



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 21, 2023

Day 22

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

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

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

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Lang Bawn, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Kaycee Madu	Deputy Premier, Minister of Skilled Trades and Professions
Nathan Neudorf	Deputy Premier, Minister of Infrastructure
Mickey Amery	Minister of Children's Services
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Mike Ellis	Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Energy
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Brian Jean	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Matt Jones	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism
Jason Luan	Minister of Culture
Nicholas Milliken	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jeremy Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Brad Rutherford	Minister without Portfolio
Sonya Savage	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Joseph Schow	Minister without Portfolio
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

Parliamentary Secretaries

Tracy Allard	Parliamentary Secretary for Civil Liberties
Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Ukrainian Refugee Settlement
Tanya Fir	Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridors
David Hanson	Parliamentary Secretary for Procurement Transformation
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business
Miranda Rosin	Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
R.J. Sigurdson	Parliamentary Secretary for EMS Reform
Devinder Toor	Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism
Glenn van Dijken	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary for Community Outreach

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Orr

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Eggen
Gotfried
Gray
Hunter
Issik
Phillips
Pon

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Allard
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Carson
Feehan
McIver
Rowswell
Stephan
Walker

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely

Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Carson
Dang
Fir
Gotfried
Long
Sabir
Smith, Mark
Yao
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Smith

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Ceci
Dach
Hunter
Loyola
Orr
Panda
Rehn
Shepherd
Toor

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Williams

Deol
Fir
Goehring
Gray
McIver
Pon
Rowswell
Sabir
van Dijken

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Williams

Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Irwin
Lovely
Nielsen
Nixon, Jason
Panda
Rehn
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Reid

Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Aheer
Allard
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Loyola
Nixon, Jason
Rehn
Renaud
Yao

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips

Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Hunter
Lovely
Pancholi
Panda
Renaud
Schmidt
Singh
Stephan
Toor
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Feehan

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and to his government, to Members of this 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 ideals but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

Members may be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to rise to introduce two good friends of the Speaker that are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, Christie Bergman and her son Nate Bergman. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner has a school group.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly the junior high class of Sun Country Christian School from my riding. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 14 students from the U of A's English language school, who are accompanied today by Ms Vicky Chang from the Student Engagement Centre. They're here to learn more about our Legislature and democracy here in Alberta. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 105 students seated in both the public and members' galleries from Monsignor Fee Otterson school, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-South. They're joined today by their teacher, Ms Susan André. I ask that we please give them the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Walker: I am pleased to introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, three Stollery families. The Smashnuk family from Grande Prairie: hello to Stollery kid Arabella, her parents, Alicia and Greg, and her sister Ava. From Red Deer the Adolphe family: hello to Stollery kid Amélie and her parents, Leslie and Astrel. And from Edmonton the Hlewka family: a warm welcome to Stollery kid Samantha and her mom, Kim. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly Sara Wood, Martina Frost, and Maria Vicente from the KARA Family Resource Centre. Each day these amazing people provide supports that help create positive outcomes for children and families in this province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you my constituent from the beautiful community of Edmonton-South West, Debbie Filipchuk. Debbie is a recipient of the Queen's platinum jubilee medal. She is also a Canadian air force officer. With her also is her nephew Leo Christensen, also a Canadian air force mechanic. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please join me in welcoming Laura Penner. Laura is an advocate for the trans community, the disability community, and for those living in poverty. She's an active community volunteer, and she's passionate about improving systems through listening to those with lived experiences. Welcome, Laura.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy to rise to introduce several incredible human beings today. Tamara Jones and her mother, Pat Monilaws, are with us, both Alberta-appointed marriage commissioners and advocates for human rights. Thank you so much to the minister of red tape reduction for taking a meeting with them.

I'd also like to welcome Lanre Ajayi and his marketing manager, Tim Meduna. Lanre is the founder and director of Ethnik Festivals, an association that was recently recognized for the top 25 Canadian immigrants award.

Finally, we have Mina Jama and Candice Janzen with the Jama Foundation.

Thank you so much to all of you for your incredible work. If you could please rise and accept the warm applause from this group.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you, from the International Union of Operating Engineers local 955, president Declan Regan, business manager Chris Flett, and executive director Tyler Bedford. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

International Union of Operating Engineers Local 955

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, as labour critic and as previous labour minister, over the last eight years much of my time has been spent talking to, listening to, and advocating for the workers of this province, including hard-working members of local unions like the International Union of Operating Engineers local 955, for whom 2023 is a very important year. Seventy-five years ago right here in Edmonton local 955 signed their constitution. Earlier I introduced members that have joined us in the gallery.

Today local 955 proudly represents a growing membership of 12,000 hard-working Albertans that leave their mark on almost every facet of our lives. Chances are that at some point today you or a member of your family will either interact with a member of local 955 or go by a project a member worked on. These workers are in everything, from construction, pipelines, and crane operating to fabrication, health care, school divisions, municipalities, and much more.

Not only are the members of local 955 marking their 75th anniversary; they are also celebrating 50 years with their pension

plan. Mr. Speaker, that is half a century of ensuring working Albertans have retirement security and dignity, that they deserve after so many years of hard work.

Local 955 and their members are celebrating their 75th anniversary with a golf tournament, family events in Edmonton, Calgary, and Fort McMurray, and a gala this fall. I hope that all members of this Assembly are able to get out and join in the celebrations taking place throughout the year and across the province, and I ask all members to join me in congratulating the International Union of Operating Engineers local 955 on achieving these milestones and thank them for the contributions that their members have made to Alberta over the last 75 years.

Support for Ukrainian Newcomers

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary for Ukrainian settlement and a descendant of one of the first Ukrainian settlers in Alberta I'm incredibly proud of the many measures our government has taken to help Ukrainian newcomers to Alberta.

Recently I've had the privilege of attending a number of announcements that I know will be of great help to displaced Ukrainians. Our government has committed \$7 million over three years for settlement and language supports, \$9.9 million for social housing and rent supplement programs, and \$3.6 million to support emergency and ongoing income support. We are providing a further \$1.5 million through a new Ukrainian student benefit to assist displaced postsecondary students, \$12,000 in funding for the Red Deer public library to provide EAL classes, and \$12 million in additional funding to school boards for supporting newly enrolled students from Ukraine. Today the Premier, Minister Sawhney, and I announced the establishment of a Ukrainian helpline to assist Ukrainian evacuees with settlement.

What makes me even more proud is that all of these come as a direct result of the work and recommendations of the Premier's task force on Ukraine, which I'm honoured to have chaired. I want to thank Albertans for welcoming evacuees with open arms and making their adjustments to life in Alberta easier despite tragic circumstances. I continue to be overwhelmed by the generosity of Albertans daily.

Mr. Speaker, the national flower of Ukraine is a sunflower. The sunflower grows fast, it stands tall in all weather conditions, it sways with the wind, but it does not break. It's happily sharing its soil with others, allowing other flowers and even weeds to co-exist with it. It's bright, strong, and positive. The strength, perseverance, and brightness of the sunflower is matched by the glorious spirit of the Ukrainian people, so in the face of Putin's genocidal invasion, Ukrainians will continue to fight and triumph, and while they fight, Albertans will stand with them. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Stollery Children's Hospital

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health of our province begins with the health of its children. Therefore, we are proud to host Stollery day today. As the second-largest children's hospital in Canada the Stollery sees more than 300,000 patients each year, with nearly half of those kids coming from outside the Edmonton region. The Stollery is one of the busiest hospitals in Canada and offers the highest degree of acute care in western Canada. The foundation is the primary funder of pediatric research, \$40 million over 10 years, through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute at the University of Alberta. The foundation is giving kids the best chance anywhere in the world to live a long and healthy life.

1:40

But the Stollery is squeezed into an adult hospital and desperately needs a space of its own. Sick kids need a space that is built for them and modern health care. We are proud to have funded \$3 million in planning funds towards a new Stollery children's hospital, and I am personally hopeful that they will soon become building dollars because our kids can't wait for another second for this to happen. The Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation is proud to partner with the Alberta government in support of a new hospital. When the commitment from government comes, the foundation will raise up to \$250 million towards the cost of building it, the largest charitable campaign in Alberta's history, Mr. Speaker.

Stollery day is a chance to reflect on the tremendous impact this hospital has on the quality of health care in our province. I encourage my fellow members to think about the vital importance children's health plays in the future of our province and consider innovative opportunities to invest in and improve pediatric care for kids in communities across Alberta, including a new Stollery children's hospital.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day was proclaimed in 1966 following the Sharpeville massacre, where people peacefully protesting against racist laws in apartheid South Africa were fired upon, leaving hundreds killed and injured.

While much progress has been made, for many Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in Alberta racism and discrimination is far too often a daily reality and a maze of deeply ingrained systemic barriers. Additionally, in recent years Alberta, along with the rest of Canada, has seen a rise in hate crimes along with a rising tide of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism. Today serves as a call to action for individuals, organizations, and all levels of government to actively work to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination, injustice, systemic racism, and hate.

For years the current government has failed to take concrete, ongoing action to address the concerns of racialized Albertans. We must recommit our efforts to ensure all people are respected and have equal access and opportunity to be safe and to succeed. Albertans deserve a government that will take proactive steps not only to address the instances of racist violence but to actively combat the root causes of racial intolerance in Alberta and eliminate them once and for all.

Albertans can count on the Alberta NDP to do just that. We will start by implementing the recommendations brought forward by the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, and we will pass the Anti-Racism Act, that the UCP voted down. I'm proud to say that when elected, we will establish an antiracism office to ensure that we will live in a province that works tirelessly towards being free from all forms of racism, discrimination, and intolerance. Albertans deserve a government that takes concerns of racialized Albertans seriously, and we are ready.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a member's statement.

Federal Impact Assessment Act

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are aware of the many ways that Ottawa has trampled our provincial rights and

constitutional authority. Our government will stand up to Ottawa every day, all day long, every day of the week to ensure that Albertans have a prosperous future, with certainty that they can keep the lights on and food on the table for their families. Our province has been leading the way in fighting the federal intrusion into our constitutional authority, and other provinces have taken notice.

Tomorrow is another step in defending Alberta's rights to develop our own resources and get them to market. The Supreme Court of Canada is currently hearing arguments about the federal Impact Assessment Act, better known as the no-more-pipelines law. On March 22 Alberta will present its arguments to the Supreme Court of Canada on the many ways that this federal legislation has impeded our provincial rights.

This matter has been brought to the Supreme Court following the May 2022 ruling in the Alberta Court of Appeal which struck down the no-more-pipelines act and declared it unconstitutional. This act will not only hurt Albertans; it harms our partners in the Confederation. The economic interests of our country as a whole are at stake. Eight provinces are intervenors before the Supreme Court in this matter, underscoring the unprecedented constitutional threat the Trudeau Liberals have so callously forced upon the provinces through this law. As we have said many times, this act doesn't just harm the economy, and it isn't just Alberta's fight. It's a battle for the integrity of our role in the Confederation and our provincial partners. It's a violation of the exclusive constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces and territories to control and develop their natural resources.

Over the past 25 years Alberta has contributed \$400 billion to the federal government's revenues, more than it's ever received back from the feds. Harming the Alberta economy with the no-more-pipelines act: that'll be felt right across the country. We need to get our country working as it was intended. Striking down the no-more-pipelines act will go a long way to making our country whole again and to making our reputation to become Canadians again, where things can get done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Energy Company Liability

Ms Ganley: Every time Albertans think this UCP government has hit bottom, the members opposite manage to sink a little lower. Yesterday the UCP MLAs voted against the polluter-pay principle, the long-standing principle that if you make a mess, you clean it up. It's basic fairness. It's what we teach our kids. It's what we've expected of industry for generations, with their support. It's an important signal to global investors that Alberta is a mature and responsible energy producer. Yesterday the UCP threw that away.

According to the UCP, if you make a mess on someone else's property, not only can you refuse to clean it up, but you can stick your hand out for taxpayer money. The members opposite are now on the record in support of the Premier's scheme to give away \$20 billion to a small group of bad companies who don't clean up after themselves. This scheme is not only an unforgivable abuse of Alberta taxpayers, but it's going to make the problem of inactive wells worse. Why would anyone pay to clean up their liabilities when they could refuse and get a handout?

The UCP wants to reward bad behaviour. Guess what. All that does is lead to more bad behaviour. R-star is not about cleaning up wells, and it never has been. It's about funnelling Alberta taxpayer money to a small number of bad actors at the behest of the Premier's friends. Albertans will remember this when it comes to casting their vote in May. They will remember that the UCP refused to build a school in their growing neighbourhood, to get construction started

on a badly needed hospital, to revitalize their downtown, to create good-paying jobs, but the UCP did find \$20 billion to reward bad behaviour from the Premier's friends.

Luckily, Albertans have a choice. They can elect a government that will end the gravy train, one that will be focused on them and their priorities. They can elect an NDP government.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Alberta

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a message from Albertans to Trudeau and his NDP puppets. Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity. Woke, socialist ways do not belong here. Go away and leave us alone. Albertans did not want the secret NDP carbon tax. Albertans do not like surprise NDP taxes. Albertans fired the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans do not like Trudeau's carbon tax either, supported by his puppets. Next month they are jacking up the carbon tax by 30 per cent. Their actions speak louder than their words. They do not care about affordability, yet the NDP says nothing, sitting in a thoughtless stupor, comprehending nothing. Yet in spite of them, Alberta succeeds and prospers.

There is something extraordinary occurring in Alberta. We are seeing record numbers of families coming to Alberta from across Canada and all over the world. Mr. Speaker, is this because Alberta is a woke, socialist paradise? No. Alberta has the highest incomes and lowest taxes. It is the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow a business, leading Canada in economic growth. Parents want a better future for their children, and they are coming to Alberta, this land of freedom and prosperity.

While the NDP and the CBC may wish it otherwise, Albertans do not want a freedom-sucking, woke, socialist government. Alberta is a land of opportunity, of freedom and prosperity. We must be vigilant to keep it that way.

Oral Question Period

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Leader of His Majesty's Official Opposition for her first set of questions.

Chartered Surgical Facility Contracts

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today more Albertans are waiting in pain for their surgery, but instead of reinvesting in our hospitals, the UCP plan to shovel taxpayers' dollars at private surgical centres that are doing much lower risk procedures. But the staff to perform those surgeries still have to come from somewhere. So did the government of Alberta or AHS sign contracts with private surgical providers that guaranteed them access to a minimum number of public surgical staff, including anaesthesiologists? Yes or no?

1:50

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite well knows that chartered surgical centres are integrated into our system. They are a single system, and it's just a matter of scheduling to get one in a public hospital or one in a chartered surgical centre. There is no queue-jumping; no one pays out of pocket. The personnel work seamlessly across the two different systems to make sure that we get the maximum number of surgeries performed.

And I'll just correct the record. We don't have more people waiting; we have fewer people waiting. We've reduced the number of people who are on the waiting list down to 35,000, and we're going to continue.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of scheduling, there's only so many staff which means that if they're at the private clinics, they're not at the hospital.

Now, we are told that last week medical staff were presented with a revised assignment priority list directing that limited anaesthesiologist resources would be assigned to chartered surgical facilities ahead of high-risk patients in the hospitals. Behind the scenes surgeons and anaesthesiologists are calling these priorities unethical. Why is the Premier allowing her ideology to undermine care for high-risk patients in Alberta's hospitals?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's simply not true. We have a system that prioritizes the most urgent cases. I know the member opposite has a socialist theory of how everything should operate, meaning everything should be done in government-owned facilities. We have a different view. We believe we can partner with the private sector so that we can get more surgeries provided, and the system is working. When we began, we had 39,000 people on the waiting list, waiting longer than was medically recommended. It's down to 35,000 people on that list. We're reducing it by 3,000 patients per month, and by this time next year that list is going to be completely eliminated. That is a system that works.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier did not answer my question. Not only are they jeopardizing the health of some of Alberta's sickest patients; they are pursuing a model where taxpayers ultimately pay more and wait longer. Recent CIHI data shows that knee replacements in B.C.'s private system cost \$18,000 more than in the public setting. In Ontario 73 per cent of patients receive public knee surgery within six months while in Alberta's private centres, only 53 per cent. Why is the Premier insisting on hiding the contracts? Why won't she release those contracts so Albertans can decide for themselves if they want to pay more and wait longer under the UCP?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we can't argue with success. This was a number one priority that Dr. John Cowell had when he came into the system, looking at the surgical backlog and making sure that we were prioritizing patients and ensuring that no one was going to end up waiting longer than medically recommended. Under the NDP nine different surgeries ended up having wait-lists that increased. We've got them all going down in the right direction, and it's because of the partnership we have with the chartered surgical centres. They want to shut them down. That's the socialist ideology, and that would cut 60,000 surgeries a year out of our system, and we won't do that.

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

Ms Notley: We want surgeries on the basis of medical need, not on the basis of private-sector contracts, Mr. Speaker.

Government Advertising

Ms Notley: Now, on May 29 Albertans will have the opportunity to choose a better government, an NDP government. Clearly, the Premier is very scared of this outcome because last night while Albertans were watching the hockey game, this group approved \$9.4 million in pre-election taxpayer-funded advertising. With all the services currently underfunded, the Premier, who is one of the most unpopular in Canada, is racing to put her own electioneering first. To the Premier: why should Alberta taxpayers be funding the UCP's re-election campaign advertising?

Ms Smith: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, I'm not fortunate enough to have my husband work for CUPE and do all of my election advertising on my behalf, like the member opposite.

I would tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the affordability advertising that we are doing is one hundred per cent necessary, because I can tell you it is working. We have 1.2 million Albertans that have signed up for affordability payments. We're directing them to those with children, we're directing them to those who have seniors in the household, and we're directing them as well to those who are the most vulnerable. We know that certainly the members opposite wouldn't get this message out for us, and that's why we're doing it.

Ms Notley: The reason they're doing it, Mr. Speaker, is because this Premier is shameless when it comes to using public money for her own partisan gain.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the UCP approved \$9 million to buy UCP ads that continue all throughout April. That's a big chunk of change. In fact, it's about four times what political parties are allowed to spend during the writ period, and it's double her final offer to women's shelters. Why doesn't the Premier just get it over with and register the government of Alberta as her political action committee?

The Acting Speaker: A point of order was noted at 1:55.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, our affordability plan is such good news. We have 1.2 million people who are now enrolled, and they're getting \$600 in benefits. We have affordability payments. We also have electricity rebates. We have natural gas rebates, and we have fuel tax relief. In fact, maybe I should take this opportunity to let people know if they haven't heard about it. Go to alberta.ca/affordability. There's still an opportunity to sign up, and we're hoping that every person who is eligible for it takes the opportunity.

Ms Notley: Well, well, well, Mr. Speaker, how time changes a person. Back in 2012 when the then PC Premier, Alison Redford, approved a comparatively modest \$1.3 million in advertising, the then Wildrose leader wouldn't stand for the blatant electioneering. The current Premier said, and I quote: you should not be able to use taxpayer dollars for blatant partisan advertising in advance of an election. We are now at nine times the level she previously criticized. If the Premier is willing to sell out her beliefs in just five months of holding office, why should anyone trust her with four more years?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we got elected, the members opposite said: what are you going to do about affordability? They kept asking about affordability. They said that affordability was the number one issue. We addressed it. We addressed it through the means that I had mentioned, and it's working. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: It's working. Trevor Tombe posted today, looking at an analysis of inflation across the country. We are the lowest in the country because of the affordability payments we have put in place, because we have reduced the cost of energy, and we want to tell people about it. That's why we're advertising.

Prescription Contraception Coverage Policy

Member Irwin: I am inundated with messages from Albertans in support of our Alberta NDP commitment to provide universal

coverage for prescription contraception and from Albertans outraged at this Premier's dismissive comments. Darby wrote to me to say how much her prescription birth control costs, something that she will likely have to take for the next 25 years, following radiation treatment for cervical cancer. She says: I'm 31 years old, and this Premier is telling me that I should have to pay for private insurance rather than having this basic human right. Is this really the Premier's message for Darby?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the reason why we are proposing and looking at the issue of health spending accounts. We know that there is a whole range of services that are not covered by public insurance. The members opposite all have \$950 in health spending accounts to pay for all of their needs, and everybody's need is different. That's why we are looking at a program that would allow for us to support all Albertans in being able to get the same kind of accounts so that they can make the decisions and have the priorities themselves. We also know that we've got a number of programs that are available through our Alberta Blue Cross to be able to support those who don't have private insurance.

Member Irwin: Health spending accounts aren't the answer. They're not the answer for people like Nikki, who wrote to me saying that she's paying \$189 a month for her private health insurance plan, and she still has to come up with another \$1,000 a month for prescriptions that aren't covered. For this Premier, who thinks Albertans should pay out of pocket for their basic health care, should rely on health spending accounts, pay for a trip to their family doctor, I guess this is a system working just how she wants. Can the Premier again please try to explain, to Nikki this time, why she shouldn't have universal coverage for prescription contraception?

The Acting Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Comprehensiveness is one of the foundational principles of the Canada Health Act, and that's part of the reason why we are looking at establishing health spending accounts, to be able to make the system more comprehensive. The reason that I know about health spending accounts is because politicians have them. I find it remarkable that the folks across the aisle won't give up their own health spending account. Maybe they should if they object to them so much. I have a different view. I believe that if taxpayers are paying for this kind of approach for us, we should make the same kind of program available for everyone.

2:00

Member Irwin: This Premier is not listening. She's not listening to Albertans like Jenny, who writes: as a self-employed, single mother who pays for private coverage, I can tell you it's not cheap, and it's certainly not fair. Darlene says: does the Premier not know that Blue Cross isn't free; it's just not affordable when you're barely scraping by; this is clearly a person who's never struggled to make ends meet. I need the Premier to tell Darby, Nikki, Jenny, Darlene, countless other Albertans, why she thinks they should be forced to pay out of pocket for prescription contraception.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to tell every single Albertan that we know that they have unique health needs, which is why we are trying to find a way to give comprehensive coverage to what they identify as their highest need. Health spending accounts allow for us to be able to cover all the things that are not currently covered by public insurance. That, to me, is the approach that we need to take. Rather than identifying one thing versus another, let's

make sure that we're providing comprehensiveness so that every single Albertan is able to be supported.

Energy Company Liability

Ms Ganley: The polluter-pay principle: if you make a mess, you clean it up. It's basic fairness. We teach it to our kids. Albertans support it; Albertans, that is, except this UCP government. Yesterday every single UCP member in this Chamber voted against our motion to endorse the polluter-pay principle, including the Energy minister. Can the Premier please explain to Albertans why she thinks companies shouldn't be responsible for cleaning up their own messes? [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. members, that it is my first day on the job, so I'd like to be able to hear both the questions and the answers.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely believe in the principle of polluter pay, which is the reason why we put in a program that requires our companies to spend 3 per cent of their liability each year. It's \$740 million, and it's going to increase year after year. I find it interesting that the members opposite supported the federal government when they gave a billion-dollar grant to help accelerate some of these changes. There is still \$200 million, as I understand it, that we need to allocate on that. We're going to make sure that we support them.

Ms Ganley: The Premier just loves to point to the loan we gave to the Orphan Well Association as justification for her \$20 billion handout, but there's a critical difference. Orphan wells don't have an owner. There is no one but the association to clean them up. What the Premier is proposing is to have a massive giveaway of Albertans' money to companies who are still operating and are responsible for cleaning up those wells, making it just a handout. That's what our motion opposed. Why does the Premier think that Albertans should be on the hook for cleaning up someone else's mess?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that we've got two problems. We've got a problem of inactive wells, and we've got a problem of orphan wells. If we don't address the problem of inactive wells, if a company goes under, what it means is that those end up in the Orphan Well Association. We've got to accelerate the cleanup of all of these wells. Last time I looked, it had a \$30 billion liability, and it's part of the reason why we have a menu of options and a menu of supports, including one of the requirements that they have to clean up, \$740 million per year of their own money and their own liability. I'm not sure why the members keep . . .

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Ganley: The problem we have, Mr. Speaker, is a lobbyist Premier who lobbied for this \$20 billion giveaway before getting elected. She hired another lobbyist for the handout into her office to orchestrate its execution. Another lobbyist runs a pro-UCP attack machine that's funded by the people who stand to benefit from the \$20 billion handout. She even replaced the former UCP Energy minister over it. Why is the Premier so focused on rewarding a few bad actors while Albertans struggle to find a doctor and put food on the table?

Ms Smith: You know, Mr. Speaker, when I was in estimates, I know that the Leader of the Opposition had the correct number. She

asked me about the hundred million dollars that the Energy minister was advocating on and consulting on to see what kind of feedback we would get. Yet every time we're in this Chamber, they keep throwing a number out of \$20 billion. They know that they're being untruthful. They know that they're giving misinformation. They know that we have put forward a program that requires companies to spend a certain percentage of their own money to clean up year after year, and what we're looking at are the hardest wells to clean up, the ones that have been there the longest, the ones that they weren't able to clean up when they were in government. That's what we're looking at.

Support for Ukrainian Newcomers

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, Putin continues to commit genocidal tactics on the people of Ukraine. He's attacking their schools, hospitals, and key infrastructure. Accompanying this senseless violence, Putin is committing egregious war crimes against the proud people of Ukraine. In turn, Ukrainians are being forced out of their homeland and are coming to Canada. To date more than 25,000 Ukrainians have come in and settled in Alberta, and we need to continue to support these evacuees. To the Premier: can you tell Albertans what this government has done to support these evacuees and set them up for success in our province?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's over 25,000. It is 26,572 Ukrainian evacuees that have come to our province. We have supported them with \$28 million worth of supports: \$7 million over three years for settlement and language supports to help agencies and immigrant-serving organizations meet the need from increased demand; \$9.9 million in social and rent supplement programs. That's on top of \$6.8 million made available in 2022-2023.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Premier for her answer. Given that many of these Ukrainians are coming to Alberta and do not know the language and given that many of these evacuees have little in supports to help them navigate the many services the Alberta government is providing and given that many of these evacuees do not have family or friends in Alberta when they arrive here, to the Premier: can you please tell the members of this Chamber and Ukrainians who have arrived in Alberta if there will be prearrival services for evacuees to assist in their arrival and settlement in Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you for the question, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we made an announcement, with the Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism as well as our parliamentary secretary for Ukrainian refugee settlement, about a helpline that will allow for new arrivals in Alberta to very easily access the services that they need. We have a great network of private individual agencies, but sometimes, when you're newly arriving, it's not easy to find them. We're going to make it easy to find them, in the language that they're familiar with, and we're going to make sure that we support everyone who arrives.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for her answer. Given that there are multiple ministries working on helping Ukrainian evacuees come and settle in Alberta after leaving

a literal war zone and given that the Premier's office has set up a specialized task force with the assistance of the parliamentary secretary for Ukrainian refugee settlement and given that many of the recommendations from this task force turned into budget funding in Budget 2023, to the Premier once again: can you tell Albertans what else the task force will be doing to assist these evacuees settle in our beautiful province?

Ms Smith: We're going to have to do a lot more. As I mentioned, we have over 25,000 evacuees who have arrived here. When you think about that and put that into context, in all of Canada 40,000 evacuees arrived from Syria, 35,000 arrived from Afghanistan. That's 25,000 alone that have come here. Almost a quarter of the evacuees decide to make Alberta their home. We know that this tragedy is going to continue for much longer. There could potentially be hundreds of thousands of more Ukrainians who seek refuge in Canada. We've got to be prepared that at least a quarter of them are going to come here.

Government Advertising and Affordability Plan

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is going to spend more than 9 million taxpayer dollars trying to convince voters that their pre-election budget isn't that bad. This includes a massive ad campaign that runs until the day before the election is called. But this budget has zero dollars for university students or a couple making minimum wage without children because the UCP chose to cut half of Albertans from their affordability payment schemes. Can the current minister who's supposed to be making life more affordable for Albertans tell this House why he thinks it's more important to spend taxpayer dollars to save his own job than to help minimum wage people pay their rent?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January our government launched a dynamic and highly successful advertising campaign to inform seniors, parents, and other Albertans about the billions of dollars in relief available to them through our affordability action plan. That includes electricity rebates, fuel tax relief, affordability payments, and more. The campaign runs until April. Without an advertising campaign seniors or others who are most in need may miss the opportunity to access benefits during this period of high inflation. The campaign also informs vulnerable Albertans on core support programs – no application is necessary – to help protect them from scams and misinformation.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the government said that they would spend over \$900 million in affordability payments to Albertans but given that in estimates the minister revealed that only \$96 million had actually been spent and given that the UCP is spending 9 million taxpayer dollars trying to save their own jobs when Albertans are struggling to pay their own bills and only a quarter of Albertans have actually received any money from this government, is the minister surprised that so few Albertans support this budget? Is that why he's spending taxpayer dollars for blatant partisan advertising in advance of an election, quoting his own Premier?

2:10

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the affordability advertising campaign has been remarkably effective, with nearly 1.2 million Albertans now enrolled to receive up to \$600 over six months. That's about as many people as came out to vote last time to remove the previous socialist government. The advertising campaign is helping to

reduce fraud and protecting consumers through social, digital, and video materials educating the public on ways to avoid scams and safely access affordability supports. Translated information is also available on ethnocultural channels to ensure newcomers benefit from the programs. Our affordability action plan is working.

Ms Hoffman: Given that we know the application process isn't easy for some Albertans – and that's why the government actually asked registry agents to support applications in-house – and given that there isn't an edit button for people who have applied, made a mistake, and need to be able to have that corrected by registry agents, there are thousands of people waiting on payments that this government has been holding up. Will they admit that they've messed it up, and will they fix it before the end of the month so that people can actually pay their rent? An edit button for registry agents, Minister.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that in three weeks about a million Albertans were enrolled on our affordability payment portal, and in February we did launch edit functionality for the small number, about 1 per cent or less, that entered incorrect banking information. That patch went live in February. We have another patch upcoming to ensure that registry agents can also assist the small number of Albertans who have incorrect information in their application. Again, 99 per cent of the 1.2 million Albertans have been successfully enrolled and are receiving up to \$600 over six months. It's working to keep Alberta affordable.

Energy Company Municipal Tax Payment

Mr. Schmidt: Under the UCP the amount of unpaid municipal taxes from delinquent oil and gas companies grew every year. At first they did nothing. Then they brought in legislation everyone knew would fail, and it did. Now, on the eve of an election, they say that they're taking action by withholding licences from companies that don't pay their taxes, something that rural municipalities have been calling for for years. To the minister: why did it take you this long, and why did you ignore rural Albertans for four years?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, our government understands why municipalities and landowners are frustrated by overdue and unpaid property taxes. Yesterday I signed an order to allow the Alberta Energy Regulator tools to prevent the transfer of or issuance of a well licence if a company has outstanding taxes. If it involves the sale of assets, the payment of debts must be made a condition of sale. We believe these initiatives will provide municipalities with the necessary leverage required to collect on those bad debts.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that everyone knows that withholding licences is a necessary step to get these companies to pay their taxes – municipal leaders have been calling for it, as has our caucus – and given that despite yesterday's announcement there are still very few details about how this directive will actually work, with the minister saying that there will be a threshold for unpaid taxes but not saying what the threshold is, is this another fake program from the UCP that does nothing for Albertans, just like their fake electricity cap, their fake natural gas rebate, and their fake auto insurance freeze? What's the threshold?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear: the vast majority of companies in Alberta are good operators and do not fit this narrative.

This order to the AER, with updates to section 67 of the Responsible Energy Development Act, along with legislation regarding liens, the encouraging letters that we are also sending out, and the previous liability management framework updates significantly strengthen a municipality's ability to collect on delinquent debt. We look forward to settling these tax obligations.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that if the threshold was meaningful, the minister would have just told us what it was right now and given that rural municipal leaders are also calling for licences to be withheld from oil and gas companies that don't clean up their wells and given that rather than listening to Albertans, the UCP is pushing ahead with a program that rewards these companies' bad behaviour with a \$20 billion handout, will the minister withhold licences for unpaid taxes but not unreclaimed wells because of this Premier's close connections to the lobbyists pushing for this \$20 billion giveaway?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, our government strengthened the liability management framework, empowered the AER's ability to intervene, and passed legislation to help support municipalities in the collection of unpaid taxes from companies that are not living up to their obligations. Additionally, in order to persuade compliance, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I sent out joint letters to every functioning company in Alberta that is under default. We can't do anything about companies that are no longer solvent, but for those healthy companies doing business in Alberta, we want to send a clear message that debts must be paid.

Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, inflation and high taxes are hitting families across Canada, and the federal government is moving forward with an increase to their job-killing carbon tax on April 1. My question to the Premier: what is the government's reaction to the federal government kicking families while they're down, placing a higher burden on the kitchen budgets across the province by increasing the federal carbon tax on Albertans?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I was amused when the Red Deer-South MLA talked about the secret NDP carbon tax, and it was brought in in secret. Now the federal government won't let us get rid of it, and now the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa is voting to increase it by 300 per cent. We keep fighting a battle here on the issue of affordability and against inflation, and we're winning it, but it's no help to the folks in Ottawa. I wish that the members opposite would stand with us and say: do not increase these taxes on April 1.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, through you, thank you to the Premier for that answer. Given that the increase in carbon tax will mean a direct negative impact to Albertans at the pump, which means costs permeating all aspects of everyday life for Albertans, again to the Premier: what is the government expecting as a result of this harmful increase to the cost of living for Alberta families?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, to give you an idea of how successful our measures have been – and this comes from Trevor Tombe. The key reason is because of the tax reductions we focused on utilities and gas. This is essential to reducing the cost of

everything. The rest of the country is seeing a 5.2 per cent inflation rate; in Alberta it's 3.6 per cent. Yet we're going to have to fight the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa because they are increasing the carbon tax. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation says that it's a whopping 14 cents per litre of gas just for the carbon tax. Fourteen cents per litre: that's the amount of our carbon tax relief here. It's almost going to be completely off-set by what's happening in Ottawa.

The Acting Speaker: The member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the Premier for that. Given that the federal government is forcing these carbon tax increases despite Alberta having a world-leading, ethical, environmentally responsible approach to energy development and given that in the meantime the federal government is soft on regimes that destroy our environment and interfere with our elections, to the Premier: what is the government doing to take a stand against these cruel increases in the cost of living and protect Albertans in the face of these tax increases?

The Acting Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You would think with the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa that the members opposite would have some influence, that they'd actually stand up for Albertans and they'd stand with us on saying: do not increase these taxes. Three hundred per cent by 2030, and we're going to see a 14-cent-per-litre increase as we get to April 1. We are working to reduce emissions a different way, a better way through technology and innovation. We're talking about carbon capture, utilization, and storage. We're supporting our innovation through our TIER funding, and we're going to continue to take leadership on hydrogen and other clean technology. We won't be taxing hockey moms and soccer dads.

Primary Health Care in Medicine Hat

Member Loyola: There's a lack of medicine in Medicine Hat. Many Hatters have been without a family doctor for years as doctors chose to retire early or move away because of the UCP's war on doctors. This puts additional stress on the ER and walk-in clinics as Hatters now have to rely on these for routine health care, prescription refills, and minor medical issues. It also puts stress on the residents, like Kinsey, whose family has been without a doctor for over three years. She regularly checks the Internet and phones clinics in a fruitless search for a doctor. Why has the UCP failed to help Hatters like Kinsey find a family doctor?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As we've chatted about many times in this House, there are challenges in regard to the ongoing recruitment and retention of health care workers not only in Alberta but across the entire country, but I'm very pleased that we are making progress. If we compare last year, the end of Q4 last calendar year, to 2021: 254 more doctors in Alberta than previously. I'm looking forward to talking more about what we're doing to ensure that we not only train more doctors but attract more doctors here in Alberta.

2:20

Member Loyola: Given that our health care system continues to be deep in crisis despite the Premier's claims and given that for Hatters, like Vera, a breast cancer survivor, having a family doctor is vitally necessary and given that this Premier muses about Albertans paying

out of pocket for visits to the doctor while residents of her riding are unable to even find a doctor, does the Minister of Health support the Premier's misguided scheme to force Hatters like Vera to pay out of pocket just to monitor their health after surviving cancer?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I just want to set the record straight and make the comment that the Premier has already made. No one will have to pay out of pocket to go and visit their family doctor.

To be clear, we know that we need more family doctors, and that's why I was very pleased to make an announcement with the Minister of Advanced Education to expand the medical programs at both the U of C and U of A. Mr. Speaker, not only are we expanding the seats there; we are also ensuring that we can actually train more doctors in areas outside of the big cities – clerkships, residencies outside of the big cities – by working with organizations like the University of Lethbridge to make that happen.

Member Loyola: Given that the Alberta NDP caucus has a plan to connect a million more Albertans with a family doctor and a family health team and given that our family health team plans will directly meet the needs of Kinsey and Vera and thousands more people in Medicine Hat and given that we are ready to start the work to build family health teams on day one, does the Health minister regret his legacy of failure to provide basic primary care to Albertans in Medicine Hat and across this province?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the members opposite endorse our approach for team-based family care. This is something we already started in our agreement that we reached with the AMA, to move to a different model of care, a team-based model of care, and we have the support structures in place from a funding standpoint to be able to make that happen. We are making progress.

I'm also very pleased that we are also making progress in bringing in more doctors, internationally trained doctors. We are streamlining the processes for certification to be able to make this happen. Mr. Speaker, for example, in Lethbridge: 17 more doctors over the last nine months, and they'll all be working very soon. We're going to continue until everyone has access to a family doctor.

Misericordia Community Hospital CT Scanner

Mr. Dach: Yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the Premier a single question: would she fix the malfunctioning CT scanner at the Misericordia hospital, that has forced hundreds of patients to be shipped to other facilities? The Premier chose instead to pass the buck to John Cowell and refused to answer. That's not good enough when you're dealing with a broken piece of essential equipment that doctors rely upon to save lives every day at a major Alberta hospital. Since the Premier is so indifferent to the health of Albertans, will the Health minister commit to getting this scanner replaced now?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the scanner actually is fixed and has been fixed since March 17. It was unfortunate that it was having some issues, but, you know, Covenant Health worked to actually get that fixed. In the interim diagnostic imaging had to be done at other locations, but, again, I'm pleased that it's fixed.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to invest in our health care system, including at the Misericordia, and I'm looking forward to when Infrastructure is going to pass the new \$85 million emergency department over to Covenant Health so they can actually start to get it up and running by next September.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister will know, of course, that this CT scanner has a history of breaking down and being out of service for weeks and weeks at a time, and who knows how long it's going to last this time. Thank goodness it's fixed right now, but will the minister agree that it needs to be replaced rather than being fixed? I had just this morning an individual who told me that she would not go to the Misericordia to see if she had kidney stones for fear of that CT scanner not being in commission. Will the minister commit to actually getting that replaced so we have one there?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is committing to make sure that Alberta Health and all of the hospitals, including Covenant and AHS, have the equipment that they need to actually deliver the service. We are actually, you know, putting money where our mouth is, with over \$4 billion this year in capital alone. Now, as the hon. member knows, if there's a need for increased capital, that gets put into the plan. I look forward to working with Covenant and AHS on the needs that the Misericordia has.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CT scanner that regularly goes out of service at the Misericordia is a long historical situation that needs to be addressed by having that CT scanner replaced by a brand new piece of equipment not only for the existing emergency ward but for the new emergency ward that's being built with the \$65 million that we got going when we were in government. Now, there is no CT scanner dedicated to that emergency department, and the hospital relies upon a CT scanner to serve the regional area, not just the hospital patients for the Misericordia. We need two scanners; a new one for both sides of the hospital.

The Acting Speaker: Perhaps I'll invite the hon. member to read *Hansard* from yesterday for another example of a question with a preamble. I encourage you to read the *Hansard* from yesterday, because, yes, you said the example.

The minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've stated before, our government is making significant investments in health care, an additional \$1 billion on the expense side, over \$4 billion on the capital side. I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans here in the Edmonton area and those who use the Misericordia hospital that we will continue to invest. We're investing \$85 million in a new emergency department. Should a new CT scanner be needed, we will continue to work with Covenant and AHS to make sure that they have the tools they need to deliver services to Albertans when and where they need them.

Federal Impact Assessment Act

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, the appeal of the federal Impact Assessment Act, C-69, better known as the no-more-pipelines law, is under way at the Supreme Court. Given that this act has made it impossible for companies to build pipelines and given the current opportunity for Alberta to be a solution to help the world transition away from dictator oil and, more specifically, Russian oil and gas, can the Premier remind this House and Albertans what this law does and how it puts jobs and investment at risk here in Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found it interesting that the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa, rather than make it a condition of their continued coalition to repeal this bill, made a condition of their

coalition the just transition, which would have phased out oil and natural gas workers. This bill is one that is going to pose an existential threat to our ability to continue developing our energy sector. It not only puts in jeopardy billions of dollars that are generated for Albertans and all Canadians, but it's also a violation of the exclusive constitutional jurisdiction of our provinces to control the ability to develop our own resources. We need to win this in the court.

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier, thank you for that answer. Given that the Alberta Court of Appeal has rendered its decision regarding C-69 and given the nature of the findings in this court of law, can the Premier provide this House and Albertans what the Alberta Court of Appeal determined regarding C-69, the no-more-pipelines law?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have read the decision; maybe the members opposite should, too, because they'll see how much worse it is than just no more interprovincial pipelines. They want to stop all of the development in this province. They want to put every single project under the scope of the federal environmental regulation. Here is the quote from the decision, which was a 4-1 decision in our favour. The Alberta Court of Appeal says this:

[It] constitutes a profound invasion into provincial legislative jurisdiction and provincial proprietary rights. Parliament's claimed power to regulate all environmental and other effects of intraprovincial designated projects improperly intrudes into [our] activity.

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, given the immediate need for energy security in North America and world-wide and given that Alberta has an abundance of environmentally and ethically produced energy and further given that Alberta's ability to be a solution hinges on the ability to build more pipelines, can the Premier tell this House when we can expect a decision from the Supreme Court on the constitutionality of C-69?

The Acting Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a shame that we weren't able to see the members opposite lobby their federal leader to end this legislation at the federal level. They could have done that so we didn't have to go through the process of the courts. We are going to see a two-day hearing over the next couple of days. We'll get a decision within the next six to 12 months. We're also backed by 10 other organizations, including the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Indian Resource Council, the Business Council of Alberta, and many others, and together, with Alberta leading the way, we are going to argue that this bill risks disrupting the constitutional balance of our federation and undermines the right for us to govern our affairs.

Child Protective Services and Transition to Adulthood Program

Ms Pancholi: One hundred and sixty-four: that's the number of children and youth receiving child intervention services who have died in the past four years, 98 in the last two years alone. Since last Thursday another three deaths were reported. This is the UCP's record: children and struggling parents abandoned; young people treated like pawns; supports cut, then paused, cut again, then renamed. Why? To save a buck. All these young people needed were adults they could trust, and the UCP broke that, too. Spare us

the line that every death is a tragedy; the tragedy is the UCP's indifference. Will the Premier admit that the UCP has failed children in care?

2:30

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to reiterate, each and every time that member asks a question about children's deaths, that our hearts do go out to the families and those impacted. The work that we continue to do in this area is difficult and challenging, but we will continue to address every single one of these deaths by investigating it thoroughly, by assessing, by reassessing, and by implementing all the recommendations of the advocates.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the outcomes for children and families who survive the system are also heartbreaking and that in the past two years the number of families that have stayed together without a child being apprehended has dropped 56 per cent, the number of children that were reunited with their parents dropped 34 per cent, and the number of children who were adopted dropped 39 per cent and given that that means that under the UCP more children are permanently separated from their parents and spend their whole lives in care and an unbelievable 74 per cent of those children are Indigenous, how is this a record of anything other than total failure?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the reduction in the statistics that the hon. member mentioned is evidence that the system is working, and it's working well. We have an absolute commitment to ensuring that the cultural components of every single one of our interventions is paramount in all the decisions that the caseworkers make, and that's what we'll continue to do, especially as it relates to Indigenous families as well.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the UCP should listen to the voices of young people like Shay, who is 22 and described losing her caseworker and being moved to the TAP program as "revisiting abandonment... financial loss... the risk of being homeless again, pressure, instability and stress," or Christian, aged 22, who says that "When you decide to become our parents... then you should be in it for life like good parents are – not... turning your back on us whenever you decide we have 'aged out,'" and given the deaths, the trauma, the broken trust, my question to all UCP MLAs but especially the three who served as Children's Services ministers is: was it worth it?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of announcing just last week a monumental investment in our transition to adulthood program, which dedicated an additional \$25.6 million to supporting exactly what that member just mentioned. The youth in this program will continue to receive financial supports, but in addition to that, they'll receive counselling, they'll receive mentoring, they'll receive workplace-related training, and they'll receive careers in the trades funding as well.

Industrial Development in St. Albert

Ms Renaud: During her speech to the St. Albert and District Chamber of Commerce the Leader of the Opposition committed to investing in the Lakeview business district if elected. This project will support local business development, create 7,000 new jobs, and support advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, clean tech, the health sciences sector, and more. Yet the UCP have been vehemently opposed to this project. I don't really understand why. Question: why is the UCP so opposed to investment and job creation in St. Albert?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. members continue to peddle in fear and personal destruction because, quite frankly, they're not encumbered by the truth.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: Now, Mr. Speaker, back in the final days of that administration's government in 2018 they made a campaign promise to expand Ray Gibbon Drive, because this was important and strategic for the growth of St. Albert. They had four years to fund it, and the best that they could do was come up with a campaign commitment in 2019. They're doing the same thing with the Lakeview business district. They promised it. We're going to deliver it.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:34.

Ms Renaud: Given that the mayor of St. Albert said that the Lakeview business district is the city's number one priority and they get calls all the time from businesses that want to set up in St. Albert but there's no more land and given that if funding was to come through soon, shovels could be in the ground as early as next year, why is this government refusing to listen to the people of St. Albert and their priorities that they've clearly identified and standing in the way of economic development? They'd rather stand up and fling insults at people instead of working with the city to get things done, create jobs.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, do you know what the members of St. Albert really want? An MLA that lives in their riding. In addition, since they know that they're not going to get that for a few more weeks... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nally: Now, Mr. Speaker, the Lakeview business district is strategically... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. You've been doing so well up until now.

Mr. Nally: Honestly, Mr. Speaker, it's like high school without the teachers.

Now, Lakeview business district is strategically important to the growth of St. Albert. Quite frankly, we're out of land for the city to grow the business investment and tax base in that city. We're committed to delivering on the Lakeview...

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is what desperation looks like.

Given that the mayor also said that investment in the Lakeview business district will maintain momentum of economic growth along Ray Gibbon Drive... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I'd like to hear the question, please.

Ms Renaud:... and given that the Lakeview business district has been described as the city's main pillar of the city's future and given that on this side of the House we believe in building Alberta's future and we will get the Lakeview business district built, why is this government so opposed to progress, creating economic opportunities, and good-paying jobs for Albertans? They'd rather stand up and heckle and fling insults than actually get to work and create projects, build jobs.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Unlike the members opposite when they governed, our government has been laser focused on creating a very competitive business environment. Alberta is leading the nation in economic growth. We're diversifying our economy at record rates. There are 100,000 unfilled jobs in Alberta, and we have a balanced budget. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order. Order. [interjections]

Mr. Stephan: They can't handle the truth.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Energy Company Municipal Tax Payment (continued)

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we are extremely fortunate to be the economic engine for Canada through our natural resources like oil and gas. However, there are a few delinquent companies that have yet to pay their municipally owed taxes. To quote our Minister of Municipal Affairs, "In Alberta, we pay what we owe, and it's time to pay up." To the Premier: what were the key findings from the unpaid oil and gas property tax survey in 2022?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. When we did the survey, \$220 million in unpaid taxes had been reported by municipalities, with \$130 million in tax arrears, including penalties and interest, and the remaining \$90 million in cancellations. I want to commend the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Energy working together to find a solution to this. Some of the taxes are going to be unrecoverable because they've been previously written off, but already because of the work that the two ministers did – they reached out to the companies. There's \$48 million in unpaid taxes that are already under repayment plans. There's about \$76 million that is still potentially recoverable, and we'll make sure that those get recovered.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the Premier. Given that I have heard from my constituent landowners and local municipalities about the challenge of unpaid municipal taxes and given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been focused on finding a solution to help support municipalities across the province and further given that this does not seem to be a new issue, to the Premier: what are you doing to ensure the unpaid taxes from noncompliant oil and gas companies are paid?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The measure that the Minister of Energy took in the last couple of days was a ministerial order under the Responsible Energy Development Act to the Alberta Energy Regulator. What we will do is provide a new condition where companies will not be able to transfer well licences or get new well licences unless they have satisfied the regulator that the taxes have been paid. We think that this is going to provide just enough stick so that they'll be able to pay their taxes and make sure that the municipalities are made whole, and we can get on with continuing to operate.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of my constituents tell me how grateful they are that this government is taking action to address these challenges and listen to our municipal partners, unlike the NDP during their disastrous term, and given that this government is serious about addressing the problem of unpaid municipal taxes, to the Premier: what else has our government done to support municipalities trying to collect what they are legally owed?

2:40

The Acting Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our liability management framework is designed to make sure that licences do not get transferred to companies that are not going to be able to meet their liability needs. It's part of the reason why we have a new program in place, where companies are going to also have to clear up previous years' liability in order to improve their balance sheets. Municipal Affairs restored a special lien in legislation to give municipalities priority over creditors, and Municipal Affairs as well continues to deliver our provincial education requisition credit, which gives municipalities a break on their education property taxes by giving them credit for uncollectable taxes.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the daily Routine. Please leave quietly.

We are at points of order. At 1:55 the Government House Leader called a point of order.

Point of Order **Language Creating Disorder**

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it is your first day in the chair ruling on points of order, I wish you the best of luck, and may the force be with you and the table.

I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically at the time noted by yourself that the Leader of the Opposition said, when asking a question to the Premier – I don't have the benefit of the Blues; I'm trying to find a delicate way to describe my handwriting: less than legible – that the Premier is shameless using public dollars for campaigning. Now, I understand that this may be something that the opposition likes to call out often, saying that we're shameless or other kinds of insults, but I think that kind of language certainly would cause disorder in this Chamber. Suggesting that the government is using public funds to campaign for an election would also be, I think, making a false accusation against a member in particular, and in this instance the Premier. So, Mr. Speaker, I do contend this is a point of order, but I leave it in your more than capable hands.

The Acting Speaker: The opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also don't have the benefit of the Blues, but in the context the question was about government spending of \$9.6 million on government advertising just before an election. In that context, it's a question well put to the Premier about that spending, and as head of the government it was directed to the Premier. I think they are talking about disorder in the House. I also note that the Premier, in her answer prior to this one, also said: I'm not lucky enough to have Lou Arab as my husband, who works for CUPE and runs ads. Like, she also directed an attack personally to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. So if they want to keep

order in the House, I think they should watch their language as well. It's not a point of order; it's just a matter of debate. Whether they're spending money wisely or not, we disagree with that spin, so that's what it was about.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else wishing to add anything additional?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and at 1:55 the statement was made: "The reason they're doing it, Mr. Speaker, is because this Premier is shameless when it comes to using public money for her own partisan gain." I appreciate the arguments from both sides of the House regarding whether it is a point of order or simply a matter of debate. I do want to strongly caution all members of this House to act with decorum and respect for one another. I believe probably my mother is watching today, and I would love for her to see how well you all behave. While this is getting to be uncomfortable language, I do not find it a point of order, but I do strongly caution all the members to choose your words wisely. I consider this matter concluded and dealt with.

At 2:34 the Deputy Opposition House Leader called a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 2:34, in response to a question from my colleague from St. Albert, the minister rose to answer and said something to the effect that the hon. member is peddling fearmongering and that they are not encumbered by the truth. I know that the minister used "they" when he said "not encumbered by the truth," but all allegations were directed personally at the member and, prior to that, also where the member lives and those kinds of things. I think that kind of language is personally directed at the member, and it's also not helpful to the decorum in the House, and that should be ruled out of order.

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we've travelled down this road not that long ago, where a comment was made by a member on this side of the House about members, plural, on the opposite side. Had the comment been made about a specific member – and in this case, without the benefit of the Blues I do recall the member who was speaking saying "unencumbered by the truth," which would be an indirect way of saying something unparliamentary in the event it was about a specific member. In this instance that member – and quoting the Deputy Opposition House Leader – said "members." So this is not a point of order. This has been ruled on as recently as last week, and it was a point of order called by that specific member. I'd hope that lessons are learned, that we're not wasting the Chamber's time calling points of order that are in fact not points of order, and he knows it. So I would contend it is not a point of order, but again I leave it in your capable hands.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else have anything additional?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. At 2:34 a statement was made: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. members continue to peddle in fear and personal destruction because, quite frankly, they're not encumbered by the truth." So to the Government House Leader's point, the comment was made about members in general and not a specific member. However, I do once again want to strongly caution members that you cannot do indirectly what you can't do directly. With that, I rule that this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 11, the Appropriation Act, 2023.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2023-24 fiscal year. This includes the following amounts from the general revenue fund: \$180 million for the Legislative Assembly; \$50 billion for the public service, including the government's various ministries and departments; \$3.9 billion for capital investments; \$1.5 billion for financial transactions; and \$1.5 billion in contingency funding, which will ensure the government is well equipped to respond to disasters and emergencies as well as any future pandemic-related cost pressures. This funding will ensure the government has the resources it needs to continue providing the programs and services Albertans will rely on in the coming fiscal year, as laid out in Budget 2023.

2:50

Budget '23 secures Alberta's future by growing and diversifying the economy, strengthening health care and education, improving the safety of our communities across the province, and establishing a new fiscal framework. It continues our positive fiscal trajectory with another balanced budget and forecasted surplus of \$2.4 billion in '23-24 and projected surpluses of \$2 billion the next year and \$1.4 billion in the out-year.

Over the last four years our relentless focus on investment attraction, job creation, and diversification has secured our position once again as the economic engine of the nation. Building on the \$600 million committed over three years to the Alberta at work initiative, Budget '23 includes an additional \$370 million to help Albertans build their skills and fill thousands of new jobs as businesses grow and more corporations and businesses move to our province.

Budget '23 also includes a new health workforce strategy that provides \$158 million to support multiple initiatives to recruit and retain health care workers, including the targeted recruitment of internationally trained workers. We're providing funding to increase the number of seats available in health care professions, including 1,800 new seats for health care aides, licensed practical nurses, and registered nurses over the next three years and an additional 120 seats to train more physicians at our schools of medicine, Mr. Speaker, a 40 per cent increase in physician training capacity. Another \$35 million over three years will expand enrolment in our nontrade construction programs and training in the energy, technology, business, and aviation sectors.

Now, while economic growth is strong, times remain tough for many families and households. New relief measures are helping postsecondary students. We're providing more grants and bursaries to low-income Albertans who are looking to upgrade their skills to fill jobs in high-demand sectors. These measures will keep \$178 million more in the pockets of our students each year. This adds to our comprehensive affordability measures, including the suspension of the fuel tax, providing electricity rebates, the indexation of personal income taxes, and targeted supports to our seniors, families, and most vulnerable.

We're also making record investments in kindergarten through grade 12 education to secure the future for our youth. In total, Budget '23 provides an additional \$1.8 billion over three years to fund enrolment growth, reduce class size, meet the specialized learning needs of students, and improve transportation. The '23 capital plan supports 58 school projects – yes, Mr. Speaker, 58 school projects – including new schools that will provide more spaces for students, create jobs, and revitalize Alberta's communities.

Public safety and a fair and efficient justice system are key deliverables for government, Mr. Speaker. Budget '23 increases funding by 12 per cent to the ministries of Justice and public safety: \$655 million for Justice will increase the number of Crown prosecutors and add support staff to address backlogs, increase capacity, and modernize our courts; \$1.2 billion for public safety and emergency means more boots on the ground to better fight crime in our communities.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Alberta's strong balance sheet wouldn't have been possible without our commitment to responsible fiscal management. We're securing Alberta's future with a new fiscal framework that will require balanced budgets, control operating spending, and provide a framework for surplus cash. A balanced budget requirement and limiting spending increases to population growth and inflation would ensure appropriate and sustainable spending. The spending ceiling would challenge government to focus on how we can transform the way we do things, to improve the way we deliver programs and services while making sure Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars are respected and used efficiently. The fiscal framework would ensure that the government continues to prioritize saving for the future and paying down debt. Balanced budgets would become the norm instead of the exception, Mr. Speaker, and that's good news for Albertans today and Albertans tomorrow.

Budget '23 is a budget that secures Alberta's future. We're driving economic growth and Alberta's prosperity with fiscal responsibility, investment attraction, and diversification. This is how we fund programs and services that support Albertans. We're securing the health and education of Albertans by increasing access to family doctors, surgeries, and emergency services and making sure our children and grandchildren have the education system they need to reach their full potential. We're securing our future with a new fiscal framework, a framework that will require appropriate and sustainable spending, prioritize debt repayment and savings, and ensure the next generation is not encumbered with a debt they did not incur.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support this bill today and help us as a government deliver on Albertans' priorities.

I move to adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 11, the Appropriation Act, 2023.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's again my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 12, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023.

The funding in Bill 12 will cover costs reflecting the government's commitment to save for the future, strengthen our health care system,

and adapt to the changing global economy. It would also provide for a number of actions we've taken to help Albertans struggling with high costs due to inflation. If passed, Bill 12 will authorize an approximate increase of \$2.7 billion in voted expense funding, \$500,000 in voted capital investment, and \$292 million in financial transactions.

The largest supplementary amount belongs to Treasury Board and Finance, where we see \$753 million provided for investment in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Mr. Speaker, financial strength is critical to any government here in Alberta, and it's critical that we prioritize savings and debt repayment. This additional \$753 million investment in the heritage savings trust fund will add to the \$1.257 billion already there from the previous fiscal year, which will make \$2 billion in a net transfer to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also supports other priorities and pressures that we as a government have faced in the current fiscal year: \$636 million is earmarked for the Department of Energy – that includes \$338 million for the cost of selling oil, and this is primarily due to higher energy prices and increased activity in the sector – \$279 million is earmarked for the site rehabilitation program as a result of revised federal program timelines; and \$10.8 million will be earmarked for the Alberta petrochemical incentive program for an additional project approval, which is again good news for the Alberta economy.

Five hundred and fifty-three million dollars, Mr. Speaker, is requested for the Department of Health. Included in that amount is \$332 million for physician payments, \$184 million for the new Alberta Medical Association agreement. I would like to thank our Minister of Health for successfully concluding that agreement on behalf of all Albertans. Thirty-seven million dollars is earmarked for payments to allied health professionals. On the matter of health it must be noted that Budget '23 will provide funding, beyond that which we see in this bill, to continue to support a stronger health care system for Albertans. In fact, we're setting a new record again for spending in health care this year by committing an additional \$965 million in operating expense for '23-24 for the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a hard year for many families meeting the end of the month as bills have piled up due to inflation pressure that Canadians are experiencing right across the country, that, in fact, citizens are experiencing, really, right across the developed world. Six hundred and nine million dollars is requested under the Affordability and Utilities ministry; \$349 million for utility rebates and grant programs, primarily for electricity rebates, as part of the affordability action plan; \$6.6 million for developing the affordability action plan communications effort. It's important Albertans know where they can find relief, and we're committed to ensuring that they have the information required to participate in this programming.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, other funding is requested across departments to provide for various services and initiatives. This includes \$32 million for public security, \$31 million for court and justice services, \$28 million for homeless and outreach support services, \$20 million for learning support funding, and \$1.5 million for rural economic development, among other programs, services, and initiatives detailed before us today.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '23 keeps our net debt to GDP ratio well below our targeted maximum of 30 per cent. In fact, at the end of this fiscal year our net debt to GDP ratio will be 10.2 per cent, giving Alberta the strongest balance sheet of any province in the

country by far. Simply put, our commitment to fiscal anchors is paying off and paving the way for a more prosperous future.

Going forward, new fiscal rules will make sure that governments continue to make responsible spending decisions, and our new fiscal rules will require a balanced budget. Balanced budgets will become the norm instead of the exception.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, actions by this government have secured Alberta's future. This bill reflects that future, and I respectfully urge my colleagues, on both sides of the House, today to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 9 continues to build on the significant progress this government has made in reducing red tape for Albertans and Alberta businesses. Now I would like to quote the greatest Finance minister in our province's history, when he said that we inherited a fiscal train wreck when we got elected. In fact, we didn't just inherit a fiscal train wreck, Madam Speaker; we inherited a province overrun with socialist rot, and nowhere was that rot more evident than the 97 tax increases that Albertans were subject to. Of those 97 tax increases imposed on Albertans in the previous four years, one of them was the greatest tax in our province's history, the 4 and a half billion dollar, investment-crushing, job-killing carbon tax.

Madam Speaker, I'm happy to say that we campaigned on a platform of fiscal restraint, and we did what we said we were going to do, which is that we cut taxes, and we reduced red tape. We have the lowest corporate taxes in Canada. We are cheaper than 44 U.S. states. Our taxes put us in line with Louisiana and Texas.

But, in addition to that, we've made ourselves into a business-friendly environment. We cut red tape. Let me give you one example. If you're building a billion-dollar project, you can come to the Industrial Heartland, which has a pilot right now for a designated industrial zone where they have things like preapproved water licences so that if you're coming to the province for the first time, you don't need to spend 18 months getting a water licence, Madam Speaker, because we've already done that. Those are the kinds of things that we're doing to attract investment.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you that the world is noticing. They're watching, and our plan is working. Business is embracing what we're doing. A couple of examples, of course, are that Alberta has 12 per cent of Canada's population, yet we've created a quarter of the jobs in the last 12 months. We have the Alberta petrochemical incentive program, which was referenced by the Finance minister. We have received \$40 billion in applications: not \$40 million, \$40 billion worth of applications.

We are putting ourselves on the map as the global leader in clean hydrogen. Six facilities have been announced for Alberta, four of them coming to the Industrial Heartland, 30 minutes from where we stand right now, and they will be employing many people in the area. Many of those are my constituents, Madam Speaker. The first

one, Air Products, broke ground about two months ago. These are exciting projects. That's in addition to the Dow Chemical project, the world's first net-zero ethane cracker.

A couple more examples of how business is responding to our cutting taxes and reducing red tape are film and television. We have grown the film and television industry from \$100 million to a billion dollars. In addition to that, De Havilland airplane manufacturing – Madam Speaker, if I said to you three years ago that Alberta was going to be a destination for building airplanes, most people would have laughed, yet that's what's happening. We're building airplanes in Alberta because the investment community is taking notice and they're responding. They're responding with further investments, and the good news is that they're creating jobs for Albertans.

Now, our approach to red tape has been so successful that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave us the highest score in the country last year, and they also gave us the only A, an A-minus, for red tape reduction. This makes us a leader in Canada. We have reduced 36 per cent of the red tape that we inherited from the NDP. We also brought in some new programs as well, so we have a net red tape reduction of 30 per cent, and we will be at one-third by the end of 2023, Madam Speaker. We've also saved Albertans and job creators \$2.1 billion on unnecessary regulatory burden. Now, Bill 9 moves forward under that same premise, that we're going to make life better, we're going to make life easier for Albertans. If passed, this amendment and this bill and the previous six bills alone will have led to the elimination of at least 4,000 unnecessary requirements since the beginning of our mandate.

Let me now provide an overview of the key amendments included in this bill. Madam Speaker, Bill 9 helps agricultural workers in a number of ways. With our proposed amendments to the Irrigation Districts Act we would cut red tape for the irrigation industry, a crucial part of Alberta's agricultural sector and our economy. Several of the amendments would modernize the legislation, giving irrigation districts more options for public notification while updating accounting standards. We would also expand the ability of irrigation districts to stop water delivery to those using water in harmful or unauthorized ways while allowing them to remove unused land from their districts. Meanwhile an expanded Irrigation Council would respond to the needs of districts and water users while adding more diverse representation and expertise. These amendments are well overdue and address a number of recommendations that stakeholders have been asking for.

Bill 9 also helps another important agricultural sector in Alberta, namely the beekeeping industry. Proposed amendments would modernize the Bee Act and its regulation to help protect Alberta's bee industry. This includes adding emerging pests and diseases to the legislation to allow industry and government to respond more quickly in the event of an outbreak, saving producers time, money, and stress. Alberta has the largest beekeeping industry in Canada, and these changes will help support its continued growth and safety.

Speaking of safety, Bill 9 also recognizes the great risks that firefighters take to protect Albertans, their lives, and their property. That's why we're proposing to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to grant presumptive cancer coverage to all firefighters who served during the 2016 Fort McMurray fires. With this change, affected firefighters and their families would receive the benefits and supports they need with fewer delays as they would no longer need to provide evidence that the disease is work related. Madam Speaker, we are proud to include this amendment as part of this bill, and we thank firefighters for their continued service and sacrifice. I know my colleague the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development shares this view.

As I said earlier, we seek to help all Albertans with this bill wherever they live. We're watching out for Albertans who live in the cities, our towns as well as our rural areas. That's why we're proposing important amendments to the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act. These changes would remove the province's ability to terminate LRT funding agreements with Calgary or Edmonton without cause, reducing the risk to the cities and their contractors that the projects may not be able to proceed due to withdrawal of provincial support. Both cities have expressed concerns about this risk, Madam Speaker.

This change would also encourage more businesses to bid on the LRT contracts and potentially reduce project costs by removing the need for contractors to build in a premium to protect themselves in case provincial funding is terminated without cause. To be clear, the grant agreements will continue to provide the province with appropriate recourse should the cities not satisfy the terms of the agreement. We are happy to bring these amendments forward to eliminate oversight that is no longer needed, helping both cities to expand their respective LRT services.

Madam Speaker, last year my predecessor the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park brought forward important changes to ensure prompt payment of contractors in the construction industry. Changes we're proposing for the Public Works Act would allow the government to support the planned extension of prompt payment rules to public work projects as well.

3:10

Madam Speaker, Albertans are proud Canadians, and we want to ensure that Albertans' voice remains strong in our province's priorities, interests, and concerns. This includes ensuring that the property rights of all Albertans are protected and respected by the federal government. In support of that, Bill 9 would amend two pieces of legislation that cover trespassing on private land, namely the Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act. With the changes we're proposing, we're ensuring legislative clarity around the fact that federal government officials are bound by the same rules in Alberta's trespass legislation that apply to Albertans, including potential penalties for unlawful entry onto an Albertan's property. I should also note that in any trespassing situations property owners can still be held responsible for their actions, should call law enforcement to deal with any trespassers. However, this change aligns with similar legislation brought forward in Saskatchewan last fall and would send a strong signal to the federal government that we are committed to protecting Albertans' property rights.

Madam Speaker, Bill 9 also promotes and protects public safety in all areas of the province. The changes we're proposing to the Income and Employment Supports Act would suspend government income support benefits to people with outstanding warrants until the warrant is executed or cancelled. With this, we would ensure that taxpayers' funds are not being used to potentially enable a violent offender to avoid arrest and therefore pose a safety risk to the general public. This will also save Alberta police the time and resources in executing arrest warrants as many offenders who rely on support could be more willing to turn themselves in for arrest. To be clear, we would maintain the flexibility to continue to provide these supports to the families or dependants of these offenders. These amendments would also align Alberta's legislation with British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, all of which have introduced similar amendments to address benefit suspension due to outstanding warrants.

Last but not least, Madam Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't also make note of some important changes we're proposing for legislation that belongs to my ministry. Our land titles office has

experienced pressure due to significant real estate market activity across Alberta. Since April 2021 there has been an 86 per cent increase in registration documents coming into the land titles office. To address the increase in volume and the resulting backlog, the land titles office has hired more staff to increase our document processing capacity, but the changes we're proposing in Bill 9 would also help relieve the pressure.

Our proposed amendment to the Land Titles Act would allow Albertans to sign and submit certain documents electronically to the land titles office; in other words, no more wet-ink signatures for certain documents. This change would be an important first step towards the future digitization of the entire land title registration process in Alberta, contributing to the modernization of government service delivery. I should also mention, Madam Speaker, that this change would also align nicely with recent changes we have made. That means Albertans are no longer required to provide wet-ink signatures for vehicle registration.

Madam Speaker, we remain committed to these and other solutions that continue to reduce red tape and modernize our approval process for Albertans and Alberta businesses. The amendments we are proposing will continue to make life easier for Albertans. In this spirit, I invite the support of the House to give second reading to Bill 9.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, just to clarify – I may have not heard it – did you move second reading at the beginning of your speech? Okay. Thank you very much.

I'm looking for those that wish to join debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to join discussion here on Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I appreciate the little history lesson, I guess, from the minister of red tape, talking about, to begin with, the fiscal train wreck that he made mention of. Of course, he left out such details as things like a bet placed at the cost of \$1.3 billion on a U.S. election, might have left out the \$30 million a year being spent to chase a cartoon bigfoot and a couple of different attempts to get a logo right, and then as of recently, you know, kind of forgot to mention about the \$9 million ad slush fund the government has just given itself.

But I digress. Let's get back to Bill 9 and some of the things that are going on here. When we're talking about Bill 9 – obviously, a ministry that's now on its third minister has proposed over the course of this 30th Legislature to bill taxpayers somewhere in the neighbourhood of between \$10 million and \$15 million and possibly even more, as I was not able to get a clear answer in estimates around investigations and audits. There's almost an additional \$8 million there. It would have been helpful, especially, you know, as the minister was talking about these different percentages of red tape that's been reduced throughout 36 per cent and 30 per cent, yet in the estimates documents it was above 29 per cent. I'm not really sure exactly what that was, whether it's 29.1, 29.5, 29.9. We seem to be getting all kinds of different numbers here.

I guess the good news is that at least we're not looking at things like reducing the fee to go cut Christmas trees, but people still have to fill out the paperwork. I'm glad we don't have to discuss that in Bill 9 or something to that effect or at least not give out plaques to his colleagues. I'm appreciative of that.

The minister also made reference to some significant dollars that have been saved due to the efforts of red tape reduction. I would of course submit to the House that a very large portion of that dollar

amount would come from the TIER program, so I think the number is a little bit inflated there. I just thought I'd point that out.

Some of the things that I do want to focus on in Bill 9 – and when I got the technical briefing, I didn't really get some clear answers with regard to this. The first one I'll start off with is some of the changes on the Income and Employment Supports Act. I didn't seem to get a clear answer around: was there any kind of consultation with the Privacy Commissioner? Were there any kind of red flags brought up or any questions brought up to that effect? I'd like to know – obviously, you know, when we get, probably, into Committee of the Whole, we'll get a chance to be able to hear about some of those answers, of course. Is it in line completely with the privacy legislation?

I'm also wondering if there's been any research that's been done on the impact of withdrawing the benefits and how that will decrease crime rates. You know, certainly, I think that if we can show that this kind of a change does have an impact, I do agree that that is something that we can talk about and be able to bring to the forefront and show Albertans that that is indeed happening.

Just on the consultation I know we could hear about, you know, what we heard during those consultations, and perhaps maybe the government will have the ability to table those documents so we can see what was said during some of the consultations around changes there.

Now, I do have to bring this up, because I'd be remiss by not doing that. I know it's possible for individuals to get multiple parking tickets, not address those, and actually have a warrant brought out for their arrest. What kind of, you know, protections do we have for that? The legislation isn't absolutely clear on that. I know that during briefing I got the usual: well, it'll be in the regulations. It'd be nice just to hear some of the protections around that. Obviously, some of the protections will be for families that, unfortunately, do not know that perhaps a family member is engaged in criminal activity, but they do rely on that individual for support. Again, I just want to make sure that that's covered and addressed here.

3:20

Now, I also want to focus in a little bit here on changes to the Petty Trespass Act. There have been a couple of situations that have been brought forward to my attention which I'm very concerned that this legislation will have an impact on. Now, the first one is census workers, federal census workers. Sometimes they have to go back to a property multiple times in order to try to get the information that they're requesting via the census. I do know of situations where people really don't like census workers coming onto their property. What kind of impact is that going to have on those workers? You know, are we going to get a situation where police are called simply because of a census worker? Hopefully, we can get some clarity around that.

The other situation that's come to my attention here just a couple of weeks ago: there was a case where many postal workers had been suspended. They were trying to address some safety issues within the workplace and what entails with their job. Long story short, they were essentially told they were being suspended because they were interfering with the delivery of mail. Now, I'm wondering, just a natural question – again, I'm just hoping for some clarity on this – if federal mail workers are unable to deliver their mail for whatever reason, will they be protected from getting suspended from their job? Hopefully, there has been some consultation by the minister of red tape, through Bill 9, in terms of how that will be addressed.

Now, the other one I want to quickly jump on is, of course, the changes to the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act. Let's be honest here. This is not red tape reduction; this is simply

correcting a really big mistake that this government made. By putting in this kind of uncertain language, it has been difficult to get people to bid on projects. This seems a little bit like, you know, hand-me-down legislation like I've seen in previous iterations of red tape reduction acts, where it tried to fix a situation that was made. Perhaps maybe the Minister of Health could have brought forward some changes around ripping up doctors' contracts and could've let the red tape reduction minister handle it in that sense.

You know, this is good. I'm not saying it's a bad thing. I think the change is a good thing. It's just: why did it take so long for something like this? I'm sure that there must've been consultations with the cities of Edmonton and Calgary on this. Why has it taken literally until just about the end of this Legislature to address that? That was just simply not a very good policy that was brought forward. I am curious, though, if the cities did share with the minister how much business was potentially lost because of this. Hopefully, maybe through some of those consultations we could hear a little bit about that.

Now I want to touch on the changes to the Workers' Compensation Act. There have been a lot of very heated statements around this, and I will continue to take the position that I'm very, very disappointed. I appreciate the changes being proposed here. What I don't appreciate, Madam Speaker, is that it doesn't go far enough. Now, what I'm going to do here is that I'm going to hopefully touch the hearts of members opposite who have said they have roots in labour, just as I do. When you have a situation where language is going to fail a member, you need to do something about it to change it. In this case the failure with the proposed language here in Bill 9 around the changes to WCB is that it's only going to be on a go-forward basis.

I know that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development has said that it's only one, but that's all we needed: one example, one failure where this family is going to have to continue to try to fight to get coverage for the loved one that they lost. It would just be simple enough to retroactively change this language.

Now, unfortunately, we have heard the red tape minister say in a news conference that that was impossible right up until Ontario dated changes to WCB to make these retroactive changes. They did it all the way back to 1960, Madam Speaker. I'd like to say that I don't even think I was a twinkle in my dad's eye at that time yet. So for us to simply make a change back to the beginning of the Fort McMurray fire: it's doable. We can change it.

I know that my good friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods and critic for labour has an amendment ready for that, so here's where I will ask: for those that have roots in labour, you know that this change is the right thing to do. We're not asking for the moon. We're not trying to create any kind of uncertainty. We're simply saying: date it back to the start. This will cover that one individual. They won't have to fight anymore. It's just the right thing to do. Hopefully, my pleas haven't fallen on deaf ears, Madam Speaker, with regard to a potential amendment that we can bring forward, probably likely during Committee of the Whole, to make some slight changes to good language. I'm not saying that what's proposed in here under WCB changes is bad. It's good language. Please don't trip at the finish line. It's that important.

Now, some other things we could look at. It's just simply housekeeping; the minister himself said that. You know, we could be bringing these things forward in a statutes amendment act just like we've seen in other red tape reduction bills. It kind of feels like we're just trying to fill up the list here, fill up the roster, look like something's being done on a legislative level to justify, as I've mentioned earlier in my comments, a ministry that's spending \$10 million to \$15 million, maybe even significantly more, on red tape

besides, like I said, going and cutting red tape ribbons and giving out plaques, like we've seen in the past. Hopefully, there are no plans by the current red tape minister to do these sorts of similar things.

I think at this point in time it's not necessarily a bad piece of legislation, touting, I think, all the significant accomplishments. I appreciate that everybody is very, very proud of the A-minus rating, but I have to ask, then: why is it, which I discovered during the estimates of red tape, scanning through every single ministry, that only a handful barely mentioned red tape? It used to be prolific throughout all of it. There used to be measurements included. There were none. Even in the ones that, like I said, just barely mentioned the words "red tape," there was nothing. If it's still such a focus, why was there nothing mentioned by all the ministries about their efforts? Is it simply a case that every ministry has been able to accomplish their own red tape reduction targets and, again, here we have just hand-me-down legislation to keep the red tape minister busy?

3:30

I will make a comment around some of the changes to land titles. I'm glad to see these. You know, I don't want to be completely critical of that. I think these changes will hopefully speed up the process, will make things a little bit easier for Albertans to get that kind of documentation done. I certainly don't have any concerns with that.

Again, hopefully, as we get further into debate, we'll get some answers to some of the questions that I've posed, you know, find out some clarifying facts. I think it'll make it a little bit easier to be able to go to Albertans and tell them that some of their concerns are not a problem. As I said, changes to the trespass act have raised some red flags here. Rather than just simply going with the narrative, "Well, it'll all be taken care of in regulations," I think Albertans want to see, you know, some clarity on this so that when the regulations do come out, they'll be able to read what they're expecting with those changes.

Again, I'm looking forward to my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods bringing forward that amendment. Again – and I'm sorry to come back to this – please, please don't trip at the finish line here, literally at the finish line. Our firefighters are our heroes of this province. The work that they did was unimaginable in Fort McMurray. The stories that I've heard – I can't even begin to try to fathom and relate to it, but they have said clearly that they want their sisters and brothers covered, including the ones that we've already lost. This is fundamentally important. Again, this is not about trying to make the government look bad; it's just a simple change to cover it all the way from the start.

I will be listening to the rest of debate. I will be making notes along the way. I will likely be back up in other sections of the debate to provide further comment, but hopefully I can get some answers later on down the road here.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak today to Bill 9. This is another in a series of acts that have come forward from this government. You know, I think we all have an interest in ensuring that our regulations work better, that they protect the things they need to protect while being improved.

I'm not saying that none of these bills have ever done it at all but to a very, very limited degree. The vast majority of this is just lip service. My personal favourite was the time that the UCP literally

repealed and transcribed an entire act into another one so that they could claim to have removed a regulation. I mean, the degree to which – just, like, literally deleting an entire act and rewriting it in another act so that now you have one act instead of two acts isn't actually changing anything in the real world that affects the people out there. It's kind of bananas. I really have to say that it shocks me. Yes.

This series of bills has been problematic, I would say, to say the least. In this particular bill one of the things that the government actually gets right – and I say that a little tongue in cheek because they broke it in the first place. One of the things they actually get right is that they remove the ability, like a sort of legislative revision, in contracts that would give the government the ability to withdraw on 90 days' notice. This is from big projects. In Calgary it's the green line; that's the project in question. This was – I don't know – political grandstanding on the part of the UCP. They put in this ability to revoke a contract on 90 days. Now, anyone who's ever operated in any kind of a business environment, really, anywhere for any length of time can tell you that putting in a clause like that for a huge project, that allows one party to just walk away from the contract in 90 days for no reason, drives up the price massively.

This is public infrastructure. It's necessary public infrastructure. It's infrastructure that is incredibly important to the people of Calgary, and this clause, which the UCP put in in the first place, in order to show how antitransit they are, I guess – I don't really know what the point of that was. I mean, who's against transit? Like, that just seems crazy. But the UCP managed to put this in so that they could please their antitransit folks, I guess, and it had a huge impact.

I'm glad it's coming out, but once again this is this government asking for people to congratulate them for fixing things they broke. They did it with deindexing tax brackets, something that the former UCP Premier used to rail against and then did as soon as he was in government. I mean, this is fairly typical of the UCP. You know, they deindexed that. They cost Albertans money. They raised their taxes. And then they turned around and fixed the thing that they had broken and asked to be congratulated for it.

It's the same way with benefits. This government voted for it. These members, UCP members, voted for it when we were in government, for the indexing of benefits to ensure that the most vulnerable among us are not losing to inflation, and then they turned around and deindexed them as soon as they got in, and then they reindexed them, and now they run around the province, saying, "Look at us; aren't we glorious? We've indexed benefits," as though, again, they weren't fixing something that they just broke.

Yes, it is a good thing that this provision has been removed. It's a very good thing, but it should never have been in there. It was really transparently obvious to anyone who's ever operated in any sort of a business environment that it should never have been in there. I guess thank you for repealing your own bad decision.

The next part of this that I want to talk about is the portion dealing with WCB. This is a good change. It is a change that will cover something that needs covering. I think the challenge is that – and we have raised this multiple times in this House, and the government has responded multiple times – it doesn't cover people who were diagnosed in the interim period with these cancers. You know, the government is saying, "This isn't a problem; it doesn't exist," and the firefighters are saying: "This is a problem. It does exist, and it needs to be addressed."

In my opinion, when you have a dispute as to the facts, the best thing you can do is to look to what the most credible source is. Madam Speaker, when I examine it, the UCP government versus firefighters, I think it's pretty clear who the most credible source is. I think it's extremely clear that the firefighters are a more credible

source of information in this case, that their story is probably the correct story because this government has a long history of being deeply mistaken – I’m trying to avoid unparliamentary language here – as to the facts, with no imputation of what the intention of spreading those deeply mistaken facts was.

You know, this conversation has occurred in the House. We have seen the minister stand up over and over again and claim that it’s absolutely impossible to have this legislation operate retroactively. It might actually be retrospectively because it just changes the current outcome of – anyway, it doesn’t really matter. The point is that Ontario has done it, and in fact it can be done.

3:40

Courts tend to not read things as having retroactive or retrospective operations unless the Legislature is really clear. I mean, that is true; courts will not assume that a Legislature intended to operate retroactively, but you can do it with really clear language. This rule has been around for a while. It’s not a new thing. I guarantee you the legislative drafters have informed the government of the existence of this rule. So it’s not impossible. Ontario has done it.

I think this government should do it. We will obviously be introducing an amendment to that effect, and I think all members of this House are going to have the opportunity to vote on that. This is, I mean, just a really easy question: should we cover the cancers of all firefighters who fought to protect Albertans and then became ill as a result of their bravery? I think the answer is clearly yes. I don’t understand why the government would obfuscate or deny that or attempt to argue against it. Like, what could be a clearer answer to a question than: should we presumptively cover illnesses that firefighters got protecting Albertans? Yes. Yes, we clearly should. I really hope that the government members change their mind with respect to this.

Honestly, I have to say, Madam Speaker, I have very rarely – I mean, I find this government disappointing in every possible way – been so disappointed as to see, you know, the minister who represents the area in question stand up and say: “The WCB is working just fine. There’s nothing wrong with it. WCB is only there for employers; it’s not there for the employees.” Like, the degree to which that just represents a complete misunderstanding of WCB and the rights of employees and just everything is incredibly intense.

Yeah. That conversation has been very problematic. I sincerely hope that the government takes what may be its last opportunity to correct one of its own very egregious errors and allows that to apply to everyone.

Okay. Another section of the bill that I wanted to talk about has to do with income supports. One of the changes that is being made in here is that – and this is mostly because it’s worth discussing what these words mean because sometimes words we use in legislation aren’t super obvious to the public. Okay. This is section 15.1 in section 5:

The Director must, subject to the regulations, refuse to provide income support . . .

The use of the word “must” here is important.

. . . and benefits to an applicant or recipient under Part 2, Division 1 when notified that

- (a) a warrant for the arrest of the applicant or recipient has been issued in respect of a prescribed offence, and
- (b) the warrant has not been executed.

Warrant sounds serious, but I think it’s worth discussing because when we were in government, I had a bill that made changes to warrants because at the time – if you get a ticket for riding the C-Train without paying your fare, for your dog pooping in the wrong

place, for having your dog off a leash in the wrong area, and you don’t pay that ticket, a warrant issues. Those are things that are included in warrant when the government uses the word “warrant” here.

Now, the changes we made in government – so it used to be the case that if you had such a warrant and you came to the attention of police – I mean, they don’t generally go out looking for you on these sorts of warrants, but it was essentially what’s called a pay-or-stay ticket. Either you had to come up with the money for the fine immediately or you were jailed, basically like a debtors’ prison. You owed because you didn’t pay your C-Train, and you were then put in jail. They had sort of like – there’s a table that cross-references how many days in default you get based on the size of the fine.

This was obviously problematic. It bogged up the system significantly. It put people in jail who didn’t need to be there. There was an incredibly tragic case of someone going to jail and dying as a result of the actions of their cellmate, not of the state, who really ought not to have been there in the first place. This was incredibly serious. In fact, law enforcement was in favour of this. They stood with me, the Edmonton Police Service, when this bill was introduced. This wasn’t, like, letting people get away with things; it was just not putting people in jail because they didn’t pay for their C-Train ticket. That was the change we made.

The change this government is making is that warrants – and I know what they’re going to say. They’re going to say: a prescribed offence; don’t worry; we’ll prescribe only certain things. But, I mean, this is the problem with a government that has lost the trust of the public this fundamentally. Why would we trust them? Why would we trust them to do that? That is incredibly problematic.

I think it’s just worth highlighting what a warrant in this instance actually is, because what they’re saying is essentially that if you have a warrant, you know, you’ll be denied benefits. And those benefits, like, they don’t just – sure, they go to the individual, but that individual may use them to pay for shelter or buy food for their children. Those are important things. These are people that have not been convicted and are potentially dealing with an extremely low-level offence, again, because that’s what “warrant” means in this instance. So I think it’s incredibly problematic.

I would love to hear an explanation from the government as to why this is necessary, because I would be surprised to discover that this will have an overall effect on public safety. Like, I would be really surprised to discover that the government has solid evidence that this is going to have an impact on public safety, because it seems pretty counterintuitive.

Okay. So those are the amendments to the employment benefits, public transit. Oh, yes. The Trespass to Premises Act. That’s also potentially problematic. I would love to hear from the government. Essentially, they’re adding that the act binds the government of Canada, so government of Canada employees in the execution of their official duty. The minister has admitted that this has never actually happened here in the province of Alberta, and this has the real potential to impair, like, a census taker or something like that. So I think that that is incredibly problematic, and I would love to hear what the government has considered, what consultation they’ve done, what research they’ve done.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak at second reading to Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I’d like to echo some of the points that my colleague just made, and she made some excellent points around

the last topic that she was talking about. One of the last ones was around income support, and I'll sort of circle to those.

You know, it's not surprising that this government, this UCP government, sort of started in 2019 with a huge piece of legislation that amended a number of other pieces of legislation, and in it they hid, I think, a lot of changes or cuts, that, well, they would describe as not cuts but changes, that actually went on to make life extremely difficult for Albertans over the next few years.

Sadly, just like their other red tape reduction – I mean, there are some things that have been changed, whether it's languages, updating, some really small changes to make things read better. You know, fixing some things is fine, but what they also put in are some damaging or some potentially damaging pieces, that my colleagues have talked about.

As you'll recall, Madam Speaker, in 2019 an omnibus bill, again, did all kinds of damage to income supports, so those will be the income support products. There are two different streams of income support. The first one is barriers for employment, and the second one is expected to work. What the UCP government did in 2019 was deindex both of those benefits. That caused over the next three and a half, almost four years those benefits to be worth less because they were not tied or coupled to inflation, so instead of getting that extra money every year, people were getting less.

3:50

Now, as if that wasn't bad enough, Madam Speaker, this government did not stop there when it comes to income support. They took it a little bit further. What they decided to do – there's a base, a core for income support. It doesn't really talk about it in this piece of legislation, but there's a core benefit for income support. There are also supplemental pieces. There are supplemental pieces to address things like medical transportation, unique child care, things like nutrition, people with special diets. There's also a benefit – it's actually one of the larger ones – for people that have, I would say, pretty severe disabilities but are in the process of applying for AISH. As you know, Madam Speaker, that is not an easy process, and it's not a quick process. There's actually that supplemental benefit for people sitting on income support.

But those have been systematically removed over this government's tenure. They started by deindexing the benefits. They continued by removing supplementals and making it – not only that; if there was a decision to remove something or claw something back, then, you know, an Albertan had the ability to appeal that decision. Then this UCP government went a little bit further and changed the rules around appeal. There are some things that appellants are not able to share with the panels anymore that they used to, that used to actually help and move things a little bit in their favour.

Just to give you a taste of some of the changes that have happened over the last almost four years, you know, when we saw this first change – and I just want to remind this Chamber that we're almost four years into this. We saw the cuts in 2019, and the song that we heard from the other side was: this isn't a cut; this isn't a cut; this isn't a cut. Well, we know it was a cut. I mean, that was just the line they were all using. It was a cut, and we saw their earning power or the amount they got from income support steadily decline, steadily go down. What we heard from this government was: it's not that onerous, not a big deal. But what we did see in the years between that decision and now are symptoms of what that decision caused.

Now, I admit we also had a pandemic in there, and there was certainly some impact because of the pandemic. But what we saw was just an explosion of food bank usage right across the province – just an explosion – so much so that for the first time a government really had to step in and provide some cash. Now, we can talk about

how that was distributed another day, but there was a requirement for government to do that because they just could not keep up with demand. Demand on food banks exploded right across the province.

We also know that the number of people without homes also exploded. I think I heard that in Edmonton that population just about doubled. Small communities that don't typically have large issues or big problems with people without homes, like St. Albert, are experiencing more problems. Right across the province this has happened. This is not a coincidence. We knew this would happen. When you cut people's income, poverty gets worse, gets deeper.

The reason I'm talking about all of these things is because I want to talk about the one piece in this legislation today that the red tape minister has thrown into this, you know, everything-but-the-kitchen-sink sort of bill, and this piece is to make some changes to the Income and Employment Supports Act. Now, what this does is add some requirements or the ability of the director to actually stop those benefits or just say no right off the bat. Now, the minister also stood up a little while ago and said: well, other jurisdictions have done it. Three, I think he said: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and another one. What he failed to mention: there are far more that chose not to do that or have not done that yet.

Now, the minister could have stood up and said: we're doing this along with these other provinces because it's based in research; what we found is that we did the research, we did the consultation, we did the collaboration with people that support others on income support or work in poverty reduction, and this is a great idea, and this is going to help Alberta, and this is going to make life better for Albertans. But that is not the case. I do believe that if this decision to include this in this piece of legislation was actually based on fact and data, that this would make life better for Albertans, we would have heard that, but we have not heard that. When we ask questions – “Well, what about this? What about if it's just for, say, a parking or a speeding ticket or whatever?” – what we hear is: well, it won't be; it'll be for serious charges. Well, it doesn't say that, does it? All we hear from this government is: oh, it'll be in regulations; trust us.

There is no trust for this government. We have seen year after year after year that this government has made changes behind closed doors, that we find out about later, particularly as it relates to community and social services and income support and AISH specifically. What's today? The 21st of March. Just today there was another change to the regulations that came out. It's like almost every day there are changes to regulations that make life more difficult for people that are on income support.

You know, it's pretty clear what the goal is here, to reduce the numbers, reduce the spending, when, in fact, as a government we should be looking at: yes, the goal should be getting people off income support, but you do it properly, and you do it safely. You do it through job creation. You do it through retraining. You do it through really good child care for people that need it. You do it by supporting people. For people that have issues with the justice system, you do that by supporting – you make sure that your legal aid system is well funded. You make sure that people have access to information and technology that they need to navigate a justice system. You don't just throw in a line and say: “The director may say no” or “The director may do this” and “Trust us; it won't be a problem because we'll fix it in regulations.” Again, Albertans have zero trust for this government. Zero.

Again, I know that some of my colleagues have asked these questions. I, too, am going to ask these very simple, straight-up questions. It is my sincere hope that there is somebody over there that has some information that can provide some clarity. This particular change, I think, if it's not done properly and if there isn't correct oversight, has the potential to actually do damage in

people's lives, but it also has the potential to cost the system enormous amounts of money. These are unintended consequences.

My first question is: who has been consulted? Specifically, has the Privacy Commissioner been consulted? We know that there will be some sharing of information based on what this piece of legislation proposes to do, so has that happened? Is it possible for the red tape minister, who proudly stands and supports this bill – then back it up with some proof. Back it up with some data. Table something from the Privacy Commissioner that gives an opinion: “You know what? This will be fine. This will support Albertans. Nothing to worry about here.” It's not a hard thing to do, so I would expect that's a bare minimum.

What research as well does the UCP have on the impact that withdrawing benefits will have on crime rates? I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I would hope that when a government proposes changes, significant changes – if you are withdrawing benefits or saying no to benefits for someone that's applying for income support, you need to know that you are impacting their lives. If they don't get access to that pitiful amount of money and it is – under \$900 is the core benefit. Nobody can live on that. Let's just be honest about that. If you say no to someone that is that desperate and perhaps has a child that they're trying to support because they have an outstanding warrant, because of this change made in this piece of legislation, you need to know that you are harming people. How is that positively going to impact crime rates? I mean, really? You are going to make desperate people even more desperate. How on earth is that a positive step forward? I just don't know. I have no idea how this government thinks this is a step in the right direction. Maybe they think they're going to come up with some magical regulations. I don't know what the answer is, but this isn't looking good.

An individual with a warrant that has not been convicted of a crime. Okay. Let's be clear about that. It's a warrant, not a conviction. Does this government understand that their proposed change will be penalizing individuals who may not actually be guilty? Let's say that there's a decision by the director or the designate of the director that decides, “You know what? No, we are not going to continue this person's income support benefits because there's a warrant out for this,” and then it turns out that that person is innocent down the road and, unfortunately, still needs income support and gets it. In the interim look at the harm that you've done.

I would think that a government focused on Albertans, like Alberta's NDP will be, would do a risk assessment, the bare minimum, to determine that the legislation that they want to enact will not harm people. To the best of their ability they should determine that this change will not harm people, and I don't believe that bare minimum has been done by this government.

4:00

I want to talk a little bit, actually, about what income support is, because I don't get the sense that all members in this place actually understand the group of people that we're dealing with here or that we're talking about. Let's be clear about what income support is. Income support is something available to people who are some of the most desperate people in this province. They have exhausted all other areas of income, they're not eligible for employment insurance, and they're not eligible for any other benefits. They are not working, so they have to go and apply for income support.

Now, there are two streams. There's barriers for employment, and there's expected to work. Now, barriers for employment, Madam Speaker, is a stream where you will find many, many people. The vast majority of the people that are sitting on there are people that have disabilities, that have chronic illnesses, that are chronically unemployed or underemployed. A lot of these folks

actually end up eventually going onto AISH because they just have that severe a disability or that severe a chronic illness. Now, that is a group. They live on the core benefit of under \$900 a month. I don't know how anybody survives on that.

The other stream is expected to work, which is a little bit different. This is a group that people do expect will work again except, for whatever reasons, there are big gaps and they're no longer eligible for employment insurance. There is this short-term assistance for people. Now, without this support, can you imagine the additional troubles that you start to introduce into people's lives? This bare minimum – small, tiny, little, minuscule – amount that people try to live on: it actually does help. Sometimes it helps people stay away from a food bank one time. Sometimes it helps them, you know, stay away from having to sleep rough for that night or stay in their car or couch surf. It's that little bit that keeps them away from that chronic edge.

If this government wants to introduce change that will say, “If there is a warrant, this person is no longer eligible” – well, again, to put all of that decision-making power into the hands of a director, I don't know, leaves me a little bit chilled, Madam Speaker, that behind closed doors there are going to be people making decisions based on we don't know what. We don't know what the warrants are for or what the criteria are that will be used about who gets kicked off and who doesn't. We don't know; nobody knows. Is it for, like, a traffic violation of some kind? We don't know, but we've just been told that it'll all be sorted out in the regulations. You know what? That is not good enough.

To be eligible for income support: again let me describe to you the people that are on this kind of benefit, because these are the things, right on the government's website, these are the eligibility pieces that must be met. You have to be unable to pay for your basic needs. That's pretty self-explanatory.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to join in debate on Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. As I rise, I'd like to thank my colleagues who have already started talking on so many important parts of this piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, for my remarks I'd really like to focus in on a piece of Bill 9 that I have had the opportunity to raise in this Legislature multiple times, and that is the inadequate implementation of supports for firefighters who fought in the Fort McMurray wildfire of 2016, also known as the Horse River wildfire. I'd like to explain why this type of coverage is so critically necessary as well as where I see Bill 9 failing to provide adequate supports to all who were on the ground firefighting across the incident of the Horse River wildfire.

I would like to say in second reading that I look forward to the Official Opposition putting forward an amendment to improve Bill 9 specifically in this area, as we have talked about in this Assembly, and it is my hope that the government will support this amendment and will work with the Official Opposition to make the necessary changes as we go forward.

Now, this is an issue that I want to give credit – there are a number of people who have advocated for improved coverage for the firefighters who were on the ground in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, in the city of Fort McMurray during the fire that started in May 2016, and I specially want to give credit to the Fort McMurray Firefighters Association, IAFF local 2494. There are members of the Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union who have made this a priority issue and have been lobbying to have this fixed and, of course, the APFFPA, the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters &

Paramedics Association, which represents many, many firefighters in our province who have been advocating for the recognition that when it comes to a catastrophic, traumatic event, which this wildfire was, we need to take into consideration the conditions on the ground and what those firefighters have experienced when we are looking at workers' compensation coverage.

Workers' compensation coverage needs to be there when someone is injured on the job or incurs sickness or occupational disease as a result of their work as an employee. And in this case, for firefighters, we know that cancer is the number one cause of firefighter line-of-duty deaths. It can happen where there's a specific traumatic injury at a site – someone falls from something or is crushed, that type of injury – but firefighters most often, because of the occupational exposures they have, develop cancer later in life.

Now, it's excellent to know that the health and safety procedures and decontamination procedures for firefighters have grown exponentially. There were times, decades ago, when having the dirtiest equipment was a point of pride for firefighters and a way to show, you know, the types of fires they had been to. But as science has evolved and as health and safety has evolved, obviously that is quite different today, where now there are protocols. When firefighters have been on the site of a fire, they will immediately go and decontaminate themselves and their equipment because we have a better understanding of the carcinogens and the toxins that will stick to firefighters' equipment. That, that need to decontaminate, that need to be aware of the health and safety risks and manage those risks, is incredibly important in this situation. Because of the catastrophic nature, firefighters were not able to do that.

I'd like to talk just a little bit about this wildfire, which is unique in Canada's history because, of course, we know that it forced the evacuation of 88,000 residents and was the largest single evacuation of residents in the history of Canada, leaving a trail of physical and emotional damage.

When this wildfire began, the members of the Fort McMurray Firefighters Association were the first to engage and the last to leave, and that meant being in a toxic environment in the area of Fort McMurray. Certainly, throughout the 60-plus days until the fire was deemed to be under control, the firefighters fought tirelessly, and they did so for a number of different reasons, including trying to save as many structures as possible, trying to preserve infrastructure, and then, of course, trying to protect the citizens from any injury. These firefighters were fighting against an inferno that began with the local firefighters in Fort McMurray, in many ways, and then they brought in assistance from many other locals and from all across Alberta and other areas. Departments from Red Deer and Calgary arrived within 24 hours to provide assistance because of the size of this. All of these firefighters were working together to try and fight the fires and stop the advancement through our urban areas.

Something that many people may not realize is that it wasn't until after the first six days that crews were able to be rotated off shift for the first time. We're talking about firefighters who were working almost to exhaustion, very little rest, and they had limited to no ability to decontaminate or manage personal hygiene. At times there was no access to breathing filters or to wear self-contained breathing apparatuses, SCBA. It just wasn't feasible. The facilities that are normally used to refill SCBAs were within the contaminated areas of toxic air, so it made their breathing apparatus ineffective or refilling them impossible.

4:10

What do we know about that toxic air full of cancer-causing agents? We know that 2,500 structures were completely incinerated

or partially destroyed; 80 per cent of the structures in the city were spared, fortunately, but so much was thrown up into the air, creating toxins and creating an opportunity for those firefighters on the ground to be exposed. That air contaminated members' skin, clothing, and lungs and without the ability to clean themselves for almost a week. This is completely against the normal practice for a firefighter, that would visit the scene of a regular fire and be able to then do the decontamination that they would need to do.

In Bill 9 there is a recognition of the catastrophic, traumatic event that occurred and the need to support the firefighters who were on the ground because, as the current president of the APFFPA has said, they were exposed to a career's worth of toxins within a single week in many cases. Making sure that the occupational disease, the cancers that potentially result from that exposure, is seamlessly covered through the WCB should be a priority, and I think it's one that all members of this House, supporting our firefighters – we should be able to agree on this. So I'm pleased to see the government bring this forward in Bill 9. I would note that they took four years to do that, but I will say that it is a good thing, and I am glad it is there.

Unfortunately, Bill 9 and the portions that come into effect when it comes to the WCB: that only turns on when the bill is proclaimed, when the bill is passed. What that leaves out is that there are firefighters we know about – and there may be more that we do not know about – who have been diagnosed with occupational disease relating to the Fort McMurray wildfire in the prior seven years. There is already one known case, that we've talked about in this House, of a firefighter who has passed, whose family has been fighting with the WCB for coverage. There's another firefighter story that I have heard where they've had to go through an appeals process, and I find it completely inadequate that the minister responsible for this area, responsible for occupational health and safety and for WCB, is suggesting that a fairness review process is the right answer. I think that a change to make clear that anyone, any of those firefighters, who has been diagnosed with occupational disease or these cancers should receive the coverage for their illness automatically – it can be resolved with a simple amendment.

Now, Madam Speaker, I've already sent that amendment through to the government and through to the minister in the hopes of gaining a common understanding of how we can work together to amend this and to make it very, very clear that in the case of this one catastrophic event, retroactive WCB coverage just makes sense. I do understand that it is not Alberta's workers' compensation system's normal practice to do retroactive coverage, but to be very clear, that is a choice, and in this case we are talking about a very specific incident with specific health impacts on a narrow group of individuals. We've seen in Ontario that other worker compensation systems do provide retroactive coverage, in some cases for 60 years, and in that case they're not talking about firefighters who were at a particular event; they were talking about all firefighters in their entirety. Here we are asking for retroactive coverage for the firefighters who were on the ground during this very specific event, when they were not able to properly decontaminate, when we know they are at elevated risk of occupational disease, specifically cancers.

I think the amendment we've put forward does make sense, and the government's arguments – that if somebody doesn't fall within the correct window, they will go through a fairness process and the right thing will eventually happen, and if it doesn't, someone can call the minister's office – I find completely unacceptable and inadequate. There may be others who are out there who have not even submitted a WCB claim because they know they don't meet the latency periods that are required. We cannot say that this is only one person. It's wishful thinking. I hope – I hope – that there are

not others out there, but it's possible they are, and why not have this be entirely clear?

Now, let me talk about a second way that this Bill 9 portion speaking to firefighters is inadequate, but I won't be able to do an amendment, Madam Speaker, because of the way the bill is drafted. When we talk about the toxins and what was in the air and damage to lungs, the other challenge that we have is that respiratory illness is not being considered; only cancers at this point. We already have studies done at the University of Alberta, studying I believe 1,200 first responders who were on the ground, showing significant lung damage, asthma, and other respiratory illness as a result of being on the ground in Fort McMurray. So I would urge this government, either through amendments to Bill 9 that they may be able to do or through future action, to include not just cancers, not just that occupational disease, but to consider the impact of respiratory illness when it comes to supporting those who were on the ground.

Now, this is not a unique idea. After 9/11 the Zadroga act was passed to recognize that with the amount of debris and toxins that were thrown into the air in that catastrophic event, there was a health impact for people who were on the ground, for first responders. So there's certainly precedent in other jurisdictions that we can look to when considering making that change.

The final way that Bill 9 is inadequate but one in which I think that the government has signalled that they are planning action – and I hope that they do – is the fact that the firefighters' primary site cancer regulation has not been updated since 2018, when I as minister of labour last updated it. Now I will tell you . . .

Ms Hoffman: Best minister of labour so far.

Ms Gray: I appreciate the kind words from colleagues.

Updating that primary site cancer regulation in 2018, we were able to make Alberta the absolute best place in Canada for supporting our firefighters. We covered the most up-to-date science, the highest number of cancers, and we updated our latency periods based on the latest science.

Now, what's happened since 2018, because we are now at 2023: a number of other provinces have now updated their regulations based on new scientific information, and Alberta is no longer providing the most comprehensive list. The impact of that in relation to Bill 9 is, of course, that Bill 9 is providing presumptive coverage for the cancers that are listed in the firefighter primary site cancer regulation, but our primary site cancer regulation does not include a number of types of cancers that the firefighters have been lobbying should be included.

I would ask and urge the government to update that regulation. That is not something that needs to come through the Legislature, which is quite fortunate. That's something that can be done through regulation without coming into this House, but we need to do that as well, because of the interaction between Bill 9 and the coverage for Fort McMurray, and then making sure that firefighters are covered for all different types.

As an example, Manitoba has added pancreatic, thyroid, and penile cancers. Yukon has added thyroid and pancreatic . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt. There's something wrong with the buzzer. Your time is up.

Are there other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, in second, and I have to say that I want to continue on a little bit of the thread from the best labour minister in Alberta

history talking about the expansion of presumptive coverage for a number of different types of cancer for firefighters.

One that we worked on together, in preparing a bit of a business case, is that there were many hormone-based cancers that were seen as having a linkage to the workplace for men, that there were lots of studies that showed that men who worked as firefighters were at an increased likelihood of getting different types of hormone-based cancers because of workplace conditions.

But there wasn't this deep, long history of similar studies based on women. The biggest reason, when firefighters came to meet with us, was because there aren't many women who work as firefighters, but if we use the same logic to project that the male hormone-based cancers have workplace conditions that lead to their outcomes, we should be able to draw those similar types of conclusions for women. Saying, "Well, we need to wait until we have all of the scientific evidence to be able to back up that there's a definitive link." They said, "You will not get it, because we aren't attracting enough women to the profession right now." One of the ways we could help attract more women to the profession is if we said that the same presumptive coverage for those hormone-based cancers applied for women as they do for men, and I'm really honoured that I got to support the minister of labour in that work and that she carried that through to fruition.

4:20

I hear the same arguments being made by the minister of – I don't know the title; the guy who's supposed to be in charge of labour protections for the people of Alberta. There isn't a current minister of labour. Northern development, I think, is the minister who is standing in in that role when it comes to this file.

Mr. Hanson: Jobs, Economy and Northern Development.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. Jobs, Economy and Northern Development, formerly known as the labour ministry, at least in part. Thank you very much, hon. member.

The same argument is being given around why they aren't going to backdate presumptive coverage for firefighters who had forms of cancer and have suffered the worst fate that anyone can imagine when it comes to workplace-related deaths, getting an illness that's caused by your workplace. Having the current minister stand in this place day after day after day saying that they need to go through a fairness process to ensure that they're eligible I think is a real disservice and disrespect to everyone who works as a firefighter but all of us who stood back and watched in admiration as well when people were putting their lives on the line to help evacuate the city of Fort McMurray and the surrounding region to make sure that people got out safely, that as many homes and essential services were protected as possible.

I have to say that being the Minister of Health at that time and getting the daily briefings about the risk management and where we were at, when I heard that there were fire trucks surrounding the hospital, I was deeply concerned. It was chief fire officials who said: knowing that there are fire trucks in front of the hospital is a very good sign because it means we think we can save it; it means that we're fighting to save it. So even though it was getting that close, they put their resources, their lives on the line to fight and protect the hospital, the major regional hospital for the northeast part of the north zone, in such a difficult time.

And now they're at the point where many of them have required health care services because of the outcomes that they faced, being exposed to so many chemicals over such a condensed period of time, trying to combat that fire. I think we owe it to them to bring forward legislation that would actually improve it. As the former

minister, hopefully once again future minister, has said, because of the way that the government chose to draft this and provide changes, the ability to amend that section isn't available to us in this version. I think that's an incredible disservice to firefighters and to Albertans who would like to be able to show our support generally to people who put their lives on the line every day.

I know that all of us are thinking about first responders, I think more over the last week than maybe we did a few months ago or years ago, given other very close tragedies that first responders have faced over the last several days in the province of Alberta.

I'm going to pivot for a few moments to – because this is titled, you know, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, and there's been a whole ministry created to oversee red tape. The ministry actually, for those – since we're in the process of debating the budget as a separate piece to this legislation but relevant to this. This is the ministry, red tape reduction is the ministry, that's going to see the third-most increases to staffing levels in the government of Alberta should the government's proposed budget pass in this House. It surprised me that we would see such an increase to the bureaucracy and such an increase to the number of people working in a department when the whole ministry was created to try to streamline and reduce government, essentially. So that's an interesting piece.

I have tremendous respect for people who do serve in the public service and hope that some of that will be used to address the significant delays that we're seeing in the land titles offices, but I was a bit surprised by the significant staffing increase given that this ministry typically tries to tout that it's about streamlining and creating more efficiencies.

Another area where we've seen, actually, a significant increase in red tape – and I imagine some of us will be meeting Catholic school trustees later this evening – is the tremendous increased accountability and reporting tied to many grant items from the province of Alberta. There's always been regular accounting of how many students come to school, what your class sizes are. Those are things that we were used to reporting and did for years. The government has changed the – they no longer publish class size data, and they don't even have updated numbers on how many students are going to school this current school year on their website. The last year numbers are there, and it still says "projections." We're more than halfway through this school year, but that isn't important information for the current government to share as it relates to education. But they, I will say, have added a tremendous amount of red tape, especially at the beginning of the year, to be able to get the smallest of grants to be able to support students, particularly when they're behind in their learning.

Let me talk a little bit about the early-year assessments that happen, particularly in division 1, kindergarten to grade 3. Kindergarten I think is assessed in January, but in September we start with early-year pullouts. And much of September teachers in grades 1, 2, and 3 spend pulling kids out of the class and doing early assessments with them as opposed to having that time to be able to build relationships and foster trust and excitement as a large school community. In most of those schools they do that without any additional funding to cover substitute teachers. Often, you know, in the single site administrator school somebody will be floating in and out of the classroom, or maybe there will be an educational assistant who's covering for a few minutes while people are being pulled out to do these assessments.

I can also say, having trained as a teacher, having parents who taught, and having worked with teachers most of my professional life, that teachers know who's behind after a couple of months in the classroom. They know, from working with students and building

those relationships and finding ways to do authentic assessment, where everyone's at and how they can support them.

There's been a tremendous amount of red tape added by Alberta Education under the UCP when it comes to education funding, and that might be one of the reasons why the Education budget was underspent by a billion dollars when you just look at the last two fiscal years. Again, here we are considering an Education budget. Just looking at the last two fiscal years, Alberta Education underspent, the UCP underspent, on Alberta classrooms by a billion dollars of what we in this Assembly had approved them to spend.

Money that we said should be focused and spent on education in this current year wasn't spent, whether it was through the department or whether through local school authorities. Many have said that part of that is the frustration as it relates to the red tape to actually be able to spend grants that the government has applied, that sometimes it isn't even worth the many, many hours you have to put in filling out paperwork and applying for grants to be able to access these resources. A lot of money got left on the table because so much red tape was added by the UCP when it comes to supporting schools with education dollars.

It's interesting. I think a lot of the time we'll hear talking points from folks around, you know, the best decisions being made closest to the child and the money should follow the children, but there have been so many layers of red tape and so many gates put in the way between good ideas, us making decisions in this place around supporting education funding and the barriers to that funding actually being passed on to the child, what would appear very intentionally by the minister in terms of the billion dollars that hasn't been spent over the last two years, when we in this Assembly have made the decision to allocate that money.

So it is very frustrating, and I imagine many of us will hear more about that tonight as we meet with ACSTA trustees, when we talk to them about what their biggest frustrations are and what their biggest hopes are. Red tape is definitely something that has come up many times in many meetings with trustees from a variety of school authorities.

It is of concern, and I think that we would have had an opportunity in this place to consider ways that we can streamline efficiency rather than having pieces be backlogged and held up for an attempt to have, you know, more press releases talking about surpluses when those surpluses certainly should have been spent on supporting education in classrooms for children in the year that we approved them.

Generally I've touched on the firefighter piece. I've touched on what I would have liked to have seen in terms of reducing red tape and streamlining services for children. I will say that generally I think some of the areas within this bill are just fine. The piece around agriculture as it relates to tying the origins of bees to where they are, and where they are in Alberta to the country of origin: beekeepers tell us that this isn't problematic. I'll trust them and say that these types of changes, that are very surface or superfluous for somebody who isn't an expert in the area, seem like worthwhile initiatives.

4:30

I think that this bill, again, could have been used to address the most pressing issues that most Alberta families are raising with me and, I'm sure, many of us. When we're travelling the province and connecting with folks in preparation for the next election, they want to talk about affordability. It doesn't appear that there is anything that's being done in this bill to make life more affordable for Albertans, who are facing some of the biggest increases to regular things like utilities and the cost of living as it relates to being able to put food on their family's table.

There is nothing in this bill that's addressed affordability, nothing in this bill that's going to make health care services better or more accessible for the people of the province, and nothing in this bill that's actually going to address the urgent need to have a resilient economy for all Albertans.

With that, I guess I will reluctantly support this bill. I wish that it was focused on things that are more aligned with the priorities of everyday families, but I don't think that pieces in it that are problematic are going to move us backwards, so I guess that in this place some days that's a win.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul on behalf of the minister – or the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I appreciate members in this House, colleagues, that are always prepared to rise and pinch-hit where required.

Madam Speaker, this bill contains a number of legislative amendments which, if passed, would implement key policies included in Budget 2023. Bill 10 would implement a new fiscal framework for our province. Of all the initiatives in Budget '23 – and there were many – certainly this new fiscal framework, I believe, will be very important to fiscal and financial stability in this province, hopefully for years, even decades, to come. I believe everybody in this House would recognize that fiscal sustainability is necessary if we're going to continue to deliver a world-class education system, a world-class health care system, and the other deliverables that Albertans expect.

This framework would require annual balanced budgets with limitations on in-year and year-over-year increases in expenses. Now, Madam Speaker, there are going to be exceptions, necessary exceptions, to these fiscal rules. We have an economy that's diversifying at significant rates, but it's still an economy that's in a significant way dependent on our resource-based sectors. Our fiscal rules have to accommodate the income fluctuation that we see from time to time in this economy.

Madam Speaker, this fiscal framework would also set policies for the allocation of surplus cash, with at least half of any surplus going towards debt repayment. I believe that right now a focus for a surplus should be debt repayment as well as additional deposits into our heritage savings trust fund. This fiscal framework does create what we will call an Alberta fund, which is really a holding account for surplus funds, funds not used for the repayment of debt in a year where a surplus is achieved.

Funds held in this account can only be used for three things. They can be held for future debt repayment, they can be held for future contributions into the heritage savings trust fund, or they can be held to fund one-time initiatives but initiatives subject to an appropriations bill, initiatives subject to the budget process, and, Madam Speaker, initiatives subject to the other fiscal rules. This Alberta fund will in fact provide significant additional structure for the use of funds.

Madam Speaker, another initiative in Bill 10 will be legislation that will in fact allow the heritage savings trust fund to retain all of its income. I think that, as most members in this House know, right now any income from the heritage savings trust fund not required

to inflation-proof the fund automatically gets transferred to the general revenue fund. Well, we're changing that in Bill 10. If the members of this House in sufficient numbers support Bill 10 and it passes, then the earnings from the heritage savings trust fund will categorically stay in the heritage savings trust fund. Again, that's good news for Albertans today but especially good news for Albertans in the future.

Madam Speaker, I've made this point before, but it bears repeating. If we as a province, if we as Albertans from day one had retained all of the earnings in the heritage savings trust fund without any additional deposits other than those that were made, we would not have an \$18 billion fund today. We would have a fund approaching \$300 billion. It shows the significant value of earnings compounding on themselves and how quickly we could grow a fund. As a lifelong Albertan I regret that we did not start this earlier, but I'm so pleased to join my colleagues on this side of the House to begin this savings practice today. A \$300 billion fund would generate close to \$20 billion in income per year. That would be absolutely incredible for the future of the province.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of other important pieces in Bill 10, including ensuring that the tax changes regarding the tax credit with respect to charitable giving are made retroactive to January 1, 2023. I want to once again thank my colleague the MLA for Peace River for introducing this change as a private member's bill, effectively increasing the value of a charitable tax credit from 15 per cent to 60 per cent in terms of the Alberta portion. When you combine it with the federal portion, it's a full 75 per cent tax credit on donations up to the first \$200 for every Albertan. Albertans are generous. Albertans support charities and nonprofit organizations in their communities. They give back. This will encourage that generosity, and I'm excited to include this piece in the bill.

Madam Speaker, another important initiative in Bill 10 is to ensure that postsecondary students in this province have predictable tuition fees in the future. In Bill 10 we are limiting tuition fee increases to 2 per cent at most public postsecondary institutions, starting in '24-25.

Madam Speaker, to further improve our competitiveness in this province, included in this bill is the new agriprocessing tax credit. This tax credit will provide a 12 per cent nonrefundable corporate tax credit to corporations who take on a project with a cap ex of a million dollars or greater and a project that effectively uses as its feedstock agriculturally produced goods. We've gone to great lengths to ensure that Alberta has the most competitive business environment possible. That's an ongoing effort. Introducing this additional nonrefundable corporate tax credit is part of that effort in ensuring that our world-class agriculture industry in this province remains competitive globally, remains a force as we not only generate economic opportunity for Alberta farmers and ranchers and every Albertan across the province but, in fact, make good on what is both our opportunity and deep responsibility to provide food to a growing and needy world.

4:40

Madam Speaker, this bill also includes changes that will provide dental, drug, vision, and other supplemental health benefits for children adopted in the province. Alberta will be the only province in Canada to do so. It also includes amendments which will increase the adoption expenses tax credit and off-set a portion of the cost of adoptions to help Albertans who want to start or grow their families through adoption.

Madam Speaker, Bill 10 also includes proposed amendments to the Local Government Fiscal Framework Act that will tie future municipal funding levels to changes in provincial revenues, and Bill 10 will also update that revenue index factor. Starting in budget '25-

26, percentage changes in municipal funding levels would be equal to percentage changes in provincial revenues from three years prior, again allowing municipalities to plan more effectively for the future. Of everything I hear from municipalities, they want certainty and predictability in their funding.

Madam Speaker, Bill 10 provides important legislative changes to implement Budget 2023, a budget that focuses on strengthening our health care system, a budget that ensures adequate funding for enrolment growth in our education system but, more than that, ensures additional funding to deal with complexity in classrooms.

Madam Speaker, Bill 10 will support Budget '23, which is a budget that improves public safety, with an increase in our public safety ministry budget of 13 per cent. This budget also further supports our justice system by increasing our funding to the Justice ministry by 10 per cent.

Madam Speaker, we together as Albertans have made great progress in the last four years. We've made great progress in this economy, taking an economy that was stagnant and positioning it for competitiveness, investment attraction, growth, diversification, to the point where this province now is leading the nation in economic growth. That is Alberta's rightful place.

We've also taken a province that was really stuck in a structural deficit, spending far more than comparator provinces on a per capita basis but not getting better results, and over four years we've worked thoughtfully, carefully, surgically, compassionately to bring our spending in line with comparator provinces, Madam Speaker. This puts Alberta on a sustainable fiscal trajectory, which is good news for future generations.

Madam Speaker, with that, I would call on all members of this House to support Bill 10.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and – well, “pleased” is maybe not the right word. I'm something to rise and speak to Bill 10.

Ms Hoffman: Respond.

Ms Ganley: Respond. I'm pleased to be able to respond to what we've just heard.

I think that there are a lot of potentially problematic things in this bill, but I think that by far the most problematic – I mean, it's up there in terms of problematic things we've seen come before this House at all – is the creation of a \$1.4 billion slush fund in the two months immediately prior to an election. I feel like it's difficult to state the revulsion that I feel and that I think most of the people of Alberta . . . [interjections]

Mr. Toews: It's a structured fund.

Ms Ganley: A structured slush fund. Well, you can call it whatever you like. A rose by any other name.

I think the challenge here is that it's something that generates, I think, revulsion, the idea of spending government funds to achieve political ends, which is exactly what this creates. It creates a fund.

Now, admittedly, it's not strictly untrue to say that it can be spent on three things. It's just that one of those things is a one-time initiative, which could pretty much mean anything. If you say that this can be spent on three things – they are debt repayment, savings, and anything else – it's technically not untrue, but it's not really true either. So I think the problem here is that the government is giving itself the power to, essentially, purchase votes in advance of an election, and I think it's problematic. I do, however, think,

Madam Speaker, that fortunately for us, the Alberta public will see through it. I think that people will see this for exactly what it is. It's a slush fund. It's trying to buy people off with their own money.

I want to respond as well, because I happen to be the first speaker, to a couple of things that the minister had to say. Now, one of them was this talk of how the deficit went away because of fiscal responsibility. Just let me start by saying that that is just wildly incorrect on the facts before us. The deficit went away because the price of oil went up and revenues into government coffers went up. That's what happened. [interjection]

Honestly, this government has wasted massive amounts of money. Let us start with the \$1.3 billion they gambled on Trump's re-election after, Madam Speaker, it was clear in the polls that he wasn't going to win. It was literally like: “Oh, there's less than 50 per cent success. There's less than a 50 per cent, significantly less than a 50 per cent, chance of success, so let's put up \$1.3 billion that we're most likely going to lose.” I think that's extremely problematic behaviour.

You know, from a government that calls spending to ensure that AISH recipients can afford food fiscal management and waste – apparently food for people who are disabled, for children, is a waste of money, but gambling \$1.3 billion: well, that's just wise fiscal management according to these people. I think when you see fiscal management that wise, in quotes, you should really start to wonder every time those folks use those terms, because they clearly aren't reflective of reality. So I think that's the first big point there, that the price of oil coming up and balancing the budget for you is not hard work and fiscal responsibility. It's luck, and that's what this government had, and they certainly have not, in my view, used it wisely.

I think it's also worth talking about some of the spending projects that this government has under consideration. There is the hundreds of millions of dollars to repaint police cars for the RCMP. Well, I guess they wouldn't be the RCMP anymore; they would be the provincial police force. And quite apart from the ridiculous cost – and there are hundreds of millions in one-time costs; there are hundreds of millions in ongoing costs – even by the government's own report, by their own admission, quite apart from this sort of massive waste of money, is the fact that they could spend all this money and it might still not work.

We saw this attempt to transition away from the RCMP happen just recently, not for the whole province of B.C. but for one area, and they had to abandon it. The project had to be abandoned because they literally could not get the officers to fill the positions. They were offering people, you know, \$20,000 bonuses to move over and sign on, and they couldn't get it to work. Alberta is a much bigger area, so it's going to be the problem magnified, and it's been the case for quite a while that it is difficult to hire and retain qualified police officers, because you can't just get anyone. They have to be able to operate in certain conditions. The skills required are high. They need to be able to sort of psychologically deal with a number of things, and you can't just get anybody into those positions.

4:50

We've kind of seen over time that it's become more and more difficult to hire to those positions. It's not entirely clear why that is. I mean, it could be the complexity of what modern police officers have to deal with. It's challenging. People may be looking at that and just making a different choice. But the point is that it is. We know it's difficult sometimes to fill positions like that, so the idea that the government could just sort of – in fact, when we were in government, we had challenges getting enough even RCMP officers into the province to, like, fill the number of positions that

we had because, you know, of the difficulty retaining and attracting. Yeah. It's a massive waste of money. It's a terrible idea.

The other one would be the move away from the Canada pension plan and the move to create our own revenue collection agency. In fact, we had been estimating that this would be costly and ridiculous and require the hiring of a whole bunch of civil servants. In budget estimates, believe it or not, it turns out that it was an underestimate, according to the minister, so that's highly problematic. Again we're talking about millions of dollars.

CPP: you know, we're talking about a fund that'll be smaller, that won't be able to necessarily generate the same kind of income and that's uncertain. This government, who has a history of not spending other people's money well – see the earlier gambling of \$1.3 billion – takes that CPP, and then people don't know if it's going to be there for them. That's not government money. That's not – it's people's money. People have paid into the CPP. It is their retirement savings. They are entitled to some sort of say over how it is spent, and I think that they certainly don't want the folks over there, the UCP, to get a hold of that, with good reason, because they have a long history of making bad decisions with other people's money. Those are a few of the reasons that I would challenge those statements.

Another big one I want to challenge is that, you know, the minister has mentioned several times, including in the remarks he just made, about this increase in public safety. Now, leaving aside for a moment the problem with switching away from the RCMP and potentially having insufficient police officers in the province, yeah, they are investing in the budget for public safety. You know, anyone who's studied this issue – and pretty much every police service in the province, at least at the time when I was still in, were all onboard with one principle, that the best dollar you can spend on public safety is a dollar which is invested in affordable housing. Affordable housing increases public safety in a way that nothing else does. This is quite consistent. In fact, we were – at meetings of chiefs of police this was stated almost universally. I suspect that if you were to go and ask – if a reporter were to ask right now: what's the best investment? Affordable housing. They see it every day.

This government, I mean, quite apart from the bill they had which changed the definition of affordable housing so they could deem anything to be affordable housing, putting aside that little obfuscation there in an attempt to just, like, point at things and call them affordable housing and be like, "Look, we increased affordable housing," is just ridiculous. This government has consistently cut affordable housing. They have consistently underinvested in affordable housing. They have in large part not, well, created, contributed. It's hard to say. They have contributed. They have contributed significantly to the safety problems we see in our downtowns today, and they have made those contributions by withdrawing funding for affordable housing just as, you know, we moved into several crises: affordability crisis, COVID, a number of things that made life just that much more challenging for everyone, especially people who were marginally housed or barely able to afford things.

This government chose at that moment to stop, basically, entirely investing in affordable housing. They did, however, pass an act to allow them to deem things to be affordable housing, which is, of course, of no actual, practical help to anyone, but I guess it did allow them to sort of do a dance and pretend they had done something.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was the not getting better results. The talk of: we invest too much in the people of Alberta. You know, we have seen in health care the result of this particular UCP talking point. Now, first off, I think it's clear – and it's clear in the literature, it's clear from a number of people who study how we study things – that this statement is entirely dependent on which

results you look at, and the UCP and their sort of folks around them just love to cherry-pick statistics. They love to cherry-pick the one statistic and then be able to say: well, we spend more, and we don't get better.

And then they attacked doctors, they cut health care, they cut education, and lo and behold, the health care system got much, much worse. And now they stand up and say: well, you know, it's not really that much worse than other places in Canada. Well, it used to be much better than other places in Canada. We used to have the best health care here in Alberta. These folks with their rhetoric about it not being better have brought us down.

Okay; yeah, maybe it is the case that tens of thousands of people in other provinces can't get access to a family doctor, maybe it is the case that people are terrified because they can't get an ambulance and because they're lined up with their sick children outside the ER. Maybe that is the case in other jurisdictions, but – you know what? – it didn't have to be the case here.

And it is only the case here because those folks, the UCP, engaged in a relentless campaign, a relentless campaign of attacking doctors, of threatening to fire nurses when the pandemic ended, of attempting to decrease the pay of respiratory therapists and adjunct health professionals across the system, and engaged in a war of misinformation against those doctors, when they attempted to defend themselves, until they drove them out of the province.

That's not responsibility. That's not a responsible way to bring down the – responsibility would be not giving \$20 billion away to profitable oil corporations to clean up the messes they already have the legal responsibility for. That would not be responsibility. Driving doctors out of the province, relentlessly attacking health care until it was far worse, until you create problems: that's not responsibility. That's making Albertans pay the cost of their poor decisions.

When we talk about this \$20 billion that they plan to give away to companies to clean up liabilities that they already have taken responsibility for, that's almost the entire health care budget. That's almost the entire health care budget. So to turn around and say, "Look, we strangled health care until your child can't get into the hospital, but we're going to spend the same amount again to achieve absolutely nothing" and call that fiscally responsible is absolutely absurd.

And now this government, who has made irresponsible choices, who has driven our health care system into the ground, who will cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars in correctional centres because of what they did with the Education budget, because they have starved it, because they refused to invest in children with learning needs when they were five years old, where they could've invested \$20,000 to save us millions in justice costs in the future – they have refused to do any of that.

That will continue to be a problem for generations into the future. The actions of this government will resonate. They will resonate throughout time, and those cuts, the cuts to children with special needs, that cut them off from their right to an education, will cost 20, 30, maybe more times into the future in justice system costs, in health care costs, in costs to support these people.

5:00

So, no, it is not wise fiscal management to punish those with disabilities. It is not wise fiscal management to destroy a functioning health care system. It is not wise fiscal management to gamble away money on a foreign election. None of this is wise fiscal management, and it continues to this day.

They want \$1.4 billion as a slush fund to try to obfuscate, to try to buy back the people that they have lost by offering \$20 billion to profitable corporations to clean up their own messes while they let the people of this province suffer. Honestly, at this point, having sat

here and watched this government for nearly four years, I think I can say, Madam Speaker, that the point is the suffering. It isn't the fiscal responsibility, it isn't the savings in the budget; it is the pain that they cause.

Madam Speaker, I really think that this evidence can lead us only to one conclusion, that this UCP government is a government that thinks that poverty is a moral failing, and it is incredibly problematic. It shows in every action. It shows in everything they do. To hear the minister comment on how these punishing decisions, that have hurt the people of this province, that have let them down in a time of crisis while this government hands out and gambles with billions of people's dollars – it's flabbergasting. It really, really is.

I think, with that, I will say that, you know, I think – I believe in the democratic process, and I believe that people will see through this \$1.4 billion slush fund. I believe that people will see through the UCP. I believe that the attempts to push off wildly unpopular programs like the \$20 billion handout, like the creation of their own police force, like withdrawing from CPP, like creating a bureaucracy of tax collectors so everyone can file their taxes twice here in Alberta – I think that pushing those things off till after the election: people see through it. I think that people deserve better, and I think that very, very soon, Madam Speaker, people are going to be able to choose better, and I believe that they will.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to provide my support for Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. First of all, I express my appreciation to the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance for this significant bill, which will implement measures from Budget 2023 to help build fiscal stability, attract investment, support children and families, cut red tape, improve provincial funding mechanisms, and make life more affordable for students. Bill 10 helps secure Alberta's future by addressing some of the most urgent needs the government heard from families, students, and municipalities throughout the province.

Madam Speaker, fiscal responsibility matters. Bill 10 includes amendments that would legislate a fiscal framework to secure Alberta's future. This fiscal framework would require all future Alberta governments to balance their annual budgets with certain expectations and use any surpluses to, first, pay down the debt and save for the future before investing in one-time initiatives.

What is the importance of balancing the budget? This question, Madam Speaker, never crossed the thoughts of the previous government. Balancing the budget would mean a lot to Albertans as it would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and eventually pay the debt. It would remove the burden on future generations to pay a debt that they did not incur.

Bill 10 aims to do that, Madam Speaker. It will require the government to use 50 per cent of surplus cash to pay down the debt maturing in that fiscal year. The rest will be deposited into the federal fund to give the government time to determine how to responsibly use it. It also includes provisions to provide transparency to Albertans by ensuring the government will provide detailed reports on the use of funds from the Alberta fund. Money from the Alberta fund can only be used for three purposes: to pay down debt, to invest in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, or for one-time initiatives that do not permanently increase government spending.

Bill 10, as well, carries amendments to streamline the transfer of money from the general revenue fund to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Currently legislation requires a portion of the Alberta heritage fund's net income to be kept in the fund to protect

against inflation. Any investment income not used for the inflation-proofing of the heritage fund must be transferred to the general revenue fund. Bill 10 will allow the heritage fund to retain all of its net income. Should all the income have been kept with the fund, we would be seeing close to \$300 billion in the trust fund, Madam Speaker.

This bill will also amend the Personal Income Tax Act to enable changes to the charitable tax credit rate starting this year. Last year the hon. Member for Peace River tabled a private member's bill, which this Assembly passed, to change the provincial tax credit rate for the first \$200 of donations from 10 per cent to 60 per cent. I applaud the member for taking the initiative to increase the tax credit to generous Albertans. It would also encourage Albertans to donate more. Bill 10 would enable the new charitable tax credit rate to come into effect retroactively on January 1, 2023.

Another highlight of this bill, Madam Speaker, is that it reduces the red tape to businesses, saving them around \$7 million a year in mailing costs by giving businesses the ability to provide financial statements and other reporting documents with their shareholders electronically instead of by mail.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This bill also amends the Securities Act by reducing the ability of guilty companies to use the appeal process. Sometimes this process has been used to delay enforcement. These changes would free up both time and money so the Securities Commission can continue to do what they do the best, administering the province's security loans, foster a fair and efficient capital market in Alberta, and protect investors through investigation and prosecutions of violations to the securities laws, rules, and regulations.

Credit unions are an important part of Alberta's financial services sector. Credit unions are an integral part of our communities. They're co-operative organizations that provide similar products and services as other financial institutions. These are owned and operated by its members. When it makes a profit, it shares it back with its members in the form of annual returns. In 2021, Mr. Speaker, about \$84 million went back to credit union members. Bill 10 will provide them new opportunities to generate revenue and take advantage of more flexible regulations to support their operations. These changes will allow Alberta credit unions to provide financial services to residents of border communities and other new customers they cannot currently serve.

5:10

This bill also seeks to change the Horse Racing Alberta Act. We all know that horse racing plays an important role in Alberta's economy, as it brings significant economic benefit to Alberta's rural communities mostly. Thousands of Albertans and visitors attend horse racing events each year. In order to ensure this vibrant part of Alberta's economy thrives, Bill 10 will strengthen the leadership of Horse Racing Alberta by allowing more public and industry representation to manage daily operations. More representation means more ideas and opinions, which will have more robust and successful decisions and outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to creating accessible and affordable postsecondary education, and Bill 10 will implement a 2 per cent cap on tuition increases for domestic students at the institutional level of public postsecondary institutions for 2024 and 2025 and future academic years. This will save students about \$18 million annually. Albertans repaying student loans will see their payments drop by an average of \$15 per month.

In addition to this, Budget 2023 provides more help to students receiving financial assistance as they repay their loans with an extension of the student loan grace period from six months to one

extension of the student loan grace period from six months to one year and an increase to the threshold for eligibility for the loan repayment assistance plan up to \$40,000.

As we strive to create the right conditions for the agrifood sector to do business in Alberta, Bill 10 introduces changes to the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act, that promote investment and increase our competitiveness globally. This includes the Alberta agriprocessing investment tax credit, which will provide a 12 per cent nonrefundable tax credit to eligible corporations that make a minimum capital investment of \$10 million in value-added agriprocessing in Alberta. This new initiative, program will build on our current advantages and maximizes opportunities that help create more jobs for Albertans. This will ensure we have the most effective tool kit to land large-scale investments that will help grow our agrifood industry and diversify our economy.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 makes adoptions more affordable by investing \$12 million more over three years in providing supplementary health benefits for children adopted from government care or through licensed adoption agencies. There's also \$6,000 in grant funding for prospective adoptive parents making less than \$180,000 a year and an increase of the provincial adoption expense tax credit to \$18,210 to match the federal threshold in 2023. Building forever families shouldn't be a financial burden for Albertans yearning to adopt. New subsidies, higher tax credits, and other supports would make adoptions more feasible for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2023, as implemented by Bill 10, balances the priorities of Albertans in health care and education while ensuring the government lives within its means. This budget builds on Alberta's strong foundations and continues to position the province for further diversification and growth. Through this government's fiscal responsibility during the past four years supports and reliefs to Albertans during this time of high inflation are readily available without incurring debt.

Speaking of debt, Mr. Speaker, through this government's proper management of provincial finances we are now able to reduce and pay down the provincial debt, which was never done by the members opposite during their time in the government. The members opposite did the other way around. They accumulated more debt. Even during the past budgets of this government the members opposite asserted to spend more without regard to the debt that they have piled up. Their hike on the corporate tax to 12 per cent drove away job creators and billions of investment and did not result in more tax collections.

On the other side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker, we have planned to balance the budget from day one of assumption of the office, and it is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. When the previous government began the administration of the province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were expelled from the government, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. As this government pays down the debt, we're able to use this debt-servicing amount on more valuable services that Albertans rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, daycare, and education. This government has always aimed to have financial stability to ensure a greater and successful future for Alberta by growing the economy, creating good-paying jobs, strengthening health care and education, and keeping Alberta communities safe.

Alberta is continuously moving forward, Mr. Speaker, through the government's focused, responsible fiscal management, relentless pursuit of economic growth. It has put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity resulting in additional government revenues. The job-creating corporate tax cut implemented by this government is proving to be a

more reasonable approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach it is estimated for the fiscal year 2023-2024 that there is about . . . [Mr. Singh's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: This concludes the time allotted for that member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre on Bill 10, second reading, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 10, offer some thoughts, and I'd like to begin, if you'll indulge me, with a bit of an analogy. You know, we've all been there at some point. We sign a new contract. Maybe it's with a new cellphone company. Maybe it's an Internet provider, maybe cable TV. A little less of that these days; most folks are streaming. But you sign that new contract. Maybe you were unhappy with your previous provider. You're excited. You got a new opportunity. So you sign up, new contract, and, hey, things are going pretty well. You're pretty happy with the service you're getting. Looks pretty good off the top. You might not be happy with everything about it, but, hey, you're willing to give them a chance.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

Well, time progresses, and as time progresses, you start to see your service degrade. Suddenly your download speed isn't what it used to be, or you're getting a lot of dropped calls, coming up with issues that are starting to get concerns. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, your fees start going up. Suddenly you're being asked to pay more while you're getting less. You're certainly not getting what you were promised when they sold you that contract, when they were looking to get you to sign up. And maybe this is something you can work out, so you want to get a hold of them to raise your concerns, but it's harder and harder to get a response. Your e-mails, when you send them in to your customer service representative, go unanswered, or they come back with boilerplate, just telling you: actually, we're doing a fine job; you just don't realize it. You know, you try to get through on the phone, and you spend hours and hours on hold, but you're not getting any response.

5:20

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, as your frustration is mounting, suddenly you're getting all of this advertising from your service provider. They're sending you cards in the mail. They're calling you on the phone to ask if you want to upgrade your service package and telling you what a wonderful job they're doing. You're getting spammed on the Internet. They're all about telling you what a wonderful job they're doing for you even while, at the same time, you're trying to get through and let them know about your frustrations. But they're not interested in listening. Indeed, the kicker, the punch in the gut, is that they're using your money – the extra fees they charge you, the extra service bits, all of that – to tell you that what you're seeing in front of your eyes is, in fact, not actually real.

You know, every contract eventually comes to an end. Finally, you get that opportunity. You're a couple of months away, so you call in. You try to get hold of them to end that service contract. Maybe you spend a few hours on hold, get cut off a few times, have to call back in. You finally get through to that customer service representative to tell them that you are ready to end that contract, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? Suddenly out of the blue there are all kinds of incredible offers on the table. A few weeks out from when you're ready to end that contract, suddenly they're offering you discounts. They're offering you a special deal, better service. Maybe they're offering you a bit of a refund. They offer to lower

your rates. Of course, it's just for the next few months. They'll go back up eventually, but they're offering you a few months' discount, anything they can do to get you to keep from cancelling that contract because suddenly, with that on the horizon, they want you to know how much they value you as a customer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is what we have with this government's Budget 2023. That is what we have in Bill 10, a government that has spent the last three years undermining every single service that Albertans depend on. The Minister of Finance, the Member for Calgary-East were just standing and bragging about their investments in education, their investments in health care after years of cuts, after laying off key people in the classroom, after driving doctors out of the province, making it harder for students to get the help they need, driving up numbers in the classroom, making it harder for Albertans to access care.

But now, when there's suddenly an election on the horizon, well, all of a sudden this government cares so deeply about ensuring that Albertans have access to these same services that they've spent years making it more difficult for them to get while driving up costs, having deindexed AISH and income supports and all these things, making it more difficult for people to actually afford the cost of living, for the most vulnerable in the province, and at the same time deindexing personal tax rates so every single Albertan paid more while getting less from this government. Now they want to stand and pat themselves on the back for suddenly riding to the rescue with a few extra dollars, thanks to the soaring price of oil, when they see there's an election on the horizon. They want to try to get Albertans to forget all of the damage this government has done over the last few years and, hey, sign on for another four.

Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans are smarter than that, certainly the ones I've spoken with, whether it's on the doors or at my office, through e-mail, on social media. They see through this government's charade.

What we have here is a government that is bent on using every tool in the box, scraping up every public dollar they can to try to sell themselves back to Albertans. Indeed, what we have here in Bill 10 is one fine example of that, section 9, which creates the Alberta fund: \$1.4 billion of Albertans' tax dollars, \$1.4 billion that was scraped out of the pockets of AISH recipients and folks on income support, folks receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit, \$1.4 billion that was taken in additional income tax from Albertans in the midst of a pandemic and an affordability crisis, Mr. Speaker, \$1.4 billion in services that families were denied when the kids needed support in school or when folks needed the access or that was scraped away from doctors, who were struggling to keep their clinics open in the midst of a pandemic, when this government refused to provide proper funding for virtual care.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That \$1.4 billion that they squeezed out of Albertans they are awarding themselves now to use as a slush fund for the upcoming election. Shameless, Mr. Speaker. But, of course, this government has shown us so many times over the last few months that they really don't care about public dollars when it comes to their political interests. The fact that we have two-thirds of this government's caucus as either a minister or a parliamentary secretary, buying caucus loyalty with public dollars: the government is happy to do that. They're happy to take another \$9 million in advertising to tell Albertans how wonderful they are for the affordability program that they scraped together at the last minute, that they have made incredibly difficult for most Albertans to actually access, and which will end shortly after the election. They are happy to take \$1.4 billion to spend in the month of April, announcing who knows what

but initiatives that they feel will perhaps maybe help them get re-elected, much as they like to stand up cardboard cut-outs of schools and point to them and say: "Hey, look at us. Wonderful. We're going to build something."

We went through that with the previous PC governments, empty fields with signs talking about how wonderful the government was. You know, that was entitlement and arrogance that this Premier spoke against, and rightfully so at that time, but that's forgotten now in the rush for power, the desperation ahead of an election, and the deep, deep desire to try to erase Albertans' memories of what they have suffered under this government for the last four years. Here in Bill 10 we have this \$1.4 billion slush fund. We can only imagine what projects this government will suddenly decide are so incredibly important that it couldn't have been bothered to actually look at over the last three and a half years, how those projects will just happen to coincidentally be in seats where they are concerned that they might potentially lose.

Ms Hoffman: Almost certainly will lose.

Mr. Shepherd: We're certainly going to work as hard as we can to ensure they do, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that it shows, I guess, how afraid and desperate this government is, knowing what their record is in front of Albertans, knowing what it is that Albertans have seen. Indeed, I'm sure that they are hearing about it when they're out on the doors, Mr. Speaker, or when they're reading the inbox at their constituency office or in the minister's office or certainly that we continue in our role as the Official Opposition to bring into this House and share with them every day. What we have here, again, is a government that is going to use Albertans' own tax dollars to try to buy support.

We have seen clearly what the realities have been under this government. They talk about fiscal responsibility, the Member for Calgary-East, a fiscal framework to secure Albertans' future, removing the burdens for future generations to pay a debt they did not incur. Albertans now and in future generations are going to pay for the damage this government has done to our health care system, I say more damage than any previous government has ever done to our public health care system before, driving doctors out of practice and out of province, leaving entire communities in this province right now where there is not a single family doctor accepting new patients, leaving Albertans in a position where health care workers – Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. They are still in a state of crisis. They are exhausted. They are demoralized.

Under this government, because of their financial decisions, which they are doubling down on in Bill 10, which they are bragging about in this House today, health care workers are still being mandated, forced to take on extra hours despite their exhaustion, despite the toll on their mental health, their physical health, their families and relationships.

5:30

On the eve of an election, much as this government in Bill 10 is awarding themselves this \$1.4 billion slush fund to try to cover over their mistakes, they are also, within the health care system, mandating health care workers to try to cover over their damage, to try to juice the numbers so they can brag about their fixer, Dr. Cowell, having fixed the health care system in a mere three months. But the fact is that nurses on the front lines are being burned out. They are choosing to quit, Mr. Speaker. They are leaving their jobs because they have a government that is tone deaf and refusing to listen and is putting their political priorities and their desperation ahead of an election ahead of the actual good of those health care workers and the Albertans that are in desperate need of care.

We see that, Mr. Speaker, as the Health minister stood in this House and admitted that they are mandating anaesthesiologists from public hospitals in Calgary to go and work in chartered surgical facilities, because this government is interested in juicing the numbers on hips and knees to have a bragging point and a talking point ahead of the next election rather than actually looking at the proper functioning and good of the health care system as a whole. And that is what this Minister of Finance, the Member for Calgary-East stand and brag about as being fiscal responsibility. The fact is that they are creating a debt that will be borne by the next generation.

That's just in health care. Let's talk about schools, Mr. Speaker. How many students were not able to access the support for special needs because of this government's cuts and changes to PUF funding? How many families are further behind? How many of those students are going to struggle? What is the debt that they are going to bear because of this government's cuts and decisions? The fact is that debt is not just measured in dollars and cents; it is measured on the social impacts. And, on that, this government's record is unconscionable.

But, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't seem to matter, not to this Premier, not to this government, as long as they are able to provide the rewards that are needed to their friends, as long as they are able to cherry-pick those particular statistics, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View spoke about earlier, to try to make things look good as they try to sell themselves back and get Albertans to sign on for another four years. In their desperation they can throw everything they've got against the wall. They can blow millions, \$1.4 billion of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Schow: Sounds like your campaign.

Mr. Shepherd: But Albertans are smarter. They're smarter than this government and the Member for Cardston-Siksika, as he heckles. They see through it, and they know the truth. And we'll see who signs a new contract on May 29.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 10. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to add comments to Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, on behalf of my constituents. When I say "on behalf of my constituents," I really mean it. A lot of feedback around these issues on a daily basis is from my constituents, from my communities, and communities from around the ridings. There's much evidence, like what people wanted, what people suffered through. There's not really a lot of room for debate. It's sad to see that instead of, you know, looking at that feedback of Albertans going through the crisis and facing challenges, coming up with solutions – and eventually we're discussing this Bill 10 in the House.

The government wants – I don't know if I can call it unprecedented but unethical, I would say – the amount of money that in two months before the election they can use these funds, the public money, to make their image better so they can buy the votes from those many Albertans that they have upset in the last four years.

Every single day I get calls, people who walk into my office, and, of course, people on their doorsteps. Why are they worried? They're asking me, like: what are you going to do with the insurance premiums? This government has jacked them up about maybe 30 to 38 per cent, on average, but in some instances the premiums went up 40 to 45 per cent. The worst part of this is that the government, I heard, approved another increase in the premiums after their fake premium cap. People in my riding are very concerned.

People are asking about, in my riding and my neighbour ridings – they wanted to say what this government could have done to relieve the growing pressure on the Grey Nuns hospital. There was a project already going ahead, that was approved, for another hospital in the southwest. That was halted under this government. Not only this; in the last few years the whole world went through the very unprecedented, challenging time of the COVID pandemic. It's senseless to see, and it's very painful to describe, and that was the time when this UCP government failed to spend or account for where they – I don't know. What did they do with the \$4 billion? They initiated the fight with doctors and nurses.

I met with a very brilliant young registered nurse. I just wanted to share the story. She was changing her career selection. What the heck? Like, why? She said: "It's not bearable what we're going through. Overtime, the N95 equipment and this, and at end of the day the treatment we get. I can't bear it. I'm quitting it." And the feedback from doctors.

I had a constituent come into my office loaded with information that she is not happy with. Her children are going to school and, you know – I try to keep my office as much as possible nonpolitical, being their representative, being very polite and nice. She was saying, "Oh, you don't have to" – like, I got a reply before I said anything. "Oh, no, no, no; you don't have to explain anything. I already know what's going on. My child lost PUF funding already. I know it's not your fault. What I want is for you to be aware of what we are going through. I want you to take these voices to the House. We want to be represented."

The affordability crisis: a mere help, a mere and disappearing help, I would say. The Alberta fuel tax: a little help that will disappear right after the election. People are concerned. It's not only me. It's not only the constituents and the people from the communities that come forward and tell me their stories, their struggles with price gouging in the stores. Interestingly, I would tell the House that you can easily go to the UCP candidates in these ridings on their social media platforms, and these are exactly the questions they are facing.

5:40

They're feeling kind of, you know, helpless to answer those questions. It's very funny. Like, I have seen the candidate kind of diverting himself into the NDP platform, you know, as if this is his own, to kind of face the questions from the media, from the people. At least, you could get feedback from those people and help them, get into the communities with answers they could have, but you don't.

I know all my colleagues and myself many times in the House have brought forward this feedback of the pain and the challenges, the utility prices costing my constituents and Albertans. Growing prices: insurance is one of those. I met with a taxi company two weeks ago. They said that these changes have brought \$1.3 million in extra cost to that small cab company in Edmonton. They've been struggling. They're trying. They will try this year, and they might lose next year. They might not be able to keep up with all the challenges they are facing.

I do know that I cannot imagine, you know, UCP MLAs or the ministers, that those people would not approach them. I can't think – but I don't know where that feedback goes. When I've seen for the past four years, during all those challenges, that none of the UCP MLAs actually stood up and shared these views and these concerns, I don't know if it's that Albertans are telling it to the Alberta opposition NDP only or because they don't have hope from this UCP government going forward.

That's why there's this bill we're discussing in this House, because the Premier and the cabinet know what they're facing

practically on the ground. They have planned to buy votes, to bring this bill in so they can, you know, change their image. But that's not what we're here for.

We are the 87 privileged out of a population of 4 million in this province, and we promise our constituents and Albertans when we get elected: we will represent your voices, and we will take your issues back to the House. We will discuss in our caucus, we will discuss with our colleagues, and we will discuss this in the House with all the members.

But one after another, a \$4.7 billion investment, the government in those four years could not tie even one job directly. You know, none of the ministers could stand up and say: oh, this is the job because of that; this is the investment because of this. The Energy minister then in the media accepted that they needed to look at it. Like, why is it not working? But did the government look back? No. They didn't. They came up with another plan, a \$1.43 billion giveaway, a bet, a risk on the election in the U.S., on Trump's election. The timing is very suspicious, when the money was handed over. I think Trump had already lost the election before the money was being transferred.

What we hear from our constituents are the problems that people are facing of houselessness, affordable housing. We have seen the way the government treated municipalities. Now they are discussing also another way. Like, they are trying to fix their own mistakes close to their term. I don't know how much that will do to help those municipalities and the people who are upset with those decisions, because we will not have enough time to, you know, reverse those changes and damages and harms that that bill has done. So out of, like, hundreds of millions of dollars of investment proposals to eliminate or address houselessness, affordable housing, the city of Edmonton was promised \$5,000 from this government, and my councillor tells me that finally they got that cheque two weeks ago, after one year.

This is the kind of help this government is giving to the people. That's the kind of feedback I'm hearing from my constituents. You know, I had better, actually, expectations from this government, that after four years they would have learned something. They had their opportunity with the growing prices of energy, oil, a windfall of money, but they wasted the opportunity by handing, again, \$20 billion to their corporate friends to deal with the responsibility they already had in the contract. It is sad to see that this is how the UCP government is dealing with public money, handing it over to multinational corporations and transferring all kinds of burdens to ordinary Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with this, I conclude my remarks. I'm sad to see that the government is moving in this direction. I know my colleagues will definitely oppose this bill. I will look forward if any other UCP MLA, government member, can come up with the feedback they get from their constituents and stand up in this House and share that feedback and their views on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to address Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. The purpose of this bill really is to help build fiscal stability, attract investment, support children and families, cut more red tape, improve provincial funding mechanisms, and make life more affordable for students. Fiscal responsibility really requires that we build a prosperous and a sustainable future. Bill 10 proposes amendments that would legislate a fiscal framework to secure that sustainability. The proposed framework would require that the government use any surpluses to, first, pay down debt and, secondly, to save for the

future. This framework will ensure fiscal stability for all Albertans as we move forward.

Bill 10 also proposes amendments to the Personal Income Tax Act to enable changes to the charitable tax credit rate, starting this year, actually, retroactively. The rate will change from 10 per cent to 60 per cent on donations under \$200. This is really to encourage support for those organizations in our province that do such great work, that make such a great contribution to our society generally, and that do everything that makes us a great place to live. It will actually be retroactive to January.

The government is also making changes to cut red tape for publicly listed corporations, saving them roughly \$7 million a year in mailing costs, if you can believe it, giving them the ability to provide financial and other shareholder reporting documents electronically instead of by mail. This happens across the country pretty much everywhere already anyway.

Changes to the Securities Act will reduce the ability of bad actors to use the appeal process to endlessly delay enforcement. Quite frankly, it'll free up both time and money for the Securities Commission so that they can do what they do best, which is investigate and prosecute violations under the securities laws and rules and regulations.

5:50

Credit unions are an important part of Alberta's financial services sector. Changes proposed by Bill 10 will provide them with new opportunities to generate revenue, take advantage of regulations that will support their operations. It'll allow credit unions to provide financial services to residents of border communities and other new customers that they cannot currently serve, again providing sustainability for them.

Horse racing plays an essential role in Alberta's economy, particularly providing benefits to rural communities. To ensure this vibrant part of Alberta's economy thrives, our government is proposing to strengthen the leadership of Horse Racing Alberta by allowing more public and industry representation in the management of its daily operations.

We are committed also to making postsecondary education more affordable. To improve that, the government will implement a 2 per cent cap on tuition for domestic students, and hopefully that will help them as they move forward.

Bill 10 proposes the Alberta agriprocessing investment tax credit, a 12 per cent nonrefundable tax credit for eligible corporations that make a minimum capital investment of \$10 million. The goal here, really, is to ensure that we have the most effective tool kit in order to land large-scale investments that will help grow our agrifood industries.

Building forever families through adoption is a noble pursuit, so we are introducing the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act changes. These bills will provide higher tax credits and other supports that will make adoption more feasible for Albertans by easing some of the financial burden of adoption. We really hope to encourage more families to open their hearts and their homes to children in need of loving families, because we believe that every child deserves a stable and nurturing environment, and these changes will help make that a reality for them.

We're introducing the Local Government Fiscal Framework Act, which addresses long-standing concerns by municipalities regarding predictable and sustainable funding. It will provide that to them. As was announced this morning at the RMA, it will tie future municipal funding levels more closely to provincial revenues – actually, at 100 per cent, at RMA request – and it will help address

the concerns that have been raised for many years by municipalities as we move forward.

Bill 10 also aims to secure Alberta's future by addressing some of the most urgent needs of families, students, and municipalities throughout the province. The proposed amendments in this bill, if implemented, will provide that fiscal stability and ensure that business investment continues to be preferential to Alberta, thus making life more affordable for Albertans.

One last thing: the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act will be strengthened under Bill 10. Currently legislation requires that a portion of the heritage fund net income be kept for protection against inflation only, but everything else over the last few years or the last quite a few years, actually, has been required to be transferred to the general revenue fund. Now, with the proposed amendments, the heritage fund will retain all of its net income.

This is extremely important because if you compare the heritage trust fund from 1983 to now on a per capita basis, it's actually only worth per capita about one-third of what it was in 1983 because we have continually either not made contributions to the fund or we have siphoned them off for general revenue, and of course the population has increased. The per capita value of the fund has significantly decreased from about \$12,000 per Albertan down to just over \$4,000 per Albertan.

These are some of the changes that we've made, great changes for Alberta. I encourage everyone to vote for the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Irwin: Well, slightly disappointed, because I was quite surprised to see another UCP member stand up there. I was ready with my 15-minute speech, but I will have to condense my 15 minutes into six, which I can probably do. You know, it is an honour to rise . . . [interjections] I don't know why I'm already getting heckled. I've literally just begun. But perhaps the member who continues to heckle, who never does join debate, might like to do so.

I stand here speaking to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I must get it on the record, you know – and I've shared this before, especially in the previous session – that it is certainly disappointing that at a time when this government has an opportunity to really do some transformational work, instead we see a lot of cleanup bills, administration, statutes, a bunch of things sort of addressed in a bit of an omnibus. This one is not as much of an omnibus, but I think back to the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, who envisioned a world in which perhaps this government would invest in affordable housing – right? – as an example, something that truly would be transformational for my constituents and constituents across the province. [interjections] Again, I'm fully getting heckled. If the Member for Calgary-Klein would like to join debate on this, I would sure love to hear from him as well.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: On affordable housing?

Member Irwin: Well, please do join, then.

You know, health care, public education, housing, all of these things – the list certainly goes on. Instead, a whole lot of not much.

It is, of course, I would say, one of the least robust legislative agendas that we've seen, but from a Premier without a mandate I do get it. I understand why we end up with bills like this one. But I digress.

On this bill, I think I do need to get on the record that one of my most grave concerns about this bill is the slush fund. The slush fund: \$1.4 billion – \$1.4 billion – as a campaign slush fund to really, really buy votes. I mean, as we've heard – we talked about this in question period today – you know, I'm not sure that that Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, the Premier, would like this, at least not the her of 10 years ago. The her of 10 years ago? You know what I'm saying. I can't say her name, so that makes it complicated.

When we look to that member's own words from just a decade ago, she was so against using taxpayers' dollars for any sort of partisan purposes. In fact, quote, you should not be able to use taxpayer dollars for blatant partisan advertising in advance of an election. And, of course, we know, fast-forwarding to right now, the current day, 2023, she's putting \$9 million of Albertans' tax dollars towards pre-election communications, and we see in Bill 10 ahead of us \$1.4 billion for a campaign slush fund. Quite alarming.

This fund – and I've been really, really blown away by the discourse here from my colleagues on this side of the House prior, especially the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-City Centre, well, all of them. I don't want to put anybody on the spot; they all did a great job just outlining how incredibly alarming this slush fund is. The fine print on this fund allows the UCP to spend the projected surplus for re-election before the bills come at the end of the fiscal year. As my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West put it – she said: that's bad fiscal management, and it's exactly how you squander a resource boom. We all know in this House the past saying around squandering a resource boom. I can't say it in this Chamber. But, as has been noted, none of this should come as a surprise to anybody in this Chamber and, in fact, outside of it. The people we meet door-knocking all over the province: they're bringing these things up.

This is the same government that gambled away \$1.3 billion for Trump's re-election, the same government that couldn't account for \$4 billion when it came to COVID spending, and we know they had – what? – nearly \$2 billion in accounting errors the first year in office. Well, it doesn't end there. It doesn't end there. This is the same UCP government that plans to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a provincial police force, a provincial police force, might I add, that Albertans aren't asking for. Oh. Attack Alberta's CPP? Yeah. Again, something that Albertans aren't asking for. They want their retirement security protected.

One more thing – I'd better add this one for good measure – the \$20 billion that this Premier hopes to give away to, you know, her corporate buddies to clean up the messes that they're already legally obligated to clean up.

With all of this – all of this – the UCP has clearly already cost Albertans billions of dollars . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(1)(c) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	663
Introduction of Guests	663
Members' Statements	
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 955	663
Support for Ukrainian Newcomers	664
Stollery Children's Hospital	664
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	664
Federal Impact Assessment Act.....	664
Energy Company Liability	665
Alberta	665
Oral Question Period	
Chartered Surgical Facility Contracts	665
Government Advertising	666
Prescription Contraception Coverage Policy	666
Energy Company Liability	667
Support for Ukrainian Newcomers	668
Government Advertising and Affordability Plan.....	668
Energy Company Municipal Tax Payment.....	669, 673
Federal Carbon Pricing.....	669
Primary Health Care in Medicine Hat	670
Misericordia Community Hospital CT Scanner.....	670
Federal Impact Assessment Act.....	671
Child Protective Services and Transition to Adulthood Program	671
Industrial Development in St. Albert.....	672
Orders of the Day	674
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023.....	674
Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023	675
Bill 9 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.....	676
Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	686

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca