19 vaccines are bioweapons. It really goes back to the decisions that this Premier has made to invite certain conspiracy theorists to provide information, to provide guidance to this Premier and to this government, in respect to Paul Alexander, and I think that it should be pretty straightforward that these are not the types of people that we should be expecting or looking to for medical guidance, medical information.

Looking back at other – I believe it was during the leadership process of the current Premier and the UCP government that we saw this Premier again blaming both Alberta Health Services as well as the previous chief medical officer of health, Deena Hinshaw, for giving bad advice and execution through the pandemic. Of course, that eventually led, when this Premier became the Premier, to firing that chief medical officer of health. I think that the Health critic laid out a very reasonable and clear timeline of what has happened since then, with the subsequent hiring of a voluntary chief medical officer, the resigning of the two deputies. We find ourselves in a very unfortunate situation.

5:20

The fact is that with our last chief medical officer of health, Deena Hinshaw, we heard again and again that that position was there to provide advice to this government, and it was up to the government and this Health minister to take that advice or to not take it. I guess, Mr. Speaker – I can't necessarily claim to know – it seemed in some circumstances that this government was not necessarily following the advice that was given to them, very likely going against many of the decisions that were made by that chief medical officer of health at the time.

The fact is that the decisions that were made through that process lay squarely at the feet of this UCP government, lay squarely at the feet of this Health minister, so it's interesting that with all of the attacks the Premier has done on our health care system and the previous decisions of politicians in this province and, through them, the chief medical officers, they decided to keep the same person in that role. I'm interested to find out why, again, we have a Premier attacking those decisions but not necessarily making changes to structures or designs that were in place at that time and likely made some decisions that were not necessarily the best ones.

Now, there is just so much to be said on this, Mr. Speaker. I, again, fully support the motion that has been brought forward. I thank the Member for Edmonton-City Centre and the critic for Health within our caucus for bringing it forward. I think that it should be very easy for all members to support this motion because at the end of the day the effectiveness of vaccines – through COVID-19 and through several flu seasons every single year it is very clear that these vaccines are effective, that we should do everything in our power to not undermine the effectiveness of vaccines, that we should be doing everything in our power to encourage those to make the choice to get them.

I think, with that, Mr. Speaker, again I would just thank the member for bringing those forward. I would encourage the Premier to stand up in this House and support this motion, speak to this motion, and, further to that, make it very clear to the general public that they as the Premier and as a citizen believe in the efficacy of the flu vaccine, among other vaccines as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a second I thought that somebody from the other side will speak, so I was willing to wait

and hear them and then speak, but while I am now on my feet, I will speak to Motion 502, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, which essentially is asking this Legislature and this government to say unequivocally that they trust in science-based research, including the research and development of vaccines, and reject the claims of conspiracy theorists that vaccines are bioweapons.

We do know that science has settled that vaccines are the most important way to keep Albertans healthy, in particular as the spread of respiratory illness is on the rise. We're grateful to every Albertan over the period of the last two years who stepped up to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and played a role in ensuring that we remain open, our economy remains open, and Albertans – fellow Albertans, their neighbours – remain healthy. Now that our health system is under strain and in particular children's hospitals have seen a huge rise in workload because of respiratory illnesses, we must send a strong message to all Albertans that it's important that they receive vaccines and that vaccines do work.

When we were going through the COVID-19 pandemic, I remember that former Premier Jason Kenney once blamed people in northeast Calgary for spreading COVID-19 without any basis whatsoever. I think that most people living in northeast Calgary, living in my riding, were in the kinds of jobs that they were not able to do from home. They were mostly front-line people working in hospitals, working in retail, working in transportation, the kinds of jobs that you would not be able to do from home. Then Premier Kenney blamed them, that they were spreading COVID-19, which he never apologized for. But afterward people in my riding, people in northeast Calgary came together, and they worked on making sure that people got vaccines. Now, as a result of that work, where many organizations, including AHS, were involved, northeast Calgary has a 99.9 per cent vaccination rate. That's huge.

Now, if they will hear from the Premier of this government that somehow vaccines are bioweapons and, instead of getting the COVID-19 vaccine, they could have used hydroxychloroquine, that doesn't send a very good message. That is disrespectful to all those people who stepped up and got a vaccine. So I do want to stress that the words that we say, the words that people in positions of power say, do influence public opinion, and we should be very careful when we say such words.

Not only that, in the last week or so while I was here in question period, the Premier was asked more than three times, I believe, just to simply get up and encourage Albertans to get a flu vaccine. I think that was too much for the Premier to say. Not once – not once – did the Premier get up and state that simple fact, that vaccines are good, that people should talk to their doctors and make their choice. Instead, the Premier is saying that they won't defer to experts anymore. Also, when this government will bring in people like Paul Alexander, when this government will legitimize the work of people like Paul Alexander, a conspiracy theorist who has called vaccines a bioweapon, that doesn't send a good message.

5:30

That's why it's important that this Legislature votes in favour of this motion, which the Minister of Health has indicated they will, so that Albertans can be assured that vaccines are effective, they save lives, and Albertans should consider making that choice. We should also condemn and oppose the misinformation spread by the likes of Paul Alexander, who thinks that vaccines are bioweapons.

It's also important that we send that message because we do know that we have a crisis in children's hospitals. There are capacity issues in Lethbridge. General hospital systems are getting overwhelmed by respiratory illnesses. So passing this motion and urging Albertans to get vaccinated, get flu shots, will certainly be a

step in the right direction. It will also help us deal with the workload that our hospitals are seeing and focus more singularly on managing the crisis in health care.

Thank you. With that, I urge everyone in this House to support this motion. Use your circle of influence to urge Albertans to get flu shots. Use your influence and position of power to urge Albertans to seek expert advice, not politicians' advice, when they are in doubt about vaccines and get vaccinated. That will certainly help us address some of the strain that we are seeing in our hospitals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 502. I've got a number of comments that I want to make. I think that the debate of this motion today is very important. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for bringing forward previous motions like this, bringing forward emergency debate resolutions that, unfortunately, in the past – we have seen over the course of the past few weeks, since the start of the fall sitting, the government refuse to engage in emergency debate around things like the crisis of our health care system, the crisis of lack of medicine for our children, which, yes, I will acknowledge that the minister and this government have secured, you know, children's medicine to come into the province, which is greatly appreciated. However, that solution doesn't address the backlog of children's surgeries.

The fact that we've seen staff in Calgary providing a critical service for children suffering, you know, unbelievable health issues, who are terminal, moving over to support other children who are critically ill: that shouldn't be the case in a province like Alberta, a province as rich as ours, a province with a once incredible health care system but that is under immense strain.

Now, the reason for this motion, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is because we've seen numerous examples where the Premier and leader of this province refused to encourage Albertans to get their vaccinations. Now, I'll acknowledge that the Minister of Health has done that. I appreciate that he has done that for the past couple of years, throughout the COVID pandemic, and now encouraging people to get their flu vaccine.

I will give a plug that – you know, for those who don't understand how flu vaccines work, our health care professionals try to anticipate the strain of the flu virus. Some years they get it bang on; some years they don't. This year, from what I've learned, our health care professionals have done an amazing job identifying the strain that is coming through. All this to say that if you get your flu shot this year, it is going to be very effective against four different strains of flu that are going to pass through our province throughout this fall and winter. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that my two-year-old daughter just got her flu shot two weeks ago and has both of her COVID shots.

The purpose behind this resolution, which, you know, we heard the Minister of Health stand up and acknowledge that he is encouraging members to vote in favour of – and that, quite honestly, was a bit of a surprise. It's very welcome news. I thank the minister for his support on this motion. Having been in this Chamber for quite some time, Mr. Speaker, as you're also well aware, it's rare that government will accept motions from the opposition and vice versa. You know, it's very exciting when those moments happen. I appreciate the Minister of Health acknowledging this, and my hope is that the Premier will also acknowledge this.

Some of my comments are going to be around the responsibility that we all have as the 87 Alberta legislators. We are in a position of leadership, a position where the public does – some look up to us, but the public does often listen to our words and what we say. You know, if we want to lead by example, if we want to be good role models, then we should be encouraging actions that will protect ourselves, our families, and our communities. The Premier, being the chief spokesperson for the province of Alberta, should be encouraging Albertans to get their flu shot and to get their COVID vaccinations. I appreciate the fact that the Premier respects every Albertan's individual choice, but encouraging people to do something that's going to protect their communities, I believe, is a responsibility of looking at the greater benefit versus just thinking of ourselves as individuals and it's my choice and I'll do what I want. Yes, but let's use our positions of influence to better our province, to better our communities.

I am hopeful. I will encourage all members to vote in favour of this motion. I think this motion will also demonstrate to our front-line health care professionals something that they've been asking this government for. I'll acknowledge that the previous Premier encouraged Albertans to get their vaccinations, standing in this Chamber.

Mr. Sabir: He offered a hundred dollars.

Mr. Bilous: Pardon me?

Mr. Sabir: A hundred dollars a jab.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, right. Well, he even, yeah, offered a hundred dollars per jab. That's a good point. I forgot about that one. Right. Yeah.

Well, regardless of that, the point is that there was an acknowledgement of his position and of the position of influence that we all have.

I will take my seat momentarily here, Mr. Speaker, but my hope is that, one, our Health critic will continue to hold the government to account but continue to press the Premier to use her position as Premier to influence Albertans to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my chair and encourage all members of the Chamber to vote in favour of this motion and to go out, get vaccinated. Let's protect Albertans. Let's protect our economy and do what's right.

5:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 502. Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to close debate on my motion calling for the Assembly to affirm its trust in the science-based research, including research and vaccine development here in Alberta, that led to the COVID-19 vaccine, acknowledging that it has saved the lives of tens of thousands of Albertans, and reject claims that that COVID-19 vaccine in any way is a bioweapon.

I appreciated the response from the Minister of Health, the lone response from any government member towards this motion, but I do appreciate that he recognized the history and the importance of vaccines, that he recognized that they are indeed life saving, that that includes all vaccines up to and including the COVID-19 vaccine, that he does not share the skepticism, outright misinformation that at times has been shared by the Premier. I appreciate that we have that in the Health minister's office and that indeed that is a perspective he brings.

He spoke of this government's continued work on an influenza vaccine campaign, noting they've increased by 3.5 per cent the number of vaccinations. That indeed is a good thing.

They're in the middle of a campaign, but again, Mr. Speaker, I would note it was only four days ago that the entire AMA section of pediatrics called on this government to do more. This has been a consistent pattern throughout the COVID-19 pandemic up until now, that this government chooses to act last, act least, be somewhat, shall we say, less than full throated at many times in its promotion of vaccination, walking a very careful line under the previous Premier and even more so under the current Premier, who, again, has chosen to court communities that spread outright disinformation and indeed used them to propel her into the position that she holds today. That is clear on the record, and I outlined it clearly.

I recognize that the government is making vaccines available, and certainly the Deputy Premier was very vocal in pointing out that it is an individual's choice. Indeed, it is an individual's choice, and we should be encouraging people to make that choice, not discouraging and spreading misinformation. Now, I did note that at a time this Deputy Premier came out and said that in terms of many of the public health measures that were brought forward, they were never about science but about political control and power. He thanked all those citizens, freedom convoys who had the courage to mobilize against what he called tyrannical policies.

Mr. Madu: Yeah. By forcing people. It's a choice.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, when we use that kind of politically charged rhetoric, we are tainting the choice people have the opportunity to make.

Let me remind this Deputy Premier that his government held a two-year, 3 and a half million dollar inquiry into anti-Alberta energy campaigns, claiming that there was disinformation about the oil industry. That is something that they thought was worth while to combat disinformation on. Of course, that report found that the organizations, individuals involved, in fact, had done nothing wrong. They just exercised their personal choice, their free speech and did not spread misinformation, but the government insisted on spending Albertans' time and money and a great deal of political hot air on combatting that because they claimed it hurt our economic interest and our reputation. Mr. Speaker, the kind of disinformation that's been supported by this Premier, that the Deputy Premier chose to skate up to in his tweet: that harms our economic interest. That hurts Alberta's reputation.

So they will stand and they will vote for this today – and I'm glad to see that – to help repair some of the damage that they have done

and that they continue to do as this Premier continues to undermine public health in the province of Alberta. The Health minister continues to support her in doing so. The Premier was very clear during her leadership campaign why she was firing the chief medical officer of health, the board of AHS, and we will see about the board of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. It's because she said they were lawless during the pandemic. It had nothing to do with improving the health care system; it had to do with her political objectives in catering to a particular base. She said it. It's on the record.

We have this motion today. I'm glad to see that the government will support it. Perhaps this will help. Indeed, I hope to see that the Premier will stand and will give full-throated support to vaccination against influenza for children, indeed for adults, for seniors in the province of Alberta and that we will see this government take the action that is being called for to help address the very serious crisis in our health care system, particularly in terms of pediatric care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Jean	Rowswell
Carson	Jones	Sabir
Copping	LaGrange	Sawhney
Eggen	Luan	Schulz
Feehan	Madu	Shepherd
Glubish	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Goehring	Panda	Toor
Gotfried	Pon	Yaseen
Issik		

Totals:	For – 25	Against – 0
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(8) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:02 p.m.]

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