



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, February 28, 2023

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)	Nixon, Hon. Jeremy P., ECA, Calgary-Klein (UC)
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Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)	Pon, Hon. Josephine, ECA, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)	Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)	van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
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Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC), Deputy Premier	

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Yao

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Ganley
Getson
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

[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'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Timothy Noel. I'd 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.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we would traditionally pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. However, I hope that you'll provide me some forgiveness as I have decided to postpone the tribute for former member Mike Cardinal until Monday, March 6, when his family is in attendance.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, for your awareness I have a number of introductions today, which will not take away from any of the time allotted for members to introduce other guests. However, I did have the privilege this morning of hosting a very special guest, who is joining me in the Speaker's gallery. We had a wonderful opportunity to debate the merits of *Beauchesne's over House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and other parliamentary discussions. The hon. Anthony Rota, the Speaker of the federal House of Commons, is joined by his wife, Chantal Piché-Rota, and his chief of staff, Alexandre. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce a couple of other guests who are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, including the best Schow of this place, the hon. the Government House Leader's spouse, Nicole Schow. Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today is a former Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, Mr. Bruce McAllister. If you both would like to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but certainly not least, I think we can all agree that today's rendition of *O Canada* was something special as it was led by Mr. Timothy Noel. Mr. Noel, in his assistance to help us honour and mark Black History Month, the month of February, joined us today to lead us in the national anthem. His father emigrated from Grenada in 1973. Here he is today leading the Assembly in the singing of *O Canada* as the first Afro-Caribbean Albertan to lead

this House in the singing of our national anthem. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a school group to introduce.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you a grade 6 class from Sister Alphonse Academy, with teacher Sean Brass and a special guest, Kristi Rouse, who is a mom and helper today but also a trustee for the St. Albert public school board. If they could all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 34 brilliant students from Belvedere elementary school. They are joined by their amazing teacher, Bonnie Clydesdale. I've had numerous opportunities of speaking to Belvedere school during Read In Week. I ask that all the students rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you it is my distinct pleasure to welcome one of my constituents. She is a grandma, a musician, and a true leader within the freedom movement. She gave hope to all of Alberta, Canada, and the world. She was proud to stand strong and free in the face of the worst government overreach in a generation: Tamara Lich. Tens of thousands of Canadians supported and helped Tamara. This includes a constitutional lawyer from Alberta who held the Prime Minister to account during the Emergencies Act inquiry. Please welcome Eva Chipiuk and Tamara Lich. Ladies, please stand and accept a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to this House Linette Soldan, who is the executive director of Rowan House Society in High River, an organization I have had a chance to brag about often in this House. Please rise and receive the warm, traditional greeting of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has an introduction.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you from Lesser Slave River Deputy Reeve Lana Spencer and also from the same Lesser Slave River Reeve Murray Kerik. Both of them work tirelessly in order to help fulfill the dreams of their constituents.

Thank you.

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you two guests to the Assembly. First, I have Mr. Ken Drysdale. Mr. Drysdale is an innovator and entrepreneur with deep ties in the community, and he is working tirelessly to reform health care for the residents of Grande Prairie. I'd like to thank him for his efforts. Beside him I have Owen Lewis, a lawyer and managing partner at KMSC Law. Gentlemen, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, do you have an introduction today?

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a former Clerk of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly as well as of the Senate of Canada, a former Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, and my good friend, Gordon Barnhart. I'd like to welcome Gordon to our Legislature as a recently new resident of Alberta.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a couple of amazing constituents of West Yellowhead: the mayor of Jasper, Richard Ireland, and Joehn Torres, a student at MacEwan and resident of Hinton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Primary Health Care

Mr. Shepherd: Primary care is the foundation of our health care system. At its best it's one of the most personal, powerful connections we have with one of life's most personal things, our health, but over the last few years the UCP have attacked that foundation with every tool they had. When they launched their war on doctors in February 2020, they took particular aim at family doctors, cutting their pay, withholding resources, harassing them online and in person, and forcing them to deal with mountains of new paperwork just as the pandemic slammed into Alberta. Many were forced to close clinics or lay off staff; others retired early, left the profession or the province. Fast-forward to today: hundreds of thousands of Albertans have no access to primary care and are forced, instead, to go to emergency rooms or go without care, more victims of the health care chaos created by the UCP.

1:40

But, Mr. Speaker, unlike the UCP, we have a plan to repair and strengthen primary care, to restore the foundation of our health care system with family health teams, a plan that the former chair of the University of Alberta's department of family medicine, Dr. Rick Spooner, calls a pathway to the evolution of primary care in Alberta. A family health team can include family doctors as well as a wide diversity of other health care professionals working collaboratively to provide care, one location to get help for health concerns. We'll invest \$600 million over four years to help existing clinics, practices, and PCNs expand their teams, and we'll invest to build and staff 10 new health clinics in communities of greatest need across the province.

The UCP: they've just got plans to make more plans. This May Albertans will have a choice: Danielle Smith and the UCP, who have created chaos in primary care and now want applause for simply revoking their own disastrous . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Welcome back to the Assembly. The hon. member knows that the use of proper names is wildly inappropriate, and the hon. members know that the interruption of members' statements is wildly inappropriate.

Hon. member, you have 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. Shepherd: The Premier and the UCP, who created chaos in primary care and now want applause for simply revoking their own disastrous policies and bad decisions, or Rachel Notley and the Alberta NDP, who are ready to move forward with a bold plan that will ensure 1 million more . . . [interjections] Oh, sorry. I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Perhaps you can try again tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a statement to make.

Federal Energy Transition Plan

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned that before she claimed to be against the just transition plan to shut down energy jobs in Alberta, the Leader of the Official Opposition was for it. Now, this doesn't surprise anyone on this side of the House. We know the opposition leader and her party eliminated jobs in Alberta, 183,000 of them to be exact. Albertans know it, too. It's one of the reasons why they fired the members across the aisle in 2019 and chose our government to lead Alberta into better days. Today we can confidently say that Albertans made the right choice.

Thanks to the policies of our government, Alberta is leading the nation in economic growth. We've kept taxes low. We've balanced the budget, which has brought our credit rating back up. We've created hundreds of thousands of new jobs for Albertans, and we've welcomed tens of billions of dollars in new investment from major international companies like Amazon, HBO, Walmart, Air Products, Dow, De Havilland, and more. We've diversified the economy, and now new industries like film and television, agrifood processing, and technology are booming in Alberta and setting records for investment.

We've welcomed a record number of new families who want to participate in the Alberta advantage. We're providing direct affordability supports to Albertans who need them and broad supports that will benefit everyone. We're tackling long-standing issues in health care, and as we learned yesterday, we're starting to see improvements in the system. We're standing up for our province against hostility and interference from Ottawa. Albertans should visit puttingalbertansfirst.ca to learn more about the work we've done to renew the Alberta advantage.

But later today, Mr. Speaker, we will all see a new budget, and I believe this will be one of the best budgets our province has ever produced. We didn't get to this enviable place by accident either. We got here because our government put the right policies in place, and now we're getting the right results. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Job Creation and Affordability Plan

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is recovering strongly, and it continues to gain momentum through steady job creation and diversification. Alberta has created a vast number of jobs in a short period of time, thus replacing all of the job losses during the pandemic. Along with stellar job growth numbers, Alberta's labour force has also steadily increased. More and more Canadians continue to come to this great province because there are opportunities available for everyone.

Alberta is diversifying the economy by creating opportunities in technology, in innovation, as well as our film and television industry. The brand new HBO series *The Last of Us* is a prime example of how impressive and experienced Alberta's film crews are. Our government's incentives enabled many high-profile companies like Amazon, IT companies, and manufacturers to come to Alberta, creating hundreds of permanent jobs. To assist Albertans with high inflation, Mr. Speaker, our government put a pause on collecting the provincial fuel tax of 13.6 cents per litre, thus allowing Alberta to have the lowest fuel price in Canada.

Along with reindexing the provincial tax brackets for inflation, we are also providing substantial rebates on electricity bills. Mr. Speaker, more than 1 million Albertans have enrolled and are scheduled to receive their affordability payments of \$600. Albertans are receiving real, tangible support during these times of high inflation.

Year 2022 was about celebrating a huge budget surplus, paying down our debts, growing industry, supporting businesses, enhancing trade infrastructures, improving health care deliveries, and providing inflation relief. I am so excited, Mr. Speaker, to see what Budget 2023 has in store for all of us here in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Official Opposition and Government Policies

Ms Renaud: As we approach a spring election, there are clear differences that separate us from the UCP government. The Alberta NDP is focused on things that matter to Albertans. We will make sure that every Albertan has access to a family doctor. That's why we released a comprehensive plan to get 1 million more Albertans access to a doctor. We're also focused on addressing the inflation crisis, helping Alberta families manage, including guaranteeing that nobody will ever pay out of pocket to see a doctor.

But this Premier has the wrong priorities. She's obsessed with reckless and extreme ideas that will increase the cost to Alberta families. She wants to fire the RCMP, making your community less safe and downloading additional costs to municipalities. Despite massive backlash the Premier is pushing forward with her plan to get rid of the RCMP to create a new provincial police force, to the cost of \$366 million in start-up, with \$735 million a year in operating. Her plan fails to deliver any additional services, and Albertans will be on the hook to pay more in property taxes.

The Premier also wants to gamble with Canada pension, making your future less secure. She is continuing to move forward with the plan to pull Albertans out of the Canada pension plan despite the lack of public support. She's risking retirement savings of Alberta workers while hitting taxpayers with more costs.

In 90 days Albertans have a choice to continue with the UCP government that prioritizes reckless ideological ideas for their fringe extremists, that will continue to hurt Albertans, or move forward with an Alberta NDP government that is focused on what matters to you. The choice could not be clearer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Maskwa Medical Centre in Grande Prairie

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A common concern in Grande Prairie is the shortage of family doctors for our young and growing community, which leads to an array of challenges and delays for my constituents in seeking care or diagnosis. Ideally, increasing efficiency, accessibility, and service within the region is the goal, with all reforms centred around better outcomes.

Thanks to the innovative work of the Maskwa Medical Centre board, that is exactly what we are working towards in Grande Prairie today. As I mentioned earlier, in introductions, I'm pleased to be joined in the gallery this afternoon by Mr. Ken Drysdale, the chair of the Maskwa board and the driving force for this initiative.

The Maskwa Medical Centre will be a multispecialty, patient-centred diagnostics facility based on the Mayo Clinic model and is close to being a reality, Mr. Speaker. Pending approval from Alberta Health, Maskwa will be publicly funded and accessible to all, run as a nonprofit, and will provide life-saving care for our people in the northern region.

By implementing a patient-centred, collaborative diagnostic practice, the Maskwa Medical Centre will connect patients and their physicians with the right specialists to provide an early, quick, and accurate diagnosis.

Maskwa is already fully engaged in striking a detailed partnership with the University of Alberta that will provide clinical access to over 450 specialists, and Maskwa is actively collaborating with Northwestern Polytechnic to lease adjacent land and integrate with existing medical training programs in the region. This medical home approach to health care will expand the capacity for medical residents to train in Grande Prairie and will increase the number of family physicians in our community over time, addressing this critical shortage.

This type of thought leadership coupled with the can-do culture in our region is exactly what is required to transform health care, Mr. Speaker. Too many families in our region have been adversely impacted due to delays in acquiring diagnostic and specialist care, which is why the vision for this clinic resonates so deeply within my community.

I believe Maskwa is one large step forward in improving health care and health outcomes for the good people of the Peace Country. It is way past time for Grande Prairie and area residents to have access to health diagnoses and the timely treatment available to others in other parts of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has question 1.

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Barbara Ross, a 91-year-old Albertan, called 911. She was experiencing chest pains that left her barely able to stand. She needed an ambulance but was transferred to 811 and eventually told to go to a clinic. Her daughter eventually took her to the Misericordia, where Barbara spent an entire day waiting to be admitted, sitting in agony in a chair. Things like this happen every day. Barbara's is just one horror story in an endless list.

Health care is in crisis. It's been in crisis for years as a result of this government's horrible, incompetent, and cruel decisions. Is the Premier really going to stand here today and claim that the crisis in our health care system is over?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all have our heart broken when we hear stories like that, which is why we made the decision very early on to put in Dr. John Cowell as the head and official administrator of Alberta Health Services, so we could accelerate changes in the system, and I am so pleased to report that we are seeing year-over-year increase in ambulance response time. What we saw last year, last January, is that there were over a thousand incidents of code red in Edmonton, meaning there wasn't an ambulance available when it was needed. That's gone down to 82. That's a 92 per cent reduction. We've seen a 60 per cent reduction in Calgary as well.

Mr. Shepherd: There was no ambulance for Barbara Ross.

Mona Koch was forced to play the lottery to keep her family doctor, and she lost. She's on a list of patients dropped by her local clinic and far from alone there: 40,000 people in Lethbridge without a doctor. Mothers living in communities an hour from here are being forced to drive into the city while in the middle of giving birth. Surgeries are being delayed. Specialists are meeting with cancer patients months after it could be too late to do anything. Again, will this Premier explain to all Albertans how she can stand here and claim that this is not a system in crisis?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I accepted when I got elected in October that the system was in crisis, which is why I appointed an official administrator, and all of the measures are moving in the right direction. As I mentioned, a 92 per cent decrease in code reds in Edmonton, 60 per cent decrease in code reds in Calgary. We've also seen since November of '22 that the number of patients waiting longer than the clinically recommended time has gone down 9.4 per cent. A wait in an emergency room is down 10 per cent. We intend to spend \$158 million on physician recruitment and health professional recruitment. Things are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the Premier fired the board of AHS for a political vendetta, not to help Albertans. And speaking of specialists, days ago my colleague stood with a St. Albert nurse named Sheila Ethier, whose partner was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer and facing an eight-week delay to see an oncologist. Stage 4 cancer, a two-month wait; the longest two months of this person's life. These people aren't being heard. They're clearly being ignored by this Premier. So will she stand today and apologize for trying to tell Albertans that what they see in front of their eyes, what they experience every day in this health care crisis isn't real?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, one of the advisers that I have is Dr. Raj Sherman, who was working every day in an emergency room, and one of the things that he told me was that patients were showing up in emergency room sicker because of the fearmongering from people like those on the other side that the system could not take care of them. What we want to do is instill some calm, instill some confidence that the system is going to be there for them. All the measures are going in the right place. I certainly wouldn't want anybody to resist getting the medically necessary care they need because of the fearmongering that they hear on the other side.

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

Energy Company Liability

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, before the Premier took on her current role, she worked as a lobbyist, and in that role she supported a program that was designed to give \$20 billion in royalty credits to companies to clean up wells they are already obligated to clean up as a condition of their drilling licence; \$20 billion to incent profitable corporations not to fulfill their legal obligations but, instead, to wait for taxpayer cash to do it. Why is the Premier putting the interests of her friends and insiders, the people who worked on her leadership campaigns, ahead of the people of Alberta?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's simply not true. What we have done as a government is that we have put in place a process where each energy company has a mandatory amount of money that they have to spend on liability cleanup. That's going to amount to over \$700 million this year, escalating 9 per cent per year as we go forward. We have a \$30 billion liability problem. This is a problem that I have known about since 1997, when I started landowner advocacy. The members opposite had an opportunity to address it; they failed. It is up to us to make sure we're standing up for landowners, municipalities, and First Nations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: The UCP's proposed \$20 billion royalty handout was originally proposed by an organization called SAEN. SAEN's cofounder Kris Kinnear now works in the Premier's office, but the

Premier has been extremely reluctant to answer questions about what he does or what special project he's supposedly working on. Despite the potential for this \$20 billion handout to tarnish the reputation of good actors in the energy sector who clean up after themselves, the project is suddenly proceeding to pilot. So, Premier, connect the dots for us. Is Mr. Kinnear working on anything besides handing out \$20 billion?

Ms Smith: Once again what the NDP is saying is just simply untrue. There is a pilot program that the Energy minister is consulting on at the moment, and what it is is that it's focused on the worst wells. We have tried many different ways of trying to ensure that wells that have been inactive since before 1980 and been inactive for more than 20 years get priority to clean up. Under the NDP they just kept on getting transferred forward again and again to a new company. We have to make sure that we're cleaning these sites up. It's important for municipalities, it's important for First Nations, and it's important for landowners.

Ms Ganley: It gets worse. There are even members of the UCP's own cabinet who don't support the Premier's \$20 billion giveaway. When the current Premier was still working as a lobbyist, she wrote to the UCP Energy minister asking her to consider, but the minister wrote back saying that she didn't support the handout because it was, quote, a violation of the polluter-pay principle. The current Premier won the leadership, removed the then Energy minister – now environment minister – replaced her with the current Energy minister, a vocal supporter of the handout. Can the Premier explain why she thinks polluter-pay should be replaced with Albertans?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a targeted program, that may be \$100 million, that is focused on making sure that the worst wells in Alberta . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: . . . are taken care of. These are wells that have been around since the '40s and '50s and '60s. They had an opportunity to put a program in place that would have incentivized the cleanup of those sites; they failed at that. We cannot allow for this problem to continue to be passed forward to future generations. We owe it to future generations to make sure that these sites get returned to their natural condition as quickly as possible.

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

Coutts Border Crossing Protester Conspiracy Charges

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year our border was held hostage by an illegal blockade which cost Alberta's economy over \$200 million. Some of the people involved stockpiled weapons and planned to kill RCMP officers. When the Premier took over, she prioritized to get amnesty for those arrested at this blockade. The Premier even claimed that she called Crown prosecutors to get them to reconsider the charges. Why did this Premier spend her time to get allegedly violent criminals off the hook? Is that really what the Premier should be prioritizing?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there may be a point of privilege in here, but let me just say that the CBC published a false story. They published a story that my office staff had been calling Crown prosecutors. They had not seen e-mails. They were not in possession of e-mails. They made false allegations. We've put in a request to the Ombudsman to investigate this. We've asked for a

retraction, and we have asked for an apology, and we are still waiting.

I would advise the member opposite not to repeat false claims, because they have absolutely no evidence at the CBC for the claims they made. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Premier, you admitted twice to having talked to Crown prosecutors. That's on record.

Not only did the Premier admit that she was calling Crown prosecutors to get amnesty for those who broke the law, but according to Artur Pawlowski, who was arrested at Coutts for encouraging the blockade to continue, she promised to get him amnesty. This was a major theme of the Premier's leadership campaign. She, again, twice claimed publicly that she was speaking to Crown prosecutors. To the Premier: what did she promise those arrested for holding southern Alberta hostage and those threatening the lives of law enforcement?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, rather than call another point of privilege, let me also correct the record from what is being said across the aisle, which is simply not the case. I have always said that any communication that I had about the issue of amnesty would be done through the proper channels, which is my Justice minister. There is no question that I campaigned for seven months saying that I would look into that, and I can tell you what my Justice minister told me: one, that a Premier does not have the power of amnesty and, two, that we are waiting for the result of the Ingram decision. I accepted what my Justice minister told me, and that is what I've communicated.

2:00

Mr. Sabir: While the Premier prioritized trying to get lawbreakers amnesty for breaking the law, Albertans have suffered through a health care crisis, an affordability crisis, and a government that was slow to act to either. Our team put together a jobs plan, supported by the Industrial Heartland, a health care plan that will get 1 million Albertans access to a family doctor, supported by many in the medical profession. Mr. Speaker, it is clear what we are focused on. Will this Premier admit that her decision to call Crown prosecutors, which she admitted twice publicly, and seeking amnesty for lawbreakers was the wrong choice?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're focused on fake stories; we're focused on addressing issues for Albertans. My very first action when I became Premier was to focus on fixing the health care system. That was the number one priority. They continue to talk down the front-line workers in the health care system. We're supporting them because we have confidence in them that they're going to be able to address the issues of Albertans with our support, and that's part of what we're doing.

The other part of what we're doing is an affordability plan, which even Trevor Tombe has said has counteracted the federal inflation crisis caused by the NDP coalition.

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Dach: The Alberta pension plan is, quite frankly, one of the worst ideas this government has put forward. Respected economists, academics, and workers' representatives have all been adamantly opposed to the idea. Mr. Speaker, they are right. Seniors fear for their retirement security. Those considering retirement worry about their futures. Albertans want to keep their pension investments within the CPP, period, full stop. Why doesn't the Premier understand this?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we had a Fair Deal Panel that did widespread consultations across the province, and one of the things they asked us to do was to look at the feasibility of an Alberta pension plan, and if there was any decision to be made, it would be made through a public referendum of Albertans. We've had an initial report done, and we need more work done, quite frankly. It looks promising, but we want to make sure that Albertans have the most up-to-date information. That will be available, we've been told, sometime in May. When the final report is available, we will put it out into the public and Albertans will decide.

Mr. Dach: Albertans do not want this Premier anywhere near their pensions. They've made it abundantly clear, yet this government is refusing to listen to the very people they represent. They talk of a referendum, but they know already where Albertans stand. Thankfully, there's a vote coming. I suspect Albertans will have the final say on protecting their pensions, and that's how it should be. Will the Premier agree with me that the fate of Alberta's pensions is on the line in the coming spring election?

Ms Smith: Well, no, I won't agree to that because there's a process we'd have to go through. We'd have to issue the report, we'd have to do public consultations, and we'd have to see whether or not Albertans even want to have a referendum on the issue of a change in the pension plan. So there are many, many months of work ahead of us, but I will agree with the member opposite on this: this is Alberta's pension. It will be Alberta's choice. We listened to what Albertans said when they wanted us to investigate. It sounds to me like the members opposite would ignore what they heard from the Fair Deal Panel, ignore what Albertans told them. We think it's our responsibility to put the information on the table and let Albertans decide.

Mr. Dach: Moving from the CPP to the Alberta pension plan is so unpopular, more than 60,000 Albertans signed a petition telling this government not to do it. Let me say that again: 60,000 and counting. Albertans work their whole adult lives building their retirement savings, and the UCP wants to gamble them away. It's shameful. Pension plans are not political games, and treating them as such is dangerous. I want to send a message to all Albertans. An Alberta NDP government will never treat Albertans' pensions like their fun money, as the UCP have. We could never be that careless. For the last time, can the Premier explain why she wants to gamble?

Ms Smith: Well, I wish the members opposite would stop fear-mongering. I suppose it doesn't surprise me that they don't want to see the results of the report. They didn't want to see what Bill 1 looked like before they voted against it as well. We believe that Albertans want to see this information. They asked for us to do the report. We have done the report. We will release it when it becomes available. We're hoping that'll be in the next few months, and we look forward to having a robust discussion. We have always said – and this was the recommendation from the Fair Deal Panel – that if there is any decision to be made, it has to be through public referendum by Albertans, and that's what we've committed to.

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

Health Care Wait Times

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the best front-line health care workers in the world, and this government is making meaningful changes to our health care system to improve outcomes for Albertans all across the province. Yesterday the Minister of Health, along with the Premier and Dr. Cowell, released a 90-day

report to provide us with a status update on this very important work. To the Minister of Health: can you please inform the members what results we've seen in EMS response times over the past three months?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question on this important issue. We've seen significant progress over the past three months. During that time, since November, EMS added 39 front-line staff, including paramedics and emergency communications officers. EMS response in urban areas has improved by 22.1 per cent, and remote areas have improved by 10 per cent. EMS response times for most urgent calls improved across the province as well. That's in metro, urban, rural, and remote areas: 17 minutes in metro and urban areas, down from 21.8; 19.2 minutes in communities over 3,000, down from 21.5; and further improvements.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the effectiveness of our health care system is an issue that impacts all Albertans and given that Albertans deserve to have confidence that they will receive high-quality care with minimal wait times, can the Minister of Health please share how we're working to reduce wait times in emergency rooms and for surgeries and what progress we're seeing so far?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're working with Dr. Cowell, our official administrator, and working with AHS, and I want to thank all of our health care workers on the front line for doing significant work over the last three months. We are making progress. The ED wait time to see a doctor went down by nearly 10 per cent since November. The number of patients waiting longer than the clinically recommended time has decreased by 9.4 per cent. By March 31, 2023, AHS and the chartered surgical facilities anticipate that they will complete 290,000 surgeries. That's a 4 per cent increase over next year, and progress in lowering ED wait times has been seen in all three measures. We're going to keep working and bring those times . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: given that a strong team of health care workers is critical to our system running smoothly and given that the Premier committed to empowering our health care workers to make more decisions about the running of the system, can the Minister of Health please share how this will be achieved and his overall impression of these first 90 days of health care reform?

Mr. Copping: Thanks once again to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, as you know, on November 17 we announced our health care action plan and promised Albertans that help is on the way. Wait times are trending down, and we are seeing a decrease in provincial averages for ambulances, surgeries, and emergency room waits over the last 90 days. We will continue to put in place the structure for both immediate and long-term reforms and changes. I know that Dr. Cowell has been meeting with AHS employees across the entire province and getting their input. We'll keep driving changes until we get these times down.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

Member Loyola: Red Deer is Alberta's third-largest city, and it currently has no doctors accepting new patients. On top of an already grim situation, the vital Red Deer hospital expansion project continues to be delayed. Mr. Speaker, all of this is unacceptable. The people of Red Deer deserve timely, high-quality public health care. The UCP promised that construction would begin in 2021, but now in 2023 nothing is started. Can the minister please explain why they have chosen to delay this critical project every chance that they've had? Clearly, a strong public health care system isn't a value of the UCP. It is of the NDP, and I can't wait to deliver for Albertans.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This project is proceeding. In fact, the RFP for design is out, and we expect it to be completed and returned by the end of March. At that point we can carry on with the design. Unlike the NDP, we believe in planning first, so we're going to do a good plan so we can do a good build so we can meet the needs of people in central Alberta and Red Deer, giving them the health care they need in a good-designed building, meeting the needs of all citizens within central Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Member Loyola: Given that walk-in clinics in Red Deer are overrun and this government has continued to delay the Red Deer hospital expansion despite it being critical to the service of the central zone and given that when pressed about the delays, the Minister of Infrastructure insultingly said, quote, that there are complexities that most of the general public doesn't understand, and it's difficult to explain to them because it's tedious and very time consuming, will this minister apologize for this arrogant comment and admit to the people of Red Deer that their hospital was not a priority for this government over the last four years? If it was, construction would have started already.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic hearing from the NDP, who removed the Red Deer hospital from the priority capital list, that it's not a priority. We have put it back there. In fact, what I did when I made those comments was – when I went to Red Deer to talk face to face to the citizens of central Alberta to answer their primary question: why does it take so long to build a hospital? We're trying to be very transparent. We had plans there. We had officials from my Department of Infrastructure, officials from the Department of Health, and we had AHS members all there to answer people's questions and help explain: why does it take so long?

Member Loyola: Given that there are zero doctors accepting new patients in Red Deer, which leaves thousands of Albertans without any form of primary care, and given that the lack of primary care leads to more costs and more burden on our hospitals because far too many Albertans have nowhere else to go other than an emergency room and given that the UCP have no plan to get Albertans a doctor and the Alberta NDP have a comprehensive plan to get a million Albertans more doctors, which includes building a family health clinic in the new Red Deer hospital, can the minister stand in this House and admit that we will deliver health care for Red Deer after four years of this government failing so badly?

Mr. Neudorf: All the NDP will continue to do is make promises that they can't fulfill, so we're going to keep moving forward with good planning and good building, with all kinds of community consultation to make sure that they get the building that they need, the hospital care that they need, the services they need planned well, delivered well, and in good time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Ms Pancholi: Recently my colleagues and I went to visit the site of the south Edmonton hospital, you know, the hospital that the Alberta NDP announced in 2017 and construction was supposed to begin in 2020, but, Mr. Speaker, that construction site was just an empty field. The UCP, without saying anything to the people of south Edmonton, has delayed this project countless times and now indefinitely. The UCP clearly do not care about ensuring that my constituents have access to health care, but I can promise Albertans that an NDP government will get this project done. Can the minister explain why the UCP has failed to get even one single shovel in the ground for the south Edmonton hospital in four years?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the capital plan from 2022 has over \$371 million provided for this project. That money is already being put to use. There is site work happening; there is servicing work happening. We are in the middle of a functional design plan because, again, we need to know what design to do before we can build it. That's the order of construction, and that's what we're looking forward to working on, and that's what we're doing, making sure that we have a plan to meet the needs of all Edmontonians, especially those in south Edmonton, and build them a facility that works.

Ms Pancholi: Well, the minister should visit the site; nothing is happening.

Given that Edmonton is currently short over 400 hospital beds and that number is projected to more than triple in the next three years and given that some Edmontonians have to drive nearly an hour to get to a hospital that will no doubt be over full with long wait times and staff who are stretched too thin and given that this government has thrown public health care into a crisis, making the need for a new south Edmonton hospital even more critical, to the minister: can he explain to my constituents why the UCP has abandoned the health care needs of Edmontonians, of those living in communities around the city, and all Albertans, as a matter of fact?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are doing the work that the NDP failed to do. We are developing a plan. We are making sure that we meet the needs. The first thing you have to do when you do a good building is have a good plan. What are we providing for the services for those in Edmonton? Is it ambulatory care? Is it emergency rooms? Is it surgery suites? We need to answer these questions through our service providers, Alberta Health Services, work with the Ministry of Health. Once we have that, then we can go to design and building. We look forward to doing that. We continue to invest money in the capital budget from 2022 and beyond, and we will provide health care services . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that south Edmonton is one of the fastest growing areas in Canada and given that the last hospital in the city was built in 1988, when Edmonton's population was almost half of what it is today, which is why the Alberta NDP committed to building the south Edmonton hospital, and given that my constituents are tired of asking why the UCP keeps delaying this project, I think they're ready for a change, so this is our commitment. The Alberta NDP will get the south Edmonton hospital built, and we will deliver public health care for all. They can count on it. Is the minister getting used to the idea that we will finish what he can't even start?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Yeah. A great example of what the NDP didn't do is the Grande Prairie hospital. How come that took 14 years to deliver? Again, the NDP makes promises they can't deliver on. Where you start with building is with a good plan. We are continuing to work with the residents of Edmonton and south Edmonton, and we have an obligation to all taxpayers in the province to manage their finances well and appropriately. We need to build a building that will serve the needs not only today but into the future, and we're developing that plan, something the NDP failed to do in their four years in office.

Energy Company Liability

(continued)

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are hearing conflicting reports concerning the Premier's proposed liability management incentive program. The Premier argued that this thinly veiled corporate welfare scheme somehow doesn't undermine the polluter-pay principle. She stated that the projects to be cleaned up were – and I quote – left with somebody holding the bag who may have not been responsible for the initial liability. Given that the oil and gas under our feet is owned by all Albertans, to the Premier: why should Albertans be left holding the bag for private companies who pumped every last cent out of these wells before they abandoned them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member is just getting a little ahead of his skis here. You know, as with any government we're looking at a variety of ideas and programs. One we're exploring in the Department of Energy is the liability management incentive program, but it's a program that's still under development. It requires further stakeholder engagement and consultation. I would just ask the member to have a little bit of patience, and we will release the information and details in due course.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this Energy minister have very different ideas of how this program may actually work. Given that this minister has indicated that projects belonging to active, financially responsible oil and gas companies may be considered under this revised R-star program and given that the Premier has been more adamant that the pilot project will be reserved only for abandoned and orphaned wells, will the Premier actively commit right now that if all Albertans must pay for this, at least it'll be limited to orphan wells that have no current owner?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the basic premise of the liability management incentive program is to encourage further well site cleanup. We want to focus on some of the most challenging sites

that are out there, some that have been around the longest, say, inactive for greater than 20 years, so those from the '60s and the '70s. We know that industry is a good steward of the environment, and we want to support those efforts while encouraging new investment and creating jobs while we're at it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Barnes: Given that there is a long history in Alberta of major projects being used to feather the nests of lobbyists and companies close to this government – sometimes, like the case of the massive overbuild of Alberta's electrical transmission system, these companies hail from eastern Canada – and given that the Premier has personally lobbied for a similar program in the past and given that orphan well cleanup is being billed as a job-creation project for Albertans, will the Premier commit to ensuring that if the polluter-pay principle is abandoned, at least all of the out-of-province companies will be banned from participating in any facets of this cleanup?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, the details of the program haven't been released yet, so I think the member is just jumping to conclusions here. You know, I can say that the program does not change anything around the new liability framework or with directive 088 and the mandatory spend requirements. Those will remain in place. The liability incentive program is meant to be a supplementary thing and very targeted to some of the oldest liabilities. Consultation is ongoing. It's early days. It still has to go to caucus, committee, cabinet, Treasury Board . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning and Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Provincial Policing

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite overwhelming public objection, this Premier still plans to fire the RCMP and saddle communities across this province with a new provincial police force, all with new bills and new bureaucracy that will come with it. Now, while the minister ignores the feedback that we're getting from councillors, municipalities, the RMA, and more, we've been listening, and we can't find one municipal partner that supports this bad policy. Can the minister tell us who exactly supports this failed policy that is being forced on Albertans, and why are their opinions more important than those of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. As I've indicated before, there's no decision that has been made regarding the Alberta police service, and we continue to consult with municipalities and First Nations communities. I guess my question, though – I mean, we have nations such as Siksika that are interested in doing their own police service, you know, and we have had other municipalities, we've had other First Nations that are interested in doing their own policing service. So I guess the message coming from the NDP to the First Nations communities is: we don't care what your opinion is; we don't care what you have to say. They're going to impose whatever they want on the First Nations communities.

2:20

Ms Sweet: Well, given that the government might want to go back and look at their sovereignty act and given that all across this province communities are struggling with the rising cost of

everything and given that the city of Red Deer already explored the idea of leaving the RCMP and abandoned it over a decade ago and that it's clear that this minister isn't a fan of common sense and given that the minister had his chance to listen and he chose to put the Premier's demands over what Albertans are asking for – Albertan communities don't want the UCP to impose \$735 million per year for a provincial police force, period – why isn't the UCP listening?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I mean, contrary to the NDP's belief, many people, including the federal government themselves, have been talking about reviewing and moving away from contract policing for years. A 2019 briefing note provided by the federal Minister of Public Safety – and let me just give you a bit of a quote here. It says, "It has been the Government of Canada's objective since the 1960s to decrease" – let me say it again: to decrease – "its contract policing financial liability." We are listening to municipalities, we are empowering municipalities, and we're . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, given that this government likes to say that there will be cost savings with their new police idea but that is based off a report that was paid for by this government and given that other reports not commissioned by this government show the opposite, including what's going on in Surrey, and that Alberta municipalities can't afford to gamble millions of dollars and loss of services on hypotheticals or reports bought and paid for by the government and given that this minister refused to listen to what people are telling and insists even as recently as last week on standing behind this awful plan, I'm just going to be clear, Mr. Speaker: the Alberta NDP government will keep the RCMP and invest in community safety.

Mr. Ellis: Again, I'm hearing the NDP say to First Nations communities: we do not care what you have to say; we do not care what your opinion is; we will force the RCMP on you. They have no respect . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will come to order. You may not like the answer, but he's entitled to give it.

Mr. Ellis: On this side of the House we're trying to empower municipalities. We are . . .

Mr. Feehan: You're making this stuff up.

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

Mr. Ellis: On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we are trying to empower municipalities, we are trying to empower our First Nations communities, and we are trying to listen and do what is best for them. We want to hear from them. We are listening to members like Siksika. We are listening to First Nation communities like Enoch, and they are giving clear direction, and it is not towards the NDP.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Seniors' Care Facilities

Ms Sigurdson: The office of the Auditor General released reports on long-term care and COVID-19 in continuing care facilities. The

reports make it clear that long-term care and continuing care facilities were poorly resourced during the pandemic. Shortfalls in staffing, resources, and procedures were known. They were noted in previous audits, raised by those living and working in these homes. The UCP government failed to make the homes of seniors and the workplaces of our front-line heroes safe. To the Minister of Health: why has this government failed at supporting Albertans living in continuing care?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health has the call.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, and thank you to the hon. member for the question on this important issue. Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member, we are investing in our continuing care system and supporting seniors. We accepted all of the recommendations made by the Auditor General, and a number of those recommendations we have already acted on. As part of Budget 2022 we invested over \$200 million in capital to be able to expand our continuing care system, including to ensure that we had enough spaces for seniors so they didn't need to double up. We're going to continue to invest.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the report highlights that paid sick leave would have halted outbreaks in long-term care facilities and given that mitigating outbreaks could have saved lives and given that the Official Opposition proposed paid sick leave and drafted a bill that the government could have introduced during the pandemic but they ignored it and failed Albertans, to the minister: why ignore real measures like paid sick leave that could have improved the care and saved the lives of Albertans?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the facility-based continuing care review identified staffing as a significant issue in regard to the continuing care sector. That same review identified that we also need to actually transfer our approach from congregate care settings to home-care settings. We started that process in Budget 2022 with an additional million hours in home care, and I'm looking forward to the budget that's going to be released today. We'll talk more about the investment that we are making to improve continuing care for seniors and for all Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that continuing care residents accounted for 65 per cent of COVID-19 deaths in the province and given that while they were dying, the now Premier was spouting conspiracy theories about the pandemic – even now she seems more focused on getting the people who undermined the public health response out of their criminal charges than improving care – can someone explain to the surviving relatives of thousands of Albertans who died in the continuing care system during the COVID-19 pandemic why they didn't implement life-saving policies?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we invested significantly during the COVID crisis to support those most vulnerable. I appreciate, again, the report being done by the Auditor General. We accepted all of the recommendations in principle. I just want to be clear. We invested hundreds of millions of dollars, both from a staffing standpoint and to provide PPE for those who were the most vulnerable in the continuing care setting. We learned from waves 1 and 2 that we needed to only have single rooms, and we're investing to make sure that we can ...

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has the call.

Calgary Crime Rate

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister of public safety. According to the latest statistics crime

rates in Calgary have been on the rise for the past two years, with significant increases in property and violent crimes. Can the minister please inform the House what measures the government is taking to address this concerning trend?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and of course I thank the member very much for the question. Of course, public safety is very important in our large municipalities, Edmonton and Calgary. You know, people have a right to feel safe in their homes, children have a right to play outside, and these sorts of rights are being infringed upon right now. That's why we created the Calgary public safety task force. We've been working with multiple levels of government, and we've deployed several initiatives that we believe are going to be in place – and, believe me, several more will be coming – to ensure that families, that people that live and work and play in Calgary can feel safe within their communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has the call.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the recent reports have highlighted the growing concerns among Calgary residents, particularly in high-crime neighbourhoods, about their safety and well-being, can the minister elaborate on how the government is working with local communities, leaders in law enforcement agencies to address these concerning concerns and ensure that residents feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of emergency services.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you again to the member for that very important question, especially to his residents, many of whom do not feel safe in their homes with the gunfire that has been going on with the gang-related activity. I can tell you that, of course, through the department we've been in touch with the Calgary Police Service to make sure that they have the necessary resources to go after those gang members, because I can tell you that in this province we are not going to tolerate gang members instilling fear in our community members. Let me be very clear on that.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic pressures have contributed to the increase in crime rates in Calgary, can the minister provide details on any specific programs or initiatives being implemented by the government to support vulnerable populations and how this has improved public safety in Calgary?

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Thank you very much. Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely, of course, we work very closely with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction to make sure that those officers that are being deployed, whether it be through the Calgary Police Service or the sheriffs, have the necessary resources to provide support for people, especially vulnerable people. To be honest with you, I can tell you that it's not about moving people along; it's about ensuring that they have the resources, including the HealthIM app, to make sure that those individuals are actually getting the help they need and a pathway to recovery and treatment.

2:30 Support for Victims of Gender-based Violence

Member Irwin: Violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse people has created a shadow pandemic over the last three years. Overwhelming demand for support services compounded with high inflation and inadequate government funding have left shelters overwhelmed and survivors struggling. This government has completely turned their backs on survivors. This is disgraceful. Will the Premier commit today to addressing the funding crisis that women's shelters are facing? Stakeholders are here today. They're listening. Tell them your plan.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of seniors and community services.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I share her deep concern for women that are fleeing domestic violence, and I want to assure her and anybody that's finding themselves in a situation where they're in a domestic violence situation that this government is there for them, this province is there for them. We continue to work with not-for-profits across this province to make sure that there's a safe place and there's support for people in that situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Member Irwin: Given that nearly 1 in 2 Albertans has experienced sexual violence in their lifetime – and in the last few years survivors are reaching out and they're asking for help at record rates, which is a good thing, but because of lack of government funding survivors are waiting months, even years to access counselling – and given that the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services has made it clear that funding is desperately needed to shorten wait times, address the complex needs of survivors, access justice, and offer prevention programs, do the right thing today, Premier. Show your government cares. Fund the organizations doing the critical work to support survivors.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of seniors and community services.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her question and her concern. I'm pleased to report that I've been working very closely with our parliamentary secretary for the status of women. We have been going across the province meeting with front-line service providers, not-for-profits, and working to understand what the challenges are to make sure that we do have the funding in place to meet the needs that are there. Again, I continue to look forward to working with our amazing parliamentary secretary for the status of women as well as our fantastic not-for-profits to work towards addressing these challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Member Irwin: Given that the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters said it best, "Survivors deserve better; Alberta deserves better," yet crickets from this government – this is your legacy, Premier, one that eliminated the status of women ministry, one that abandoned survivors of violence, one that continually attacked women-dominated sectors like health care and education, one that purposely denied nonprofits essential funding, all while having billions in surplus to give away to your corporate buddies. That's the legacy you're leaving, Premier, and you should be ashamed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the question was there, but I'm happy to address what's being said here.

This government has demonstrated compassion, and we will continue to work with not-for-profits across this province in all sectors, especially for women fleeing domestic violence. We have increased funding for shelters by 10 per cent. We have increased funding for folks that work in the disability sector by 10 per cent. We fund women's shelters, \$51.3 million a year. Anybody who is in a domestic violence situation will get help in this province. You have my commitment to that. We will continue to work with our not-for-profits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary students and the schools in which they learn are crucial to Alberta's economic recovery. Unfortunately, students are struggling because of decisions made by this UCP government. The Premier and this minister have approved hikes of anywhere between 16 to 104 per cent in tuition, more than \$10,000 in additional fees, removed access to grants, underspent student aid, slashed funding to postsecondary at record levels. So it begs the question: why would the postsecondary minister make it so hard for students to get a postsecondary education?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member is curious about why it's so difficult, he should ask his boss in Ottawa, Jagmeet Singh, who is working with Trudeau to jack up the carbon tax. Reckless spending is driving up inflation. One of the reasons that postsecondary students are struggling is because of a cost-of-living crisis created by the Trudeau Liberal and Jagmeet Singh alliance through reckless spending. We are taking action. A couple of weeks ago I announced a series of affordability measures to help our students while the NDP sits there and does nothing.

Mr. Eggen: Really, Mr. Speaker. I mean, given that tuition in this province was amongst the lowest in Canada in 2019 – now it's the highest; students report increases of more than 30 per cent to their tuition because of this minister – and given that they didn't even get a piece of the Premier's so-called affordability plan announced last year, they're having to sell their vehicles, skip meals, and pile on debt just to make ends meet. How does this minister stand in the House with a straight face, which he doesn't even do – he has a smirk – knowing the pain and the suffering of students he is personally responsible for?

The Speaker: That sounded a lot like a direct, personal attack on the minister, which the hon. member knows is not appropriate.

The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: It's okay, Mr. Speaker. He can buy me a coffee afterwards and it's all done and dusted, although I have to correct the member. I'm not sure where he's getting his information from. I think we talked about this last year. I encourage the member to look at Stats Canada. Again, it's a very reliable source of information. I really don't know what the member is talking about when he says that tuition prices are the most expensive, because that is simply not true. The average undergraduate tuition rate right now in the country is \$6,800. Alberta is just above that at \$7,100, far below neighbouring provinces, far below Ontario, far below Saskatchewan.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this government is forcing more and more costs on to the backs of students who are already struggling

due to the UCP's countless poor decisions – to date \$700 million has been cut from universities, colleges, and polytechnics; \$700 million – and given that they have done this while the Premier seems somehow to find \$20 billion to hand over to her friends and insiders, can the minister then explain why they get the support and our students do not?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the member missed the press conference, but we've announced a series of affordability measures to help our students. We're eliminating the plus 1 per cent on student loan interest rates to help students cope. We're extending the interest deferral period from six months to 12 months. We're extending the repayment assistance program. As well, we're adding more money to student financial assistance to help those who need funding the most. We are taking direct, real, and measurable action to help our postsecondary students right now and well into the future.

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

Postsecondary Students and Affordability Plan

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making life affordable for Albertans continues to be a top priority for this government. We will continue to aid Albertans in achieving financial security by a variety of means. Our policies have already provided support to a multitude of groups such as seniors, AISH recipients, and families who are struggling with inflation and affordability in large part due to poor federal fiscal management. Our government has laid out plans to help protect the bank accounts of postsecondary students, starting with implementing a tuition cap. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how will the new tuition cap benefit Alberta students?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. You know, one of the things that students have been asking for and have been lobbying me about over the course of the past four years has been stability and predictability when it comes to tuition policy. We currently don't have that because of the cap, that the members opposite created, that's allowed tuition to increase by 5 and a half per cent this current year. We're introducing a new cap that'll establish a base rate of 2 per cent. Institutions will not be permitted to increase tuition by that 2 per cent, giving students and families predictability and stability.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government aims to provide a foundation for Albertan graduates to be successful contributors to our economy and given that upcoming and recent postsecondary graduates will still face financial barriers and given that these individuals will require government support, what new supports are available for students who have already graduated or are graduating before 2024-2025?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Recent grads and upcoming grads will benefit from some of the affordability measures that we've just announced. We are extending the interest, the student loan deferral period. Right now students have a six-month window after they graduate to begin repaying their student loans. We're going to extend that out to a year. We're changing the interest rates on student loans. That'll affect all current and future borrowers, giving

them more ability. In addition, we are expanding the thresholds for the repayment assistance program to help those recent graduates who need assistance in repaying their loans.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Peigan.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, through you, to the minister for that answer and for recognizing the value of Alberta postsecondary graduates. Given that our government is prioritizing affordability for all Albertans and given that as a result we have already put significant measures in place to lighten the financial load on Albertans, how do these new measures support other initiatives to make life more affordable for all Albertans?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, addressing the cost-of-living crisis is a top concern for the government and, as the member noted, is being driven largely by reckless federal policies. But Alberta's government is focused on making life more affordable for Albertans, our postsecondary students, seniors, and other individuals. I know that the minister of affordability is working hard to address that. These measures that we announced a couple of weeks ago will help our postsecondary students through some of these challenging times and help them transition into rewarding careers in the near future. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

This concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In light of the budget, coming at 3 o'clock, we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine immediately. If you are leaving the Chamber to prepare yourself for such activities, please do so quickly, quietly, and appropriately out of respect to the remainder of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Ukraine

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, it's been over a year since Ukraine was invaded by Vladimir Putin's Russia. It's been a long year of watching cities devastated, families and communities forced to flee the onslaught of devastation wrought against a peaceful country by the Russian Federation. There are heartbreaking stories of people losing their loved ones, of communities devastated by invasion and bombings.

But throughout it all we've seen heroism of people standing up against the invaders determined to crush a free and independent Ukraine. We've seen compassion both around the world and right here at home with Premier Stelmach and Thomas Lukaszuk, who shipped tonnes of aid and supplies to Ukraine and filled planes full of refugees, who found their way here to find peace and stability as this illegal and immoral war continues. It's been a year of pain and hurt for Ukraine, but the people of Ukraine are still standing in defiance of the tyranny of Putin.

Now, there are those, including the Premier, who suggested that the only solution for Ukraine was neutrality. The Premier even stated that she thought the invasion was understandable. Although I appreciate that she corrected her wrong opinion, it still caused harm to the Ukrainian community here and those fleeing violence. Some may never forgive what she said.

Mr. Speaker, I'm deeply proud of my Ukrainian roots, and I know so many Albertans are of theirs. As a province I know that we will continue to stand up for Ukraine and its people.

Slava Ukraini.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has a statement to make.

Federal Energy Transition Plan

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because the federal government persistently employs newspeak rhetoric to disguise its progressive ideological policies, the referencing of George Orwell has become necessary. In his essay on Politics and the English Language, written in April 1946, he said, “Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.”

Happily for the federal Ministry of Truth, a leaked memo exposed the rhetoric of the just transition policy as classic newspeak. The actual aim of just transition was revealed to be the murder of the Alberta oil and gas industry, albeit a respectable murder. A quote from the memo gave the game away: Canadians thrown out of work by climate change programs can get jobs as janitors. The memo revealed that they intend to throw 2.7 million Canadian employees out of work into janitorial jobs.

Surely no political party leader in Alberta can know this situation and with good conscience sit on their hands. However, the Leader of the Opposition’s hands are tied because her federal boss has already signed up to this attack on Alberta’s oil and gas industry, the industry which provides the funds for the social programs socialists claim to champion. Then conscience is obsolete.

Happily for Albertans, their Premier has not sat on her hands. Indeed, she is squarely on her feet. She proved this when, immediately and without compromise, she called out the newspeak rhetoric of the just transition policy. I know that the Premier along with my UCP colleagues will continue to expose just transition newspeak euphemisms and resist this ideological attack on Alberta until it’s defeated. However, we should heed the admonitions of Thomas Jefferson, who said that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, because once we send this dishonest nonsense packing, Canada’s federal government will launch a new attack on our province.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has a petition to present.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to present this petition coming from the southwest Edmonton community of Edgemont. Spearheading this petition is the Edgemont Community League School Advocacy Committee, who have obtained 480 signatures. Right now the children of Edgemont have the longest average commute times to school in Edmonton, and this petition seeks to comprehensively address the educational infrastructure in the area by building a much-needed K to 9 public school in the community of Edgemont.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2023-2024 estimates schedule.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Seeing none, hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2:22 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll be short. At the time that you mentioned, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford clearly shouted, after being warned by yourself, “You’re making this stuff up.” I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, and I suspect it may not even be caught by the ambient mics, but I sure heard it, and I suspect many other members in the Chamber heard it. That kind of language isn’t appropriate for this Chamber, especially because it was directed at a specific member, the hon. minister of public safety. I believe this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I encourage that member to apologize, withdraw, and do better.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member we withdraw the comment.

The Speaker: I accept this and consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Temporary Adjournment of Spring Session

20. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Assembly stand adjourned at the conclusion of its sitting on February 28, 2023, and reconvene on March 6, 2023.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, in order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House stands in recess until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:48 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I’ve received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: The Honourable the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

The Honourable the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2023-24 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the '23-24 government estimates. In addition, I also wish to table the '23-26 government of Alberta strategic plan and the Budget 2023 ministry plans.

Government Motions

(continued)

Budget Address

21. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the government's 2023-26 fiscal plan and move Government Motion 21.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I count it a tremendous, tremendous honour today to rise in the House and present Budget 2023, the fifth I've presented on behalf of Albertans. In the fall of 2019 I put forward a four-year plan to bring the province back to fiscal responsibility and a balanced budget. In some respects these past four years have felt like a century, in part due to the extraordinary global challenges we faced but also because of how far we've come. When as a government we took office in 2019, Alberta had an economy that was flatlined, and we were spending \$10 billion more than comparable provinces on services, without better outcomes.

Our plan to strengthen Alberta's economic foundation was twofold: first, to bring discipline to Alberta's spending – we could no longer afford to be the spending outlier among Canadian provinces – and then we were determined to position our province for competitiveness, leading to exceptional investment attraction, economic growth, diversification, and job creation, thereby ensuring an increase in fiscal capacity and provincial revenues. These goals were, to put it mildly, ambitious.

To achieve them, we committed to three fiscal anchors that informed our decision-making. The first anchor was a commitment to keep Alberta's net debt to GDP ratio below 30 per cent. This would ensure that debt and debt repayment would not strangle our economic growth. Second, it was imperative that we would get our spending in line with comparative provinces and, third, when there was economic clarity, to chart a path to a balanced budget.

As we implemented our ambitious economic recovery plan, the impact on Albertans was almost immediate. Our red tape reduction initiative has saved Albertans \$2.1 billion. We established the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation with \$1 billion of capital so that Indigenous communities can be full partners in the Alberta advantage.

Our government invested in strategic infrastructure projects that were essential for future growth while getting Albertans back to work at a time they needed it most. By July 2020 we had cut Alberta's corporate tax rate from 12 to 8 per cent. We recapitalized the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, adding \$175 million to support investment into Alberta start-ups, and we established Invest Alberta to sell the province's incredible value proposition to the world. Then on February 24, 2022, I was able to stand in this House and present Alberta's first balanced budget in a decade.

3:20

That brings us to today. Today Alberta is leading the nation in economic growth. Today, with a rapidly diversifying economy, there are career opportunities that didn't even exist a few years ago. Today Albertans pay \$20 billion less in taxes than they would if

they lived in the next lowest taxed province. Today, after some very difficult years, the opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs are exploding, and today I again present a balanced budget.

This means debt is on the decline. In this last fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, we paid off over \$13 billion of debt, all of the debt that matured in 2022. This means lower debt-service costs and more resources available for health, education, and other programs. It means more available fiscal room and thereby more runway and capacity should we experience another economic shock. We are far and away below our net debt to GDP ratio ceiling of 30 per cent. Today Alberta is at 10 per cent, the lowest in all of Canada by a long shot. And because of our strong balance sheet, Alberta has received its second credit upgrade of the year, remarkable when we consider that our last credit-rating increase was back in 2001.

Investment attraction is essential to Alberta's strong economic growth and job numbers. In my business experience a government will either help or hinder progress, get in the way or get out of the way. It's an attitude, Mr. Speaker, and it matters to investors. Four years ago we put out the Open for Business sign, and we followed it up with real actions, not just words. We've reduced business taxes, cut red tape, and have created one of the most business-friendly environments on the continent, and the results speak for themselves. In a year when venture capital investment dropped in Ontario, Quebec, and B.C., we in Alberta, at \$729 million, set another record.

Businesses across sectors and across the province are creating thousands of new jobs while diversifying Alberta's economy. Just days ago Applexus Technologies announced they were moving their Canadian headquarters to Calgary, creating 125 tech jobs. Southland Trailer Corp. in Lethbridge will double its production, creating 250 jobs. De Havilland is moving its head office to Alberta – instead of to subsidized Quebec, I might add – and it's building an aerospace centre and manufacturing plant, employing 1,500 people, and that's just the start.

CGC development is building a \$210 million wallboard manufacturing plant in Wheatland county. Garmin Canada has announced expansion plans for their Cochrane head office that will double their workforce in two years. We have Imperial Oil investing \$720 million in the heartland for a biodiesel refinery. Drilling activity in the oil and gas sector ramped up to an eight-year high last year, and investment is expected to grow by a further 19 per cent in 2023.

IBM is opening its client innovation centre for western Canada in Calgary. Sidetrade is investing \$24 million to make Calgary its North American headquarters. Air Products is building a net-zero hydrogen complex right here in the heartland. Amazon, Walmart, Canadian Pacific, Dow, Infosys, Mphasis, HBO, Northern Petrochemical, RBC, CN Rail, Ernst & Young – I could go on and on, but there's not time this afternoon to detail every good-news investment story in Alberta's economy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be crystal clear here, and it's important that our colleagues across the floor hear this. Governments do not create wealth. They create the conditions favourable for investment attraction and wealth creation, and over the last four years this government was relentless in its focus to make Alberta the best place to do business in North America. Behind the long list of good-news stories the best part of the story is what this means for Albertans every day on the ground: 92,000 jobs were created in 2022 and over 20,000 in January of this year. In fact, almost a quarter of all jobs created in the nation in 2022 were created right here in Alberta.

These jobs are paying Albertans more. Workers in our province make more than in any other province. Since January 2019 the

amount Albertans earn per week has gone up 12 per cent, and we expect these earnings to keep growing. Further to that, thanks to the lowest taxes in Canada, Albertans keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians from other provinces and those new to Canada are taking note of Alberta's growing economy, our lower cost of living, and the abundant opportunities we offer, like the story of Nick and Jessica, two young professionals – one from Edmonton, one from Vancouver – debating about where they're going to start life together. When Jessica recently visited Edmonton for the first time, she was surprised by its natural beauty, but what tipped the scales? The high wages, the affordability, and the cost of housing. "Edmonton is cold," Jessica says, "but I can buy a coat." It's not surprising, then, that Alberta is leading the nation in population growth and that more Canadians are moving to Alberta than any other province.

Our growing population means good news for Alberta's labour market. Opportunities in every sector from finance to film, energy to agriculture mean we need a skilled workforce to keep up with the labour demands in the province. Budget 2022 committed \$170 million intended to create 7,000 training spaces for jobs in high demand. I want to commend our Minister of Advanced Education for his work in this area because, Mr. Speaker, he took funding for 7,000 spaces and worked with our incredible postsecondary institutions to create 10,000: 10,000 additional learning spaces for high-demand occupations across sectors and across this province.

Now, while Alberta's economy strengthens, we cannot afford to become complacent. We continue to face headwinds. Fuelled by supply chain constraints, global unrest, and our federal government's irresponsible fiscal policy, inflation is making life more costly for all Albertans at home, in business, and even in government. At the same time, despite record-breaking investment in Alberta, we continue to see declining business investment nationally. Since 2015 Canadian real GDP has grown by 13 per cent, but this growth has been entirely driven by government and consumer spending and residential investment. Much of this growth has been funded by debt, and it's masked the stagnant state of Canadian business investment.

Alarming, between 2015 and 2019 business investment in Canada actually declined. One of the impediments to business investment is Canada's growing reputation as a nation where it's difficult if not impossible to get large projects completed. Global investors have taken note of the many projects killed by the Trudeau government: Northern Gateway in 2016, Energy East in 2017, the Teck Frontier mine in 2020, and at least 15 LNG projects. In fact, since the federal impact assessment legislation, Bill C-69, was passed in 2018, there's not been one project subject to the act approved in all of Canada.

3:30

Not only has Canada lost out on billions of dollars of investment that would have created more jobs, better paying jobs, and greater financial stability for Canadians; we've turned our back on a world that desperately needs what we offer, including responsibly produced energy. If Canada fails to maximize responsibly produced energy production, we're not only failing Canadians; we're contributing to massive hardship for the world's most vulnerable. Canadian energy will help those living on the margins heat their homes. It will make fertilizer more affordable and boost agricultural output. It will improve air quality by displacing dirtier fuels. But it can do none of these things if it's left in the ground.

If Canada abdicates production, it simply moves to countries that give no credence to ESG concerns, with despotic leaders who use their energy wealth for destructive purposes. It leads to increased emissions and pollution as more coal is used in electricity

generation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if Canada is serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the best thing we can do is export clean-burning Canadian LNG.

An energy-rich democracy like Canada that continues to hamstring its world-class responsible energy production with carbon taxes, emission caps, and a regulatory quagmire at a time of global shortage is irrational and grossly irresponsible. Canada not only has an opportunity, Mr. Speaker; we have a deep responsibility to prove ourselves a reliable trading partner and ally and deliver responsibly produced energy.

Mr. Speaker, as we reflect on our journey as a province over the past four years and as we recognize both the significant triumphs and the challenges we're experiencing today, the question becomes: where do we go from here? How do we maintain a strong balance sheet and positive economic trajectory? What can we do today to secure Alberta's future tomorrow?

First, Mr. Speaker, I'm appealing to the rest of Canada to follow Alberta's lead to make business competitiveness a key priority. Securing a prosperous future for the next generation depends on it. We need to be a nation that once again can get big, visionary projects completed. We need to be a nation that values the welfare of Canadians above the ideologies of the elite.

In the 1980s and '90s there was a saying going around the province: please, Lord, give us one more oil boom, and I promise not to squander it this time. As I recall, there was a different term, a less parliamentary term, used for squander. Remaining disciplined and responsible is most difficult during years of plenty. I expect most if not all of us in the House today would agree that, whether in our businesses or households, the tendency to unsustainably increase spending as revenues rise is almost inevitable. In this province, with our economy heavily influenced by commodities and our volatile revenue structure, it's been our story all too often.

The second key, then, Mr. Speaker, is to maintain responsible fiscal management into the future through a framework, a series of well-calibrated fiscal rules and guardrails. We're introducing legislation that will require a balanced budget. We'll limit year-over-year operating expense growth to population and inflation, ensuring appropriate and disciplined spending growth in easy times and difficult times. We'll implement a fiscal framework for surplus allocation to ensure that heritage fund earnings are retained in the fund and debt repayment is given first priority.

Mr. Speaker, had we from day one invested the earnings of the heritage fund back into the heritage savings trust fund without any additional deposits other than what we have made to date, instead of the \$18 billion we have in the fund today, the fund would be approaching \$300 billion. A fund of this size would earn Albertans close to \$20 billion a year in investment income. While we all wish we started reinvestment earlier, the best day to start is today. Speaking of today, to make up for lost time, we will immediately invest an additional \$2 billion into the heritage fund from the surplus of the last two years.

All of these measures together provide fiscal stability, enabling low taxes, and will ensure that business investment continues to be preferential to Alberta. It means future generations will not be encumbered with a debt they did not incur. Mr. Speaker, Budget '23 is about the future. It's about doing more of what has worked these past four years, more to champion Alberta's incredible value proposition around the world, more to attract investment, more to ensure Albertans have the services they need, and more to give a hand up to the vulnerable among us.

To further position Alberta's economy for investment attraction, we're introducing a nonrefundable tax credit for agriculture processing and manufacturing investment. This carefully calibrated incentive will build on our broad-based value proposition and

ensure we're able to compete with neighbouring jurisdictions, growing our value-added agriculture sector.

As the largest hydrogen producer in Canada we're building for the future with the Alberta petrochemical incentive program as we do the regulatory work, assign carbon hubs, and work with industry to advance logistics in our commitment to position this emerging sector for growth.

We're ensuring that future generations of Indigenous Albertans are partners in prosperity with a 50 per cent increase allocated to the Aboriginal business investment fund.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business there are 100,000 unfilled employment positions in Alberta today. It's remarkable. A skilled workforce is crucial to meet the needs of a growing and diverse economy, and as such broad and diverse training opportunities are needed not only to ensure key capacity for employers but to ensure more Albertans are invited into the Alberta advantage.

In addition to the 10,000 postsecondary seats created last year, Budget '23 is allocating \$111 million to expand seats in construction, tech, business, and energy and another \$11 million for aviation training with the new bachelor of aviation program. Over \$180 million is earmarked for upgrading or expanding facilities around the province, including a new school of business building at MacEwan University and a power engineering and instrumentation lab at Northwestern Polytechnic.

Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we, like every other province, are experiencing a serious challenge in health care capacity. This challenge is less about bricks and mortar but, instead, a lack of front-line health care professionals. The new health workforce strategy provides \$158 million to support multiple initiatives to recruit and retain health care workers, including the targeted recruitment of internationally trained workers and nurses. This budget provides funding to increase the number of learning seats available in health care professions, including 1,800 new seats for health care aides, licensed practical nurses, and registered nurses and an additional 120 seats to train more physicians at our schools of medicine, a 40 per cent increase in our physician training capacity.

Budget '23 provides \$2 billion over three years to fund the health care action plan, with investments to strengthen the EMS system, reduce surgical and ER wait times, enhance and update Alberta's primary health care network, and empower front-line workers to provide improved services for Albertans.

Although Alberta has the youngest population in Canada, it's estimated that the demand for long-term care beds could double in the next 25 years. We're investing more than \$1 billion over the next 10 years to ensure that our loved ones, the ones on whose shoulders we stand, will receive the care they need in their later years.

Mr. Speaker, affordability and the high cost of living due to inflation have been a source of hardship for many Albertans. The affordability action plan provides over \$3 billion in relief measures that will help Albertans. If we added all of the measures up, including all of the reindexing, we would be well over \$8 billion over the four years this fiscal plan represents.

3:40

The fuel tax suspension program is saving Albertans and Alberta businesses real dollars every time they fuel up and gives Albertans an enduring affordability advantage as we benefit from an owned resource. Electricity rebates are providing almost 2 million Alberta homes and businesses with relief from the high cost of electricity, and targeted affordability payments will support families, seniors, and our most vulnerable. Under this action plan the student loan

interest rate will be reduced and the no-interest, no-payment grace period will be extended to one year after graduation.

With so many families choosing Alberta, additional resources are required for our K to 12 education system. Budget '23 provides \$950 million to ensure schools are well prepared to welcome new students and includes additional targeted funding to provide for the increasingly complex needs of our youth. Budget '23 increases funding for school bus transportation, off-setting rising costs, supporting school choice, and providing a ride for an additional 80,000 students with a new family-friendly distance eligibility. And, Mr. Speaker, with all these new students we need more schools. Budget '23 provides new capital for 58 new schools in planning, design, operating, and construction. When I say "new," I need to say that "new" means schools being refurbished and upgraded as well as brand new builds.

Mr. Speaker, living a life free from the effects of crime should be the expectation of every Albertan. Sadly, this is not the case for some. Budget '23 includes a significant investment into Justice and public safety, with funding to include more Crown prosecutors and support staff to address the backlog, increase capacity, and modernize our courts. Funding is provided for increased law enforcement, more boots on the ground to better fight crime in our communities, both urban and rural. Budget '23 is also providing \$65 million over three years to strengthen First Nations policing. This will fund a new First Nation police service for Siksika and additional officers across the country.

Mr. Speaker, part of investment attraction means making sure we have the infrastructure and systems to meet the demands of growth. With tens of thousands of Canadians making Alberta home, the volume at land titles has been unprecedented. To all the realtors, developers, and lawyers out there: we've heard you. Service Alberta will again receive increased funding to clear up the backlog at land titles and, more importantly, to finally modernize the system.

Speaking of critical infrastructure, keeping communities connected with a road network that supports jobs and ensures the safe and efficient flow of traffic is essential. Budget '23 provides an additional \$580 million for transportation projects across the province with a focus on projects that improve productivity and competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, Thomas Jefferson once wrote that the measure of a society is how it treats its weakest members. I believe that the budget I'm presenting today reflects the true measure of Albertans with care across the province, across ministries for the most vulnerable and those who need a hand up. One hundred and seventeen million dollars will expand mental health services for youth across the province. Budget '23 provides for three new addiction recovery communities, and in Children's Services \$4 million of adoption supports will make it easier for a child who needs a home to become part of a family.

Now, Mr. Speaker, government initiatives and funding are essential in the care of vulnerable Albertans. They are so important, but the measure of our society goes so far beyond government programs. This province was built by people who didn't wait for government. They saw a need in their family or their community, and they stepped out to meet that need. The future of Alberta will in some measure be contingent upon our ability to preserve and foster the character trait of self-determination even in our compassion. There are examples every day from every corner of our province, people like Matthew Potts from Samson Cree Nation, who opened up his restaurant's kitchen to Ukrainian newcomers; like those from an Edmonton youth group who prepared a traditional Lebanese meal and care package for members of Edmonton's homeless community; people like Tylynn Hollingshead from my constituency in Sexsmith, who raised over \$24,000 for the Stollery children's hospital; or 11-

year-old Kennedy Bruno, who started her own T-shirt design business and donated the proceeds to the Ermineskin Women's Shelter. There are thousands – literally thousands – of stories like these across our province, and, Mr. Speaker, it's stories like these that fill me with such hope for the future.

Albertans are generous, compassionate, and intentional, and just like economic investment, when it comes to generosity, government can either be a help or a hindrance to Albertans as they work together to meet the needs in their communities. A good job is more than just paying the bills; it creates conditions favourable for people and families to thrive so they can lend that helping hand to their neighbour, to newcomers, or to those in their community who are less fortunate.

I would like to thank the MLA for Peace River, who brought forward Bill 202, reflected in this budget, which increases the value of the charitable donations tax credit. This is a substantial investment in supporting the generosity of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in three months Albertans will have a decision to make regarding their next government. As a province we have the benefit of contrasting two very different approaches to governance and the economy, not theoretical or hypothetical conjecture but the actual results of two contrasting economic strategies. Now, I want to be clear. I believe that almost every MLA that comes to this House comes with the intention of making life better for Albertans regardless of which side of the aisle they sit on, but we have to be honest with ourselves and the people we were elected to serve. The NDP's economic management model of raising taxes, increasing regulatory burden, high operational spending, and working to expedite the energy transition in conjunction with Trudeau's Liberals was nothing short of disastrous. It resulted in the flight of billions of dollars in capital, tens of thousands of lost jobs, and perpetual deficits. Our government brought a different approach. Sound fiscal management coupled with tax reductions and reduced regulatory burden have positioned Alberta to lead the nation in economic growth, with a surplus budget, less debt, more and better jobs, and, from my perspective, a whole lot of hope.

Mr. Speaker, 61 years ago my parents came west to Alberta with nothing more than a dream, a big work ethic, and a deep sense of

self-determination, a story shared by so many in this province. They worked hard, sacrificed much, and built a home and a life for their family in a place where opportunities abound, in a province where family, faith, and community are held in high regard. We, the next generation, are privileged to build on that solid foundation and are now working to secure a similar future for those that will follow.

Mr. Speaker, four years ago I sought public office for one reason, to fight for an Alberta that can offer the next generation of Albertans the same opportunities, prosperity, and freedom this province has offered me and my family, the same opportunities for our children and grandchildren, for people like Nick and Jessica, and for those that don't yet call this land their home, the same opportunities for all Albertans.

We've faced some real challenges these last few years, but like those that came before, Albertans have dug in, worked hard, made incredible progress, and I couldn't be more optimistic and hopeful about the future of this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe Alberta's best days are ahead.

Thank you.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m. [interjections]

Okay. I'll take the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I see that you are eager to get out and go report such great news to our constituents. With that said, I do move that in accordance with Government Motion 20 the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 6.

The Speaker: I feel like we've been here before.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:51 p.m. to Monday, March 6, at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 20]

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Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 4th Session (2022-2023)

Activity to Tuesday, February 28, 2023

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1* — Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act (Danielle Smith)

First Reading — 4-5 (*Nov. 29, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 22-31 (*Nov. 30, 2022 aft.*), 43-52 (*Nov. 30, 2022 eve.*), 65-73 (*Dec. 1, 2022 aft.*), 105-36 (*Dec. 5, 2022 eve.*), 172-77 (*Dec. 6, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 177-96 (*Dec. 6, 2022 eve.*), 231-38 (*Dec. 7, 2022 eve.*), 238-45 (*Dec. 7, 2022 eve., passed with amendments on division*)

Third Reading — 245-50 (*Dec. 7, 2022 eve.*), 251-57 (*Dec. 7, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022; SA 2022 cA-33.8]

Bill 2 — Inflation Relief Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Jones)

First Reading — 208 (*Dec. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 270-75 (*Dec. 8, 2022 aft.*), 342-49 (*Dec. 13, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 361-72 (*Dec. 13, 2022 eve.*), 421-25 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 430-31 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve.*), 446-50 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022, with exceptions; SA 2022 c19]

Bill 3 — Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 86 (*Dec. 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 148-55 (*Dec. 6, 2022 aft.*), 224-30 (*Dec. 7, 2022 aft.*), 276 (*Dec. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 325-29 (*Dec. 12, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 375-78 (*Dec. 13, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022; SA 2022 c23]

Bill 4 — Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Copping)

First Reading — 86 (*Dec. 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 155-70 (*Dec. 6, 2022 aft.*), 220-24 (*Dec. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 321-25 (*Dec. 12, 2022 eve.*), 372-75 (*Dec. 13, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 392 (*Dec. 14, 2022 aft.*), 426-29 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022; SA 2022 c17]

Bill 5 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2) (Shandro)

First Reading — 147 (*Dec. 6, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 211-20 (*Dec. 7, 2022 aft.*), 314-21 (*Dec. 12, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 392-99 (*Dec. 14, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 429-30 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022, with exceptions; SA 2022 c20]

Bill 6 — Police Amendment Act, 2022 (Ellis)

First Reading — 270 (*Dec. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 309-14 (*Dec. 12, 2022 eve.*), 349-54 (*Dec. 13, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 399-408 (*Dec. 14, 2022 aft.*), 409-21 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 431 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve.*), 450-51 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on Proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2022 c22]

Bill 7 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No.2) (Schow)

First Reading — 329 (*Dec. 12, 2022 eve., passed*)

Second Reading — 378-79 (*Dec. 13, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 398-99 (*Dec. 14, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 425-26 (*Dec. 14, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on December 15, 2022; SA 2022 c21]

Bill 201 — Public Health Care Delivery Standards Act (Notley)

First Reading — 64 (*Dec. 1, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 88-91 (*Dec. 5, 2022 aft.*), 354-60 (*Dec. 13, 2022 aft., defeated on division*)

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

First Reading — 64 (*Dec. 1, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 91-98 (*Dec. 5, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 289-97 (*Dec. 12, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 445-46 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 452 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on Proclamation; SA 2022 c18]

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

First Reading — 270 (*Dec. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 298-303 (*Dec. 12, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 204 — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022 (Mark Smith)

First Reading — 270 (*Dec. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 205 — Official Sport of Alberta Act (Lovely)

First Reading — 444 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 206 — Insurance (Private Passenger Vehicle Premium) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sabir)

First Reading — 444 (*Dec. 15, 2022 aft., passed*)

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