



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 22, 2023

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

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

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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)
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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)
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Aheer
Dach
Ganley
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Singh
Turton

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Alberta Hansard Special Edition

The Speaker: Hon. members, on your desks you will find a copy of the special edition *Hansard* for the special sitting that was held on September 15, 2022. As you will remember, the sitting was a tribute to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II following her passing on September 8, 2022. This special edition includes all of the words of grief and gratitude that were shared by members on that day. As well, it includes many photographs of the special sitting, the memorial ceremony that was held on the front steps of the Legislature as well as images of the life and legacy of Her late Majesty. I'd like to extend a thank you to members of *Hansard* and the communications team from the Legislative Assembly Office for putting this important document together.

I hope that this keepsake will be a treasured reminder of your service to the Queen and to the province, and if you would like an additional copy, I do have a limited number available at my office.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I am very pleased to introduce a group of visiting officials from our sister province of Hokkaido, Japan. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning, and we discussed a number of important issues as we continue to strengthen ties between our two great regions. We have much of a shared desire of freedom, of support, and I know that they are here visiting members of our Ministry of Education. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also seated in the Speaker's gallery today is Ms Heather Toporowski. Heather is a constituent of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, has worked in the Alberta health care system for over 30 years, and now coaches leaders in health, education, and government sectors, including providing some leadership coaching to LAO staff and members. I would invite her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Guthrie school serves military families and students on Edmonton's military base. Through you and to you I would like to introduce the grade 6 class. If I could ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has an introduction.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on behalf of my friend from Edmonton-South to introduce to you and through you 35 grade 6 students from Monsignor Fee Otterson school, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-South. The students are seated in the public gallery and are joined by their teacher, Colin Oberst. I'd ask that the House join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two of my constituents from the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-South West, Yuki Wong and Harris Liu. Yuki Wong is a recipient of the Queen's platinum jubilee medal. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Shandro: Well, [Remarks in Punjabi]. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Dr. Navjot Gosal and Pam Cholak. Now, Dr. Gosal worked as a mixed-animal practitioner in Punjab before moving to Edmonton in the winter of 2008. He was a veterinarian with a mixed-animal rural practice in Morinville but mostly in Lac La Biche before moving to a small-animal private practice in Edmonton. You might have heard him on the radio in previous years on 630 CHED talking to pet owners on a weekly radio show. A proud Albertan raising a son with his wife, as they stand in the gallery, I ask all members this afternoon to join me in giving them a warm welcome to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sheila Ethier. Sheila founded Blankets of Love, which provides quilts to patients who are in hospital for treatment of mental illness. She's a lifelong resident of St. Albert, an author, and a Global women of vision recipient, 2008. Sheila is here today because her family has been impacted by the backlog of cancer treatment. I ask Sheila to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and introduce four amazing women who I'm very proud to call my friends. Wendy Walker is an Indigenous singer and songwriter who's had an incredible 30-year career, including representing our province in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Thank you so much to the minister of Indigenous affairs for meeting with us. Welcome to Leen Yaghi of Nisa Homes, a national housing organization and a safe haven for women and children fleeing domestic violence, and finally, Savita Singh and Anita Ngau from first step together, a community-based group that works to increase the participation and integration of immigrants and refugees in Calgary and the surrounding area. It is truly an honour to have you. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Cost of Living and Affordability Plan

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, this past Monday marked the first day of spring. Although this is Alberta and there's always room for one

more or maybe many more snow days, you can definitely feel in the air that spring is coming and summer is not far behind. For many Albertans, myself included, the first few days of spring always bring with them a feeling of hope and optimism, and Albertans are feeling that springtime relief stronger than elsewhere thanks to an exciting trend continuing from last month. Yesterday the consumer price index released its February 2023 data, and for the second month in a row Alberta has led the country in fighting inflation and making life more affordable.

Alberta has the lowest year-over-year inflation growth, at 3.6 per cent, while the rest of the country sits at 5.2 per cent. Measures like the electricity rebates, the fuel tax relief are contributing directly to reduced inflation in Alberta. Targeted supports, including \$600 in affordability payments for parents, seniors, and vulnerable Albertans, are helping them pay their bills and save money for what matters most. Our lower cost of living, affordable housing, abundant jobs, higher earnings, and lower taxes continue to prove that the Alberta advantage is alive and well. Alberta's government has focused on taking timely, effective action to reduce costs and keep life affordable for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things that Albertans are looking forward to about spring: the return of warmer weather, hockey playoffs or, if you're like me, the start of the Canadian football season, with summer almost here on the horizon. But, beyond that, I know Albertans are excited to re-elect a UCP government, that they know has the strongest record on fighting inflation in the entire country.

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

Ramadan

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to recognize the holy month of Ramadan, which starts tomorrow. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. During Ramadan Muslims around the world observe a monthlong period of fasting from dawn until sunset, abstain from eating or drinking anything, and focus on strengthening their relationship with the Creator and Its creation.

Family and faith-based gatherings are a huge part of Ramadan. It brings people, communities, and Muslim umma together as one. Ramadan is an opportunity to embrace self-restraint and self-reflection. It encourages those with the means to connect with the less fortunate among us, to reach out to neighbours, to the sick and elderly, and to those who are struggling to make ends meet.

1:40

Ramadan is also an opportunity for all Albertans to learn more about Muslim Albertans: their faith, history, cultures, traditions, and their contribution to this province. In recent years we have also seen a rise in Islamophobia and hatred, and we also saw attacks on hijab-wearing Muslim women and increased racism and prejudice against racialized people and people of Asian origin. I urge all to take this opportunity to reach out to your neighbour, attend an iftar event, and learn about each other and come together to create a society that understands, respects, and values diversity. There is no place for racism, Islamophobia, and discrimination in our province, and we must stand together against it.

With that, I wish all Albertans observing Ramadan a blessed Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

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

NDP Government Record

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to talk about the big NDP successes when they were in government. Well, that covers that.

In the time remaining, let's talk about the other things that they did, like protesting against pipelines with their Extinction Rebellion besties, leading to the cancellation of the Northern Gateway and Energy East pipelines, followed by a 4 and a half billion dollar crude-by-rail scandal; over \$10 billion in extra costs incurred passed on to electricity consumers, including hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate welfare – such a reckless mishandling of the market – the blatant attack on Alberta farmers, private and home-schools, and the attack on virtually anybody that disagreed with their agenda. And did I forget to mention the carbon tax? Well, they sure did, at least till after they were elected. A hundred and eighty-three thousand jobs across Alberta lost, and the NDP leadership referred to Albertans as embarrassing cousins, as sewer rats, and told Albertans to move away if they wanted a job.

But then it got better. The 2019 election campaign: the largest number of unfunded election promises in Canadian history in the hopes of manipulating Alberta votes. Most people expected the former Premier to hang her head in shame and take over the federal NDP leadership after that failed attempt, but it seems that Justin Trudeau warned her of a vote split, making way for a Conservative victory, so she chose to stay in Alberta and maintain a four-year fear and smear campaign in hopes of getting control of the province once again. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker; the NDP plan to rack up debt, to shut off our resource-based economies, and to shutter small businesses. Jobs would be lost again, families would be destroyed again, a future in Alberta would be nonexistent again. Alberta can definitely not afford the NDP again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Crown of the Continent Tourism Region

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been my privilege to rise in this Chamber many times to brag about the special corner of Alberta that I'm fortunate to call home. In my little corner of southwest Alberta we have an abundance of beautiful vistas, many of which have captured the eye of Hollywood and have played an important supporting role in film and TV. In fact, we were recently home to zombies and ghostbusters.

We're also fortunate to have not one but two UNESCO world heritage sites in Livingstone-Macleod: Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo Jump and the world's first international peace park, formed in 1932 between Waterton Lakes and Glacier national parks in Alberta and Montana. This is the place I want to invite you to go with me today. At the narrow waist of the Rocky Mountains, where Alberta, British Columbia, and Montana meet, sprawls one of the wildest, most diverse and intact ecosystems in the temperate zones of the world. This area is known as the Crown of the Continent. The Crown of the Continent refers to Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and the surrounding communities in Alberta, British Columbia, and Montana. These regions have been working hard together to develop a very special transboundary and international visitor experience, and now their hard work is being recognized internationally.

As I mentioned, Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was established in 1932. In addition to being an international peace park, Waterton-Glacier also shares the designation as the UNESCO biosphere reserve and most recently was named the world's first transboundary international dark sky park. Today I want to

recognize the hard work done by Bev Thornton and the Alberta SouthWest regional economic alliance in promoting this area of Alberta. Their hard work has resulted in international recognition of the area as a top global destination and as an alternative to traditional destinations like Banff and Lake Louise. This month Alberta SouthWest was awarded second place in the business and marketing category of Green Destinations' top 100 sustainable stories for 2022.

This summer I invite you and all members to pack your bags and come visit one of the most amazing places in the world right here in our own back park.

Government Policies and Rural Albertans

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as the critic for rural economic development, agriculture, and forestry I've been privileged to meet with Albertans from across this great province. During those conversations two things are abundantly clear: Albertans are resilient, they're innovative, they're hard working, and they're honest people; and they feel abandoned by this UCP government.

This government has had four years devastating their health care, forcing communities like Olds to wait with over a quarter of the population on a wait-list to see a family doctor, increased the tax burden of rural Albertans by failing to recoup taxes owed by profitable corporations to municipalities with a combination of slow action and ideas that everyone knew were going to fail. Landowners are paying the price for the inaction of this UCP, whether it be infrastructure spending with bridges and roads, water access to support our livestock industry, and ignoring the fundamental principle of surface rights. Then they gave the ultimate insult to rural Albertans by trying to use their tax dollars to pay off the bad actors that refused to clean up their abandoned wells, that they are legally obligated to clean.

After four years it is clear that this UCP government doesn't have a plan to support rural Albertans and their communities, but the Leader of the Opposition and the Alberta NDP do. We are grateful for rural Albertans and all the people that have crafted our rural economies. As a government we will make sure that rural Albertans have access to quality health care when they need it, close to home. They know that economic diversification will not be considered a luxury under the Alberta NDP. An Alberta NDP government will not leave rural Alberta behind like the UCP has because we will stand up for them with them.

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

Eavor Technologies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and advocate for Alberta's geothermal opportunity, which is led by a Calgary-based company that represents the spirit of Alberta's entrepreneurialism, Eavor Technologies. Their geothermal technology, the Eavor-loop, represents the world's first and only viable form of baseload, firm, scalable power, encompassing power generation, district heating and cooling systems, and enabling local energy autonomy at scale everywhere. Eavor-loop was established through drilling techniques perfected by Alberta's oil and gas sector and patented by former conventional energy sector workers who now work for Eavor.

Mr. Speaker, the potential of Eavor-loop has been recognized internationally as a mechanism to support energy security and decarbonization goals abroad. The Alberta-based start-up was the only North American company to attain funds from the European

Union innovation fund amongst international energy supermajors, culminating in a \$120 million grant to support the commercialization of their first project in Geretsried, Germany, the largest geothermal-specific grant allocation ever provided globally.

A recognition ceremony of this monumental achievement will occur in Geretsried on August 24. Attendees will include the likes of Chancellor Olaf Scholz and other senior dignitaries from the German government and the European Union. I would urge all members of the Assembly to save the date in their calendar and consider attending.

Unequivocally, synergies and opportunities for partnership exist between Alberta's oil and gas and geothermal sectors. Our province has all the prerequisite requirements, from a labour and capital perspective, to become the global epicentre for geothermal technology exports, mirroring what China has achieved with solar infrastructure. This opportunity should be fully leveraged to promote job creation and economic prosperity for Albertans.

Retrospective by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, this will be my final statement in this Assembly. I have spent my life in service to people in family, churches, local communities, and, lastly, in our great province. The last eight years have been a supreme privilege for which I am deeply grateful. We have achieved so much as a government, and it has been a sacred trust to represent the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka.

I have learned so much about the perspectives and contributions of other people; about how hard it is to change things for the better; about democracy, its strengths and weaknesses, that it is still the best system of human governance. The most encouraging, hopeful thing that I have seen is the voluntary, spontaneous, generous hard work of so many Albertans. In every community there are ordinary, heroic community people who see a need or an opportunity, who rally others together or they create, by the sheer energy of their passion, innovative and beautiful solutions that enrich us all. This is so hopeful, so inspiring, so reassuring for the future.

1:50

The last few years have been difficult for everyone: the crash of energy prices to zero and broad economic pain, COVID-19 challenges not seen since the 1919 Spanish flu, and now the fears and threats of inflation. But worse than all of these is the increasing polarization of society. Social media algorithms reconfirm prejudices and biases. People are grouping into echo chambers, where they no longer listen to others or respect one another. Albertans: we can and we must do better.

It is time to consider others with humility. It is time to put away our grievances and animosities. Albertans, we have the greatest wealth in the world: the wealth of the land; of peace, not war; of unimaginable opportunity; of fascinating technological revolution; of a greening society. With so much to be grateful for, I end one season to begin another being grateful for everything, entitled to nothing.

God bless Alberta. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

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

Cancer Treatment Wait Times

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Sheila Ethier is an author, a Global woman of vision, and a registered nurse. Her spouse, Brian, was

diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer on January 26. The doctors told Brian he should see an oncologist before the end of February. This didn't happen. Now the cancer had spread, and Brian is under palliative care. He still has not seen that oncologist. Now, the Premier has said that the crisis in health care is over, but it's not for Brian and for Sheila. So my question simply is: what does she have to say to them today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising this issue. My heart goes out to Sheila and to your family.

This is a challenging time for our health care system and, in fact, all health care systems across the country. We know that we need more staff. We know that we need more people to provide the services to Albertans, and we are working towards that, to expand capacity, to hire more people, Mr. Speaker, as part of Budget 2023. We are increasing our capacity. Again, I know that these are challenging times. My heart goes out to anyone impacted . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: I quote Sheila: Brian is in pain; all he wants is to receive the treatment that may save his life. Mr. Speaker, Sheila and Brian were told by several staff at the Cross that the wait time for new patients used to be four weeks, but now it is 10. Sheila wrote to the UCP government looking for answers as to why that is, and she received no reply, so I'll ask Sheila's question today. Why have wait times at the Cross gone up over a hundred per cent, and why, eight weeks after Brian's diagnosis, has he still not seen an oncologist?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as already mentioned, we know that there is increased complexity for Alberta patients. We need more health care professionals, specialists to be able to provide the services, and that is a challenge not only here but around the country. We are investing to be able to ensure that we have the staff to provide the services. I was very pleased to announce with my colleague about increasing the number of doctors through U of C and U of A programs, and also we are bringing in more doctors from overseas so we can actually provide the services to Albertans when they need it.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from Albertans who are reporting wait times on referrals to the Cross of three, four, and even five months. Now, on February 28 of this year our opposition raised the issue of the delay being experienced specifically by Brian. The Premier called it "fearmongering," and she refused to answer the question. Three weeks later Brian's cancer has spread. So will the Premier or her minister drop the rhetoric and tell this House what is being done specifically today to deal with these terrifying wait times for cancer care? The specific answer.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated, challenges in regard to having specialists and given the increase in complexity of the cases and the number of cases – there are currently 16 positions under active recruitment for oncologists. AHS is aggressively pursuing both Canadian and international trained physicians. They're closely reviewing the local workforce to be able to provide extra care. You know, we are getting more surgeries done; surgeries have increased by 110 per cent over what they were pre-pandemic. But we know we need to continue to add capacity to our system, and through Budget 2023 we're doing that.

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

Anaesthesia Care

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 10:30 this morning I sent three questions to the Health minister in hopes that we can set political spin aside and put some factual answers on the record for Albertans. In a previous question period the minister confirmed anaesthesiologists were being redeployed from AHS hospitals to work in private, for-profit chartered surgical facilities. To the minister: will any surgeries scheduled to be performed in AHS hospitals be cancelled or delayed due to anaesthesiologists being redeployed to these private clinics?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for providing the questions beforehand. I only have 30 seconds, so I'll be providing a more fulsome answer after QP for the member and the Alberta public. I want to start with: the premise for the questions is incorrect. CSFs are part of our publicly funded health care system, no different than attending a family physician or than when previous governments used CSFs. Surgeries have been and will continue to be scheduled so that the most urgent and those waiting the longest get done first. These will be done at the most appropriate venue, either at hospital or CSF. It's all one publicly funded system. We're going to make sure . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, it's not a complex answer to say yes or no.

Despite the minister's and Premier's claims that there's one big, happy health care system, we actually have two systems at work here: public health care funded by taxpayers, with the sole goal dedicated to keeping Albertans healthy, and a private system, also funded by taxpayers, with a competing goal of generating a profit for corporate shareholders. My second question is this. What contractual guarantees were provided to private surgical facilities for AHS to supply anaesthesiologists for operations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear. These contracts, which are posted publicly online on the AHS website, are for the CSFs to provide procedures for Alberta Health Services. This is done to increase capacity in our system. It works no differently than a hospital. CSFs provide space, equipment, and care teams. AHS then assigns the surgeons and the anaesthesiologists. AHS schedules these anaesthesiologists to support the highest priority cases and are always available for emergency and urgent surgeries in addition to those schedules on the slate in AHS or CSF facilities. This is part of our public system, and we're doing it . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, public health care provides care to all Albertans regardless of how much money they have in their bank account, regardless of how many other health complexities they may have. For-profit clinics prefer to take on the simplest procedures for patients with the least amount of complicating factors. That allows them to bill taxpayers for the largest volume, leaving hospitals with only the most complex and challenging surgeries. To the minister: are private clinics being given the least complicated patients and procedures either by their own self-selection or by deliberate assignment by AHS?

Mr. Copping: I want to be succinct. The short answer is no. AHS does the scheduling. This is no different than our current public hospitals, Mr. Speaker, where the patient is assigned based on the list that AHS have and the priorities associated by the surgeons and the anaesthesiologists. Then they are assigned to what location based on the complexity associated with the cases.

Mr. Speaker, we know that our system is broken. It was broken under the previous government. We know we need to fix it. We're investing to fix it so that we can actually save money and get more procedures done. That's what Albertans want. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Government Advertising

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on Monday night the Premier gave herself permission to spend \$9 million of taxpayers' money on pre-election campaign ads, including \$3 million on the budget alone. Now, yesterday the Premier went to war with her past self, and her past self lost. Later in the day we received a FOIP showing that the former UCP Premier Kenney spent only \$600,000 on budget advertising. Why is the current UCP Premier spending five times that amount to advertise just ahead of this election? Is someone over there a little nervous?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of this past year we're projecting to spend \$20 million in our advertising budget this year. There are many components to that, certainly the affordability measures, which warrant communication with Albertans to ensure that every Albertan and every Alberta family can participate in these significant affordability measures.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we have an Alberta Is Calling campaign that is yielding great results. Once again, in the last quarters Alberta is leading the nation in net in-migration.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, let's talk about those affordability payments, Mr. Speaker, because the one fact the Premier is not advertising is the fact that those payments all end right after the election. She left that part out. Hmm.

Now, the Premier once said that this kind of behaviour was – and I quote – offside with what people would consider to be legitimate spending. End quote. Once again, if the Premier is willing to sell out her beliefs in just five months, what will she sell out if she gets four more years?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that 1.2 million Albertans are now enrolled and receiving the affordability payments that seniors, families, and Albertans on core support programs really need. The members opposite are clearly not paying attention. Here's a list of the programs not ending in June: our fuel tax relief – that is a permanent program – natural gas price protection, our indexing of AISH, income support, the Alberta seniors' benefit, the Alberta child and family benefit, retroactive indexing of personal income taxes. Parents will continue to benefit from affordable child care and our affordability measures in postsecondary.

What will end in June is their aspirations at government.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, back in 2012 the Premier and her Wildrose caucus were apoplectic when the then PC Premier announced \$400,000 for advertising. Back then the Premier's executive director accused the Tories of using taxpayers' money as their own, quote, campaign piggy bank. Well, this Premier's piggy bank is a heck of a lot fatter. She's spending 20 times that amount. To the Premier: isn't it 20 times more wrong now than it was then, or do your beliefs change when it's your hand in the piggy bank?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're projecting to spend \$20 million this year on substantive advertising on an Alberta Is Calling campaign, which is working, and to ensure that Albertans know about all the affordability measures.

My question to the Leader of the Opposition is this. Back in 2018-19 they spent \$25 million in advertising ahead of the election. What did Albertans get for that? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning and Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Energy Company Municipal Tax Payment

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural municipalities are owed over \$268 million in back taxes by oil companies. Recently the Minister of Energy ran away from reporters when they tried to ask questions about the details of his plan to block oil companies from acquiring or transferring licences on wells if their unpaid taxes exceeded a threshold amount. Municipalities deserve an answer. Simple question, Minister: how much do these companies have to dump onto residential taxpayers before the UCP starts to think it's a problem?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, we understand that municipalities and landowners are frustrated by overdue and unpaid property taxes owed by oil and gas companies. We take these matters seriously, which is why on Monday I signed an order to allow the AER authority to prevent the transfer of or issuance of a well licence if a company has outstanding taxes. In these cases the AER must be satisfied that the payment of municipal taxes have either been paid or are a condition of sale. The AER aims to develop and implement this process by April 30, so they will find out in due course. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, today at RMA we heard from municipal leaders who said that they haven't been consulted; in fact, the solution doesn't fix the problem. These companies are allowed to drill on landowners' properties, extract production, and take away enormous profits during boom times. They used municipal roads, water, drainage, infrastructure, and then left without paying their share. For years the UCP ignored this problem without taking action, and now on the eve of the election they've come up with a promise to make a plan. Why doesn't the Energy minister have a real plan after four years of studying this problem? Four years, Minister. The rural municipalities have a right to know.

Mr. Guthrie: Well, this morning at RMA we received overwhelming support for the initiative that this government has taken.

It should be noted that earlier this month a little further encouragement was made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I, having sent out letters to every functioning company in Alberta

who isn't compliant in paying their municipal taxes to request their co-operation. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and I look forward to settling these bad debts in an effort to strengthen the balance sheets of our rural municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, at RMA this morning we clearly heard that consultation has not happened. So I encourage all municipal leaders to join our consultation tomorrow night at albertasfuture.ca. It's easy to see why Albertans are fed up with this UCP government; they're stuck paying higher taxes that the profitable companies can take their own tax bills – now we're watching this minister and this Premier launch a scheme to hand over \$20 billion of Alberta's tax money to companies who've polluted the landscape and refuse to clean up the mess. Why is the Premier turning her back on rural Albertans by sticking them with higher taxes, less infrastructure, and rewarding the bad . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, this just boils down to the anti oil and gas sentiment of the opposition. I want to be clear that the vast majority of companies in Alberta are good operators, and they do not fit this order. Our government strengthened the liability management framework. We empowered the AER's ability to intervene, and we're working to ensure municipalities have every opportunity to collect owed taxes through this order, the legislation implemented to allow for liens against assets, and the letters to delinquent companies. Municipalities and landowners across this province can expect this . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Affordability Plan and Fiscal Policy

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I frequently hear from constituents who are thankful for the affordability support they've been receiving, thankful for real action from this government. Parents tell me that thanks to affordability payments they've been able to provide their children more nutritious meals and keep them in the activities they love. I hear from households, farms, businesses that are thankful for extra help on their electricity bills, and many of my constituents appreciate the price relief they are receiving at the pumps, including Mr. Sadlier, who has joined us from Grande Prairie in the gallery today. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: can you provide an update on the affordability action plan and how it's supporting Albertans?

Mr. Jones: Thank you to the member for the question. The affordability action plan has provided effective and timely relief to Albertans during this period of increased inflationary pressures. The average household is receiving an estimated \$900 in broad-based relief alone, and this includes up to \$500 in electricity rebates to 1.9 million homes, farms, and small businesses since July. I'm also pleased to report that 1.2 million low- and middle-income families, seniors, and vulnerable Albertans have now enrolled and are receiving monthly affordability payments. Albertans have expected timely, effective action on cost-of-living concerns, and we've delivered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister. Given that even though our economy is strong and this

government has worked hard to make life more affordable today while keeping Alberta affordable long term, the cost of living remains a top-of-mind concern for many Albertans. Given that I hear from many of my constituents who are thankful for the support this government has continued to provide but are still concerned about inflation trends nation-wide and further given that we know that provinces are limited in what they can do on their own to fight inflation, to the same minister: what is this government doing to combat inflation effectively?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm pleased to share that in addition to providing cost-of-living relief to Albertans, our affordability action plan is directly combatting inflation. Newly released consumer price index data indicates that Alberta's inflation rate is nearly two points lower than the rest of Canada for the second month in a row. For February 2023 Alberta sits at 3.6 per cent compared to 5.2 per cent nationally, and this difference is directly linked to our affordability measures, including our electricity rebates and fuel tax relief, measures which are saving Albertans hundreds of dollars and lowering inflation. Alberta continues to lead the way. I'm proud to be part of a government with the best . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister. Given that we inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite that required tough decisions throughout this term to get the province back on track and given that we can't address the needs of today if we have to mortgage our future by borrowing from future generations and further given that we want to position the province well to respond to potential future crises, to the Minister of Finance: can you tell this House how responsible fiscal management fights inflation and secures our future?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very appropriate question. Responsible fiscal management matters. I've been on the record – and I truly believe this to be true – that the best thing governments can do during times of inflation is spend less, borrow less, and tax less. That's why we're suspending the fuel tax as a permanent feature in Alberta's economy. That's why we reduced our debt this year by \$13.4 billion, saving Albertans \$560 million in debt-service costs. Responsible management matters. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:10 Energy Company Liability

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that if you make a mess, you clean it up; that is, unless you're the Premier's friend. Then what's clear is that you get paid off with Albertans' money to clean it up. That's the premise of the Premier's R-star program, that offers up to \$20 billion in royalty credits for a small number of bad companies to clean up their own messes. This is a giant waste of Albertans' money, especially at a time when our health care system is in crisis and Albertans are struggling to make ends meet. Why is this government prioritizing their friends over Albertans?

Mr. Guthrie: You know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP are desperate. It's obvious. They can't find their footing, and their followers are

getting frustrated with their Dumpster-fire campaign. With the lack of traction, they're just trying to manufacture a crisis. There is no program, Mr. Speaker, and there's nothing in the budget, but that doesn't matter to the NDP. If they keep repeating it, then it must be true. The people of this province: they can see through this trash, and it's exactly why they cannot be trusted. On this side of the House we will remain focused on making life more affordable for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, hidden agendas are hidden. That's what we're trying to speak to today.

Given that the president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta said that the Premier's \$20 billion giveaway is how a fox would design a henhouse and given that Scotiabank has said that the Premier's plan could create "negative public sentiment toward the [oil and gas industry]" and that it "goes against the core capitalist principle that private companies should take full responsibility for the liabilities they willingly accept," why is this government so intent on wasting \$20 billion of Albertans' money?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, it should be understood by everyone that the NDP want to see an end to fossil fuel production. We know that our producers are good stewards of the environment. Methane reductions: 44 per cent; oil sands emissions reductions: over 35 per cent. The Pathways Alliance has a goal to be net neutral by 2050, and all of these come with billions of dollars of capital investment, and all of these are done above and beyond mandatory closure limits. The NDP's ideology only paves a way to poverty.

Member Ceci: Given that the government has not yet held public consultations on this \$20 billion giveaway – all they've done is hold a few closed-door meetings with a select group of people and friends – and given that the Premier lobbied for this giveaway before becoming Premier and hired another lobbyist into her office to orchestrate this giveaway and given that the minister has said that there won't be anymore details about this handout until after the election, why is this government hiding this \$20 billion giveaway from Albertans? Are they too scared to run on it? Run on it.

Mr. Guthrie: Let me provide you with a proof point here, one regarding the provincial board of the NDP. On this board sits Gil McGowan of the Alberta Federation of Labour, who was supposed to be a champion of Alberta workers, but, Mr. Speaker, that's not the case. He opposed Trans Mountain. He opposed Energy East, opposed Keystone, opposed Northern Gateway, opposed the Alberta Clipper, and that's not all. In 2016 the NDP appointed him co-chair of a committee to diversify the oil and gas sector, and by diversify we mean eliminate, one more reason the NDP cannot be trusted. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The minister has had his opportunity to answer the question. Now it's time for the Official Opposition House Leader to ask hers.

WCB Cancer Coverage for Firefighters

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's first responders are heroes, and this is something we can all agree on. We remember the support that Albertans had for the heroes of the 2016 Wood Buffalo wildfire, who put themselves at great risk to protect communities and people. The very last thing these heroes need is to worry about whether they will have access to WCB coverage. They deserve the

peace of mind to know that if they fall ill due to work, they will not have to fight or wait for coverage. I have an amendment to introduce this afternoon that will provide this peace of mind. I've shared it with the minister more than a week ago. Will he rethink his opposition and support it?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member and the member's hard work, and I did have an opportunity to see the amendment. I'll just say this, that we're going to make sure that no firefighters are left behind on WCB coverage in Fort McMurray. We're going to make sure that all firefighters, all emergency services personnel are respected properly but also make sure that WCB and the people that support it, which, of course, are the employers of Alberta, are treated respectfully. All of our decisions are evidence based, something different than they've ever done before.

Ms Gray: Given that the WCB is a partnership between workers and employers and given that this debate should be about the firefighters and their families, who are worried that Bill 9 may exclude them, and given the stress and the sacrifice these firefighters put into saving communities from the Beast, they deserve better than a bill that may leave some behind. Given that the government doesn't need to do any work – they just need to listen to firefighters and support an amendment that's already been drafted – can the red tape minister explain why he doesn't think that every hero of the Fort McMurray wildfire deserves the confidence to know that they will be covered for occupational cancers?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, WCB has a fairness review, and they make sure that these cases, as they come forward, are treated fairly. That's exactly what we're going to make sure happens. We've already sent a clear indication to WCB what needs to be done in this particular case, and there's more good news coming. I just wish the member would be a little bit patient. I mean, after all, she was the minister in charge of this file when that particular person that was in that fire died from cancer, and she was the minister that could have made the change. She didn't make the change because she knew it was the wrong thing to do at the time. We're doing the right thing. We'll continue to support firefighters in Alberta.

Ms Gray: Given that the UCP has been in government for four years and has done nothing and given that we have a bill in front of the House today that we can amend and make better and given that this should not be about politics – it should be about what's best for our heroic front-line responders, who deserve better than a fairness review – and given that Ontario has shown retroactive coverage is absolutely possible, can the minister explain why he is fine with denying coverage to a single one of the firefighters who were there in 2016 fighting that wildfire? Let me assure him that an Alberta NDP government will correct this failure.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the member has said that she doesn't want to play politics. Well, she's playing politics. She had the chance, she had the ability to sign on the dotted line, and she didn't. You know why? Because it was the wrong thing to do. We are doing the right thing. There is more good news coming. The firefighters in Alberta are going to be extremely happy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Allergy Awareness and Supports

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, anaphylactic reactions are allergic reactions that can cause severe effects, up to and including loss of life. Severe allergies are often to food, environment, sometimes to

bees and wasps. Thousands of Albertans, including myself, live with severe allergies, and reactions can occur unexpectedly. Can the Minister of Health please share with this Assembly the importance of the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act, that was passed earlier in this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. In 2019 the government of Alberta passed the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act. The act requires schools to maintain an epinephrine autoinjector within the school for use if a student becomes anaphylactic. This, along with the Canadian anaphylaxis readiness education training program, provides teachers and administrators in all public, separate, charter, private, and francophone schools in Alberta with quick information and access to EpiPens when needed.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, given that thousands of Albertans live with severe, life-threatening allergies, with effects ranging from skin irritations, hives, severe stomach pain and upset, choking, and loss of life, and given that often people do not know they have a life-threatening allergy as this can develop at any time, can the minister please provide the Assembly with an overview of the measures this government has taken to help protect the lives and health of Albertans living with severe allergies and other related conditions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. As I noted earlier, we did pass the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act, which requires schools to maintain an EpiPen within the school for use if a student becomes anaphylactic. We also provide education about the causes, signs, and symptoms of anaphylaxis and what steps people can take if someone is experiencing issues, including calling emergency services for help when needed.

2:20

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, given that schools are not the only public spaces where someone may have their first anaphylactic reaction and that someone having an anaphylactic reaction may not have epinephrine with them and given that B.C., New Brunswick, and 35 of the 50 American states are beginning to allow for epinephrine to be stored in public spaces, can the minister please look into whether or not it would be beneficial for Alberta to follow their lead and allow entities the freedom to store epinephrine in public spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for her advocacy on this issue. Certainly, our government can explore what other jurisdictions have implemented through legislation and see what lessons can be learned to improve our response. We know that epinephrine is a powerful drug and, if administered incorrectly or for an inappropriate purpose, may result in harm or even death. Proper instruction on recognizing anaphylaxis, proper use of EpiPens, and emergency steps to follow are critical and not being overlooked, but we're happy to do the research and work with the hon. member.

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

School Construction in Northeast Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community of Redstone in Calgary needs a school. It's a vibrant and growing community with young families who deserve access to top-quality education in their neighbourhood, but this government has completely ignored this need. It is disgraceful. Luckily, come May, Redstone will get its school moving if Alberta's NDP is elected as government. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why have you ignored the needs of children and families living in northeast Calgary?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite needs to do his homework. In fact, we have provided more schools in Calgary than the NDP did. During the four years under the NDP, they only built 11 projects or announced 11 projects. We are over 18 projects and six for the CBE alone this year.

Mr. Sabir: Given that I have done my homework and that it takes about three years to build a school, which means the community of Redstone is going to have to be without a school for some time, and given that government knew about the need for a school in northeast Calgary but chose to ignore it and given that the Alberta NDP is proud to support education in this province and build schools in growing communities, can the Minister of Infrastructure explain why they only approved one new school in Alberta's largest city this year and nothing for the growing community of Redstone?

Member LaGrange: Well, I'm not sure how he does his homework, but he would get an F on it because, Mr. Speaker, Calgary was approved for a new elementary school in Redstone, also for a new K to 9 school in Nolan Hill, a new Catholic school in Chestermere, a new high school in Rangeview, a new Bishop McNally high school. We're continuing to fund more and more schools than the NDP ever did, 106 over four years; the NDP, 47.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the students and families who live in northeast Calgary clearly do not matter to this government and given that the UCP school capital plan ignores the need of northeast Calgary and given that the UCP has turned their back on students, staff, and families all across this province by ignoring the capital needs of school boards, will the Minister of Infrastructure explain to Calgarians and all Albertans why he's okay with stuffing students in ever more crowded classrooms instead of building the new school that we need?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, shame on them. Shame on them for politicizing our children. Shame on them, because we've added hundreds of millions of dollars to operating budgets in Calgary alone. We are adding an additional 11 school projects in Calgary in this year alone. Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Francophone Services and Education

Ms Renaud: Cette première ministre a bâti un cabinet énorme, et elle a créé douze postes de secrétaires parlementaires, mais elle a choisi d'ignorer la communauté francophone. Le recensement de 2021 nous a appris qu'il y a plus de 260,000 albertains qui connaît le français. Ma question pour le ministre de culture: pourquoi ne pas nommer un secrétaire parlementaire pour les francophones quand il sait que c'est une communauté énorme?

Mr. Glubish: M. le Président, notre gouvernement est un allié avec la communauté francophone.

Mr. Speaker, I am a proud speaker of French, I'm a minister in this cabinet, and I work very closely with the Premier and with her entire cabinet to represent the government to the francophone community across this province. We care deeply about Franco-Albertans. We care about their future, and we value their contributions to this province, and we will continue to operate in that fashion.

Ms Renaud: Le gouvernement a coupé le financement du Campus Saint-Jean et plus tard combat l'association canadienne française d'Alberta devant les tribunaux pour défendre leurs coupures. C'est un droit constitutionnel d'avoir accès aux programmes universitaires en français, mais le PCU ne respecte pas la constitution ni la loi. Le ministre, va-t-il s'excuser pour leur mauvaise décision? Oui ou non?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, there is a current court case ongoing, and we will not comment on an ongoing court case. That is completely unacceptable.

But what I can tell you is that our government cares deeply about Campus Saint-Jean and the role that they play in our postsecondary institution. Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of being there just last week to speak with them and to explore the topic of scientific research in Alberta but doing so in the first language of French. We know it's important for Franco-Albertans to be able to participate in Alberta in all aspects of society but to do that in the language that they were born and raised in, and we will be committed to working with them to make that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Les Albertains doivent avoir accès à l'éducation en français. C'est un droit constitutionnel. Les données de recensement montrent qu'il y a un besoin croissant d'éducation en français. On sait qu'il n'y a pas assez d'enseignants francophones, et quand même ce gouvernement attaque le Campus Saint-Jean. Le ministre responsable pour les questions francophones, va-t-il expliquer aux Albertains francophones qui veulent leurs enfants soient éduqués en français pourquoi l'école francophone n'est pas une priorité pour ce gouvernement?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again the members opposite seem to ignore the record. Under the NDP they only built four schools for the francophone community. We've already allocated 10. While the members opposite don't want to hear this, they actually took apart, they got rid of the francophone directorate that was under my purview, under my department. We recreated that under the French-language service branch. We added the francophone equivalency grant, the French-language service branch. We keep going and working with the francophone community. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Education Funding and Parental Choice

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As families flock to Alberta to gain a better financial future, even more children will be looking to attend one of the many schools and options that our province offers. I've got a brief question for the Minister of Education: what is our government doing to ensure that every family has a place to send their child to school while also ensuring that school authorities are properly equipped to receive the increase in students?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2023 adds an almost \$2 billion increase over three years to education operating, with \$820 million specifically going to support enrolment growth. This funding will support school authorities to hire more additional staff, including teachers and classroom supports. On top of this significant investment, the supplemental enrolment grant will also continue next year, which provides additional funding for school authorities facing enrolment growth above a certain threshold. This grant provides more than \$21 million in additional funding to school authorities, and it will continue next year.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for the answer. Given that many new students are coming to our province and will find a seat in an Alberta classroom, we know that classrooms may become increasingly complex. Also given that many students in Alberta have diverse cognitive, social, and emotional needs – some may have learning disabilities or behavioural challenges, and others may need extra support learning English as an additional language – to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure all students are set up for success?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to let you know that we are providing \$126 million over three years to address class size complexity and enable school authorities to hire more educational assistants or increase their hours, provide more training opportunities for staff, and/or hire specialists such as counsellors, psychologists, and interpreters. Students with learning disabilities or behavioural challenges or those who need extra support in English as an additional language will benefit from this funding. This is part of \$1.5 billion in Budget 2023 that will go to support our most vulnerable students. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. member.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is a province that offers choice in education and supports parent choice and given that choice includes publicly funded Catholic education, alternative programs, charter and independent schools, can the same minister please tell this House how choice in education has been supported under Budget 2023, and how does this contrast with how it was treated under the previous government?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I've heard many of the members opposite repeatedly share inaccuracies about education funding. In Budget 2023 our government is making historic investments in education. Make no mistake; the members opposite want to eliminate choice. They do not support public charter schools, independent schools, or home education. I was president of the ACSTA under the NDP government, and let me assure this House that the greatest threat to publicly funded, authentically Catholic education under the NDP was the NDP. On this side of the House we stand for families and students and for choice in education. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Seniors' Support

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP government has a very sad record when it comes to standing up for Alberta seniors. One of their first moves was cutting the seniors' benefit, imposing new fees on home care,

and throwing 60,000 Albertans off the seniors' drug plan, and let's not forget the plans the Premier has to get her hands on their pensions. Now the UCP is hiking accommodation rates for seniors living in continuing care. Can the minister explain why he feels that seniors need to bear these extra costs?

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud of our government. Just today we're taking action to support more households with affordable housing and stronger foundations and working with seniors. Our affordable housing partnership program is providing nearly \$66 million to support 11 projects across the province. The funding will support hundreds of families, individuals, children, volunteers, veterans, seniors, and those recovering from addictions. It's a great program.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that raising these fees is just the latest in punishing policies imposed by the UCP onto seniors who worked to build Alberta and given that seniors are already concerned because of the decision of the UCP to eliminate the Seniors Advocate, whose role it was to fight for seniors, and given that once upon a time the Premier herself supported having a Seniors Advocate, that she insisted had to be independent, why did the Premier abandon her support for an independent Seniors Advocate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, and we've spoken many times in this House, you know, we focused on – given that much of the work that the Seniors Advocate was doing was health related, we combined that office with the Health Advocate and the Alberta mental health advocate, and we also brought staff over from that office. That staff today continues to provide services to seniors to be able to refer them to the program. I'm proud of the work our government is doing supporting seniors, particularly in terms of the billion dollars we're spending to transform our continuing care sector. We're going to continue to support seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this UCP government has deferred this hike of the accommodation charges to right after the election and given that this is just another example of the UCP springing a pile of new costs and fees onto Albertans right after the polls are closed, why won't the minister tell seniors the whole story about how expensive a UCP government is and will be for them before they cast their vote?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that's actually looking after seniors. As the hon. member already knows, fees go up with the consumer price index. We recognized how difficult it would be for seniors if the fees went up, so we actually subsidized those fees this year, you know, to be able to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member had her opportunity to ask the question. The hon. minister can answer it.

Mr. Copping: We subsidized those fees so that they only went up a small portion, and we continue to bear those costs associated with it. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my cabinet colleagues to continue to support seniors and make sure the cost of living doesn't go up as high and they can afford it.

School Construction in North Edmonton

Mr. Nielsen: Edmonton-Decore is home to all three high schools in all of north Edmonton. Queen Elizabeth high school opened in 1958, Archbishop O'Leary opened up in 1960, and M.E. LaZerte opened up in 1969. All of them are full. Queen Elizabeth and O'Leary are, in fact, over capacity. Much to the surprise of no one, the UCP failed to invest even a single dollar in upgrading or replacing these schools. Can the Infrastructure minister explain if he has an issue with north Edmonton, and if not, why is he ignoring the needs of the students there?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I have to correct the members opposite. The public school division this year alone received their top five asks for schools. We worked really hard with the Edmonton public school division because in the previous years they weren't actually prioritizing schools that needed to be built in high-growth areas, and the other ones that they had prioritized were actually good schools that did not have health and safety issues, that were not in high-priority areas. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore is the only one with the call.

Mr. Nielsen: That's not what I heard from those boards.

Given that the board chair of Edmonton public says that it will be out of high school space by 2027 but given that the attitude of this minister is that the students of north Edmonton should just get used to their overcrowded classrooms since this government is in no rush to build schools that they need and given that while the minister talks about the process of building schools, he's cheerleading the Premier's plan to hand over \$20 billion to bad companies that refuse to clean up their own messes, can the Infrastructure minister explain why he feels these companies who don't follow their legal obligation are more deserving than Alberta students?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, from 2015 to 2019, under the NDP watch, Edmonton only received eight new projects. Under our watch we've already allocated 16 new projects. I have to wonder if Edmonton public schools . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The minister is the one with the call.

Member LaGrange: I have to wonder if the Edmonton public school division isn't playing politics as well because their vice-chair is running for the NDP, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nielsen: Two hundred and forty-four new and modernized schools, I know, at least while I was there.

Given that we will be out of . . .

The Speaker: No, no, no. No preamble. This is the point, why there is the no-preamble rule, so that you don't do exactly what you just did.

The hon. member can continue directly to his question.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that we will be out of high school space in 2027 and given that rather than solving that, the minister and government play the blame game to cover their failure to properly support students in my constituency and all of north Edmonton and given

that the Premier has tens of thousands of dollars to sole-source contracts for a campaign manager and nearly \$10 million to spend to promote her government right before an election, can the Infrastructure minister explain why there's money for the Premier's friends while north Edmonton students are ignored?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the members opposite need to go and do their homework. Edmonton public school division's overall increase to their overall budget, which is \$1.1 billion: they're going to see almost \$66 million additional dollars just to their operating budget. They have over \$28 million in their operating reserves and over \$41 million in their capital reserves. We are making sure that all school divisions across this province are well resourced, well funded, and ready for students.

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

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are emerging from a global pandemic, Albertans are struggling to find the support they need. The mental health of Albertans is essential to proper growth and development, and it is crucial in building and maintaining healthy communities. If passed, Budget 2023 will invest a record-breaking \$275 million for mental health and addiction support. Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction explain what this funding will do for Albertans?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I just want to reiterate that, if passed, Budget 2023 would provide a record-breaking investment of \$270 million in funding for the Mental Health and Addiction ministry. This is an increase of over 200 per cent from when the NDP was in power. This funding will support key priorities like continuing to build recovery-oriented systems of care across Alberta, that will ensure every Albertan has the opportunity to be supported in their pursuit of recovery from addiction and mental health challenges no matter where they are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that youth in our province have been hit hard these past few years in relation to pandemic restrictions and unconventional learning techniques and given that assisting our youth is one of the top priorities this government has planned for 2023, can the same minister explain what new assistance is available to support youth and children with their mental health and how we can better promote early intervention?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the hon. member for the question. As stated by the hon. member, again, Alberta's youth is one of the top priorities for this government, and that includes their mental health. Through Budget 2023 the province has provided \$2.4 million to Kids Help Phone for children and youth to access professional counselling and crisis services. Our government is also investing \$10.8 million over three years to continue expanding youth mental health hubs across Alberta to help improve youth mental wellness. In addition, we are partnering with CASA, a recent announcement that I made of \$92 million.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that recovery is possible and everyone should be supported throughout their personal mental health and addiction journey and given that our government is working towards modernizing Alberta's primary health care system and further given that this government is planning to transform how addiction and mental health services are treated, can the same minister please explain what Albertans can expect with a more modernized primary health care system and with an Alberta model of care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question to the member. I am working closely, of course, with the Minister of Health to ensure that we modernize Alberta's primary care system. We are supporting recovery and mental health and addiction challenges. Noted was the Alberta model, a model that's getting attention from across the world. People are calling us and asking us how we're experiencing the successes that we are through the recovery-oriented system of care that we have been building out throughout the province. We have taken historic steps such as removing user fees, making counselling services available, affordable, and accessible across the province. VODP is an award-winning program, treatment on demand.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 209, the Animal Protection (Prevention of Animal Neglect) Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by yours truly, myself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of Bill 208, the Municipal Government (Tourism Community Designation) Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by myself.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a number of letters from my constituents who are speaking out for the protection of the Athabasca watershed, calling on this government to work with Indigenous communities in the area. All of these letters were sent before the news of the Kearl tailings leak, so they're more timely than ever, and we'd be wise to heed their warning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today. That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Spring Sitting

25. Mr. Schow moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2023 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the

Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

The Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 25. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) this is not a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 11 requests a total of \$57.4 billion from the general revenue fund, consistent with Budget '23, consistent with the budget I presented in this House on February 28. This will add a total of \$180 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$57.2 billion for the government to meet funding commitments as laid out in the '23-24 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the '23-24 government estimates. The government's funding will provide for \$50 billion in expense, \$3.9 billion for capital investment, \$1.5 billion for financial transactions, and \$1.5 billion for contingencies.

Mr. Chair, I ask all my colleagues in the Assembly to support this bill, and I request to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments that would like to be offered? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 12 will provide authority for government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year.

Again I ask all of my colleagues in this Legislative Assembly to support this bill, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to add comments, questions, or amendments in respect to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I've actually lost track of how many red tape reduction acts we've had, so I was going to say number 5, number 7, number 8, number 12.

The odd thing I will just mention – because, hopefully, this is the last time I'm speaking to an omnibus piece of legislation called "red tape reduction." You know, it's become sort of a generic term for the UCP government to try to jam in things that would in some circumstances be considered miscellaneous statutes amendments and then in some cases to do things for performative reasons and then sometimes to do legitimate – I believe sometimes there is some legitimacy, but it's often, like, crammed in with other pieces that are completely irrelevant or problematic. I think some of these pieces could be worthy of their own pieces of legislation and conversation, but they try to put it all together into these omnibus pieces of legislation so that Albertans can't really know what's happening.

2:50

This piece of legislation, this omnibus piece of legislation, does change up to 15, if I'm correct, pieces of legislation, some of them that seem, you know, pretty innocuous. If I have some time, I'll go back to those ones, but I do want to talk a little bit about some of the changes that are, I think, worthy of a little bit of debate and discussion. Here in Committee of the Whole is an opportune time to do that kind of discussion, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin with some of the changes that are very small in this bill but that are made to the Income and Employment Supports Act. As I said, this is a very small change in the actual bill, but it does make a change that I think is worthy of discussion. It says, for example – it's section 5 of the bill, and it amends the Income and Employment Supports Act to add a provision. The provision is essentially – and I'll read it into the record, Mr. Chair. It says:

Consequences of outstanding warrant

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

What this does is essentially say that, you know, an individual can be refused – in fact, it says "must" be refused by the director – income support benefits if that individual has an outstanding warrant issued against them.

I think in principle we can somewhat understand this kind of a change and the idea of, you know, one of the ways that we compel people is that we have warrants, essentially, basically, meaning an individual can be brought before the court if found to appear before the court – a court for various reasons; let me just add that. I'll get back to that point. But why should an individual who has an outstanding warrant be eligible for financial support? I can understand that there is some fundamental thinking about that: if somebody's got an outstanding warrant, maybe they shouldn't be entitled to government supports.

However, there's a little bit more, I think, nuance and detail to that that I think we need to better understand because, for one thing, as it stands right now, it does say that it's a warrant that is issued for a prescribed offence. Later on in Bill 9 it sets out that there will be the ability to prescribe offences for the purposes of this act, but until that's decided, in terms of which offences are considered prescribed offences, we have to be clear that bench warrants are issued all the time for individuals simply for nonappearance in court.

A bench warrant is essentially, you know, ordered where somebody fails to appear in court. It means you've missed a scheduled trial date, you've missed an appearance, and the judge issues a bench warrant. Sometimes those are not for significant offences. Sometimes they're minor offences. That individual may

not even know that they've missed an appearance, so they may have a bench warrant issued against them, and they may not be aware of it. I think it's important that we are not further penalizing and isolating and ostracizing folks who may, through – we know the complexities of the court system are hard for many people to navigate, especially if there are language barriers, especially if there are educational barriers, to really understand.

I would hate to see that there are people who genuinely, with no ill intent, may have a bench warrant that's been issued against them, yet now they're being cut off from very critical income supports, which really just furthers, perpetuates that disadvantage that they're experiencing and can further isolate them and create more strain at a time when – I mean, I think this would be the case no matter when we're talking about this – we know that many Albertans are struggling with cost of living right now. We know many Albertans are struggling with finding appropriate housing, with being able to pay their cellphone bills, with being able to, you know, afford transit, and all of those pieces. I don't think it's appropriate to be basically piling on more disadvantage and isolation to folks who may not be aware.

Now, again, there are circumstances where I think we would all agree that there are individuals who, when there is a warrant issued, should not be eligible for government supports. I see that in other jurisdictions, in other provinces. They've been more specific about what kinds of offences: serious offences, right? If there was somebody who has a warrant issued because of a serious criminal offence, I think there can be some consensus here that we don't believe that that person should then be getting income supports.

So I guess my concern around Bill 9 is that we don't yet know what offences will be captured by this, and we want to be sure that we are addressing the problem in a very targeted way to make sure that those individuals who have warrants issued on serious criminal offences are the ones who will not be eligible for income supports. That's just one piece that I wanted to mention about that.

The other piece is that I'm also conscious that we do not want to be in any way penalizing family members who may be innocent of any wrongdoing whatsoever, you know, when perhaps the individual who has a warrant issued against them is perhaps the only – is financially supporting the household. This can be very detrimental for children, for spouses of somebody, for partners of an individual. Again, if we're going to do this kind of action, I believe it should be very specific and targeted so that we are not punishing and further pushing into poverty those individuals who are at no fault whatsoever but may have the unfortunate reality of living with somebody who has a warrant issued out for them.

I'm wondering what measures are being taken, especially because the proposed amendment to the act in this bill is prescriptive. It doesn't say that the director has discretion; it says that "the Director must, subject to the regulations, refuse to provide income support." So what abilities are there for the director to take into consideration that there may be individuals who are dependent – children, family members – on that person and who are really being hurt by that decision to prevent that person from applying for income supports?

You know, I think there are some other questions that we kind of need to ask about looking at what other jurisdictions have done and what has been effective and what has not been effective. Have there been conversations done with those who work on the ground with those who receive income supports? There are so many organizations, both in Edmonton and Calgary and across the province, who work very closely with those who rely on income supports, and I think those conversations are important.

As well as to note, you know, is this an effective way of ensuring that – does that compel individuals to then, I guess, appear for

warrants or, basically, stand up and be subject to whatever the trial proceeding or court proceeding is? I guess what I'm asking is: does that work? Perhaps that has been done, that analysis has been done, and I look forward to hearing from a UCP minister, either the minister who tabled this bill or the ones responsible for the income supports act, to address that question of how effective this is as a mechanism.

I want to also talk a little bit about the changes that have been made in the act to the Petty Trespass Act. This is an example, Mr. Chair, I believe, of an amendment that is performative at best and wildly likely to be incredibly ineffective. At worst it could actually create greater tension and – I don't know – put some federal workers in very difficult situations as a result of the rhetoric around this change more so than the change itself. You know, Bill 9, under the Petty Trespass Act, basically amends the Petty Trespass Act to include the statement: "This Act binds the Government of Canada." That's what it does. It says that the government of Canada is bound by the Petty Trespass Act, which has always been the case. It always will be the case. It is completely unnecessary for this to be even included in the bill because it's pretty much completely unnecessary.

Of course, we know that the reason behind – and we saw some very awkward, I have to say, press conferences with the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. A really embarrassing performance at a press conference. When asked, really, "What does this change?" the response was: it really doesn't change much of anything; it's clarifying the situation. What this is – it's not even anything that has to do with Alberta, Mr. Chair. You know, sometimes I wonder if the members on the other side are angling for federal politics or they want to be Saskatchewan MLAs. I'm not sure what's going on, but half the time they're not even talking about things that have to do with Alberta.

3:00

This is a perfect example. This was really one case in Saskatchewan, that I don't even remember the details of other than it didn't really turn out to be much of anything, but everybody in Saskatchewan, all the conservatives in Saskatchewan got their hands up in a roar of, you know, federal employees trespassing on private property. I understand that not one single UCP minister has been able to point to a single instance of this being a concern in Alberta. When asked, they could not come up with an example. They're creating a – I don't know, this is a made-up problem, and this is a made-up response and a made-up answer to it. Fine. They want to play games; they can do that on their own time. It's really annoying to do it on Albertans' time and, frankly, on our time. I've got so many other things to be doing, but here I am talking to this.

This is just an example, Mr. Chair, of how this government is consistently performing but not actually delivering. They've done that in so many instances when it comes to the federal government. They're very good at throwing tantrums and writing strongly worded letters and now, in this case, passing a completely redundant amendment, but what have they delivered for Albertans on that front? We've had four years, Mr. Chair, of watching the silly tantrums and antics of this government that has failed to deliver.

I think fondly to why I ran. I think we're all doing a little bit of self-reflection, right? We're at the end of a four-year term. We're looking at re-election for some of us, some of us are choosing to retire, and, you know, we're doing a little bit of reflection. I go back to one of the reasons why I ran in 2019. I had multiple reasons, but one of them was watching as an outsider, not politically active at all from 2015 to 2019 and watching the Premier at that time deliver on something that I knew would make a big difference for Albertans and having to do it by having conversations, negotiating, pressuring, and that was

forcing, essentially, or convincing the federal government to buy TMX. That was something that was pretty critical for our economy, and that was something that the former Premier was able to do, actually deliver something from the federal government for Albertans.

If the UCP wants to continue to do their performative antics, that's fine. I mean, I guess this is the nonsense that we've dealt with for four years. I guess I have the patience to go through it for another couple of days. Really, it's not delivering anything. It's a waste of time, but if they get to pat themselves on their backs and say, "Hey, we passed a piece of legislative change that will do absolutely nothing," good on them, I suppose, Mr. Chair.

What I do want to point out is that hyping up that rhetoric, that there is actually some wrong that they're trying to address here, is actually going to put at risk Albertans, Albertans who do work for the federal government, Albertans who – because there are many of them; there are thousands in this province who work for the federal government who are Albertans – do things like census, who do things like implement surveillance or other kinds of work pursuant to federal legislation, legitimate federal legislation. They perform that work because that is their responsibility to meet those standards. This kind of rhetoric is going to be dangerous, I believe, for some of them, and I don't think that this government cares too much about that. They just care about, I guess, looking like they're doing something even though they're not actually doing something.

I had to put some comments on – as I mentioned, Mr. Chair, there are other pieces of legislation that are amended by this act. Most of them are innocuous, but I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a lot to say. I share her concerns around the changes to WCB and making sure that all firefighters – all firefighters – are provided the supports and the coverage that they deserve. I should think that would be something that all members of this House can get on board with. I look forward to hearing a more fulsome discussion about that and to supporting any amendment that would ensure that every brave firefighter who fought in Fort McMurray on behalf of all Albertans – they deserve to be recognized and have their health conditions recognized and covered. It's, quite literally, Mr. Chair, the smallest thing we can do compared to what they gave to all of us. I look forward to having that discussion further.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any others wishing to speak to the bill? Oh, I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, in committee. I want to continue with some of the comments that I shared with this House yesterday when we were in second reading. Again, you know, just to add to my colleague's excellent comments about being exhausted by these omnibus bills, they really just inflict a lot of damage in a lot of ways in that they hide some things, some changes that this government is making in this great big piece of legislation, that does do a few things that are probably good to do – things to fix, things to alter – but what they also do is put in some other things that are sometimes performative and sometimes have the ability to create or cause harm.

One of the areas that my colleague talked about is the changes to income support. Now, certainly, I would agree that there are some warrants for some crimes. There are, absolutely, some people that I don't think should be eligible for government support, but I don't think that we should leave this government with all of the power to come up with this list behind closed doors. They've demonstrated

to us over and over again that they don't seem to have the best interests of Albertans in mind when they're making decisions. They seem to have their own political futures front of mind as opposed to the best interest of Albertans. We've seen repeatedly over the last four years that this government makes decisions that are questionable at best.

Let's say that the government proceeds, and they likely will because, obviously, they have a majority. They have the ability to change whatever they like for now, for a few more weeks. But there are some issues that I don't believe that they've thought of. They've demonstrated to us that they make these decisions like that, without a lot of thought, without a lot of consultation, and certainly without a lot of data and research.

Taking you back, in 2019 this government set us on a course to make poverty worse. That's just a fact, Mr. Chair. They deindexed benefits, all kinds of benefits, not just benefits for severely handicapped individuals, who rely on AISH, but also people who rely on income support and also the seniors' benefit. I won't even get into more income taxes that all of us had to pay because of their sneaky work. But this is what they did.

They started us on a path to make poverty worse. Not just that; they chose not to aggressively invest in affordable housing. They chose not to aggressively invest in preventative social services, and we are seeing things that have happened as a result. We know that food bank usage has exploded right across the province. That's a fact. Just google any report. The Food Banks Canada report is right there. It will tell you the increase. Every food bank is feeling the pressure.

We also know that there are more people in Alberta that don't have homes than ever before, and that is a direct result of changes that this government has made. Now, I will say that, yes, certainly the pandemic also played a role; it played a significant role. But this government almost did everything that they could to make things even harder.

Let me give you an example of somebody on AISH. Let's say that I'm a person with a severe disability, and I qualify for AISH. I receive that benefit. I decide at some point in my life to get married. Now my spouse's income is taken into account when the calculation is made for what I will receive from AISH; there are clawbacks. During the pandemic, let's say, my spouse lost their job and needed to go on EI or got a CERB benefit. Well, it was likely an overpayment because they were probably getting more than they were before – a lot of low-income people, unfortunately, live on AISH – so that income was clawed back.

We know right now, Mr. Chair, there are many, many Albertans that are AISH recipients or income support recipients that are on a repayment plan. That means that they're having money taken out of their deposits every single month to pay back an overpayment because their spouse, perhaps, lost their job and earned more on EI or CERB – for sure CERB – and now it's getting clawed back from AISH or income support. That is the reality, but get this. This government is giving them \$100 affordability cheques right till the election. So they get \$100, but they're losing \$100 to pay back clawback that this government did not fix. They knew about it. We asked repeatedly about it. They chose not to fix it. So they did not make life better for Albertans.

Now this very vulnerable group – and for the most part the group on income support is quite vulnerable. To be eligible for income support, you pretty much need to be destitute. You can't have a lot of savings; you can have a vehicle to get to and from work and things, but you can't have much. You need to have exhausted all other supports before you apply and are eligible for income support. So imagine that you have a director now that is making decisions

about warrants and is just going to say: yeah; if there's an outstanding warrant, you are no longer eligible, or you are cut off.

3:10

And, like my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud said, it's likely that some people wouldn't even know. They don't even know that they have interacted with the justice system and there's a warrant for their arrest. That income support will cease, and then the harm becomes worse. That cycle of poverty becomes worse, and you know what happens? [interjection] They're scoffing over there, which is a bit weird. When it becomes worse, it is more expensive on health care. We know this. Emergency rooms get packed. People go without treatment for mental illnesses, all kinds of treatment. More people are homeless. There are all kinds of problems. Policing: there are more demands on policing because there are more issues. All of these things compound and eventually cost more money. If you invest properly in poverty reduction, and investing properly means not taking away – that is key here: poverty reduction. When that is top of mind, poverty reduction happens. This kind of stuff is really just performative.

Let's talk about people on income support and some of the issues. Now, it shouldn't surprise anyone in this place that there are likely many people that are reliant on government supports that have unresolved legal issues. The social and economic cost of unresolved legal problems and various gaps in access to justice are hard to estimate, but there is no doubt whatsoever that they are substantial, and the costs are sometimes transferred to other sectors, as I said, including personal health, public health, public housing, child care, and so much more. Considering the costs and barriers associated with accessing justice, it is – and we know this – marginalized populations due to intersectional barriers they face.

Now, I'm going to give you this example, and this is just one, likely, that we all can picture. In general, homeless populations are groups of people that do not have homes, face enhanced vulnerability due to mental health conditions and increased potential to become homeless. Chances are that they may at some point end up with a warrant, but think about this. Homelessness stems from poverty and social inequity. Criminalizing homeless populations often creates more disadvantage and does, in fact, contribute to cycles of poverty. I'm telling you this information – and this is actually data that you can look for yourselves. Instead of just scoffing, you can actually do a little bit of research and educate yourselves – I'm speaking to the members opposite – to find out what you could do to make these issues better instead of worse, because this government has shown a propensity for making things worse.

My colleague talked about the impacts on families. For sure, if somebody's on income support and, let's say, there is a warrant, and they are either cut off or not put on in the first place, that is going to impact families. Not just that, but we know – because nobody can live on what income support pays. Let's just be honest about that. Income support, the one program, barriers for employment, is under \$900 a month; the other program is even less. Nobody can live on that. It's just a fact. However, if you take that away, you are going to make issues worse, and so many people on income support already have precarious housing, right? Very often there is a track record of inability to fully pay their rent, let's say, on time if they've skipped a month or if they've been late and they've been warned, perhaps. Now, let's just point out that this government put a lot of people at risk when they decided to change the payment date for AISH and income support to make their books look better a few years ago and had to reverse it because the Auditor General busted them, but people pay their rent late, and there are ramifications to that.

This piece of legislation has the potential to be as damaging unless this government, I think, takes the time to consult with the appropriate people, do a little bit of research, and make sure that their list of crimes is appropriate, make sure that they have some safeties in place for family members, particularly children, if there are older parents, perhaps dependants, dependent adults even, that are being taken care of by the recipient. It is so important that that work gets done because we have seen four years of things that have happened. I don't think, actually, that government sets out to harm people. I don't believe that that's their intent, but that's what their legislation and their regulation and their policy changes have done, inflicted harm to very vulnerable populations. I would suggest that people on income support are pretty vulnerable, so I do worry about this.

In many cases we know that poverty and criminality are in a perpetual cycle with each other. That is just a fact. On the one hand I understand that there are some people that should not get government assistance because they chose to engage in criminal activity. On the other hand, you know, I need to know that this government has done their homework in terms of ensuring that things that they're changing or legislation they're bringing in or regulations they're changing will not inadvertently cause more harm to Albertans. We have just seen that happen far too many times, Mr. Chair, that I am worried that this is going to happen again. Sadly, I've not seen any evidence that this government is doing anything different.

Criminal justice systems create debt through the accumulation of nonrepayment of criminal offence fines, court fees, victim surcharges, restitution. It's called justice debt, and that is also a reality. Can you imagine someone so destitute, really, that they have to apply for income supports that are impossible to live on? It's just a small amount of money to help them. They are so destitute, and now they're cut off from that because there's a warrant. Perhaps they didn't even know about it. This vicious, vicious cycle of poverty: stuck in this place, they are never going to get ahead.

Our goal should be that every single Albertan should be given the support that they need to be successful, to find the job that they want, to be able to care for their family in the way that they want, to be able to live in safe housing, to know they can feed their families. That should be all of our goals every single day, to do everything that we can to support Albertans. I don't believe that this government uses that lens, Mr. Chair. I don't because I've seen far too many examples of policy changes or legislative changes that are really made with a political lens, not a lens that looks at the quality of life of Albertans and their future.

You know, let me just say that when we address poverty and when we reduce poverty and we talk about it and we bring in good legislation and good programming that systematically reduces poverty because that's what it sets out to do, our entire economy is strengthened, our future is brighter. It's just a fact. It is just a fact. I think that – I hope that everybody in this place understands that. I hope that all members of this Assembly are asking themselves the same question or will look at the list that is generated behind closed doors, when eventually it is, and make sure that that list does exactly what we need it to do.

There was a study published in 2021 in partnership with Public Safety Canada, Stats Canada, and Correctional Service of Canada. They found that previously incarcerated individuals make less income, file less tax, and had less participation in the labour market, and more social assistance. Now, the reason that I'm bringing this up is it just sort of validates the point that I made earlier, that we should all be working together to ensure that we keep people out of those places, that we keep people out of the justice system, that we support them so that they don't continue to have these warrants or

they don't continue to have fines amassing that they can never pay, that we help them with job retraining or finding employment, that we support them and lift them out of poverty.

That is not what's happening. I feel like this is a Band-Aid that will say: oh, look at us; you know, we're going to take care of those bad guys that apply for government benefits. Sure, there might be a little group of people that you will identify that should never get government assistance. Absolutely. But I believe that the vast majority probably don't even know there's a problem, don't have the resources to fix the problem even if they wanted to, yet we're going to further penalize them because it's going to make us look tough on crime. We're going to be tough on those who are really, really poor and struggling. If they have a warrant, forget it.

3:20

Again, it's disappointing that instead of talking about poverty reduction, instead of talking about what we can do to actually invest in getting people off income support properly, not tossing them off but helping them transition off, you know, it'd be really great, Mr. Chair, if the members opposite chirping away – as some of them say, I'd be happy to entertain a question, but, you know, that's about it.

Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if I can get a time check from you.

The Deputy Chair: Four minutes.

Ms Renaud: Okay. With that, I'm actually going to take my seat. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. I'd like to briefly address this bill before us, Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Mr. Chair, the focus I'd like to bring to this is on the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act. It's right towards the back end of the bill.

You know, most of this bill – 15 statutes are being amended – is innocuous, some of it is problematic, and this is a really problematic part, Mr. Chair, because it was a problem created by the government when they brought this amendment in in the first place. What they did has to do with the green line in Calgary. I'll just spend a few minutes to read what the government did that they're now correcting. What they did is so problematic that they eventually heard from city council, they heard from, probably, people who are wanting to procure that project that this is the death of the project.

What this government did, the minister of transportation, the previous Premier did, is put in a clause that said, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by order, with a minimum of 90 days' notice to the City of Calgary, terminate the grant agreement without cause," a grant agreement from the province of Alberta that was \$1.5 billion. The total project is somewhere about \$5 billion. Phase 1 of this project, that'll take the green line from Shepard all the way to 16th Avenue in the north, is about a \$5 billion project at this point in time, and the government thought it was okay, thought it was good practice to bring in a clause that would kill any procurement wanting to go forward. Why would it kill any procurement wanting to go forward? Because what company is going to stand up and say, "You know, I want to bid on this"? It's \$5 billion worth, but within 90 days a third of that amount of money can come out because of – I don't know – the government believing that it's an LRT to nowhere. That's what we heard from this side before, Mr. Chair.

What I think was going on is that the government didn't like the project – maybe they don't like mass transit, more particularly – so they were looking for ways to kind of slow it down, to kind of create some noise, some interference. I can remember the news articles of

the day saying: this is crazy; how can you procure, how can you get a project going of that magnitude, the biggest one, the biggest public infrastructure build in Calgary's history? This government decides they want to put a clause in that makes it almost impossible for anyone to step up and say: "Yeah. I'll take that project on. I'll design it. I'll create it. I'll create it for the people of Calgary to get them moving from south to north and north to south." But maybe a third of it is going to go away, and, you know, I can't control that if I'm a company. I can't control what this government is going to do.

Today they're taking that clause out. They're saying: we're repealing section 10; we're repealing this bad clause that the minister of transportation and the former Premier had put in place and everybody on that side voted for. They're taking it out because it doesn't work. It doesn't work for a project of this magnitude. You can't shut a project like this down in 90 days. A project doesn't go forward like this with a 90-day clause to kill it. So that's good news. Today we're standing up and saying, you know, that cooler, better, smarter heads prevail, but they didn't months ago, when the government put that in. They thought it was best to put it in then. Well, it wasn't. What it did is that it delayed this project, Mr. Chair.

The previous minister of transportation also said: you know, I want a report; Calgary's got to give me a report; show me where this is going to be a beneficial project to move people, mass transit, that you can do this, that you can tunnel under a portion of downtown, and you can get people moving with the money that the province of Alberta, approved by the previous NDP government, put in place. The government of Canada is on for a 40 per cent share of that project, and the city of Calgary's on for a 20 per cent share of that project. So the previous minister of transportation said: I need a report.

We know that report and the time delay was about a year, Mr. Chair. Things would have got moving a lot quicker had the government just got onboard, just got onboard the C-Train. But they decided to put an arm down, like one of those arms that comes down over a rail crossing. This government put a stop to the C-Train moving forward and the planning and the organization, and that has delayed the project and cost more money to this project. Fiscal sense over on that side is not anything that happens. There is not any effective, efficient fiscal responsibility on the other side, because they delayed a project and made the cost, as a result of inflation, as a result of materials going up, more to the city of Calgary, more to the people of Alberta, and more to the government of Canada.

Mr. Chair, there's no debt of gratitude owed to the other side for finally coming to their senses and taking this out. What there is is the identification to everyone in this Chamber, all people in Calgary that the clause that was put in there was not in the best interest of the project, not in the best interest of the people of Calgary and taxpayers generally, because now the project's going to cost more money. I think that's disappointing. It's not talked about by the other side. They just sort of slipped it in here right at the end.

The same sort of thing went on for the city of Edmonton, of course. I guess you can't punish one city without punishing the other. That's the thinking I think we hear from the other side. Even though the city of Edmonton, even though today probably neither city will stand up and say, "You know, this was the wrong thing to do," they did at the time. They're just glad they're getting rid of this punishing clause that makes it difficult for anybody to get onboard and to procure this project.

So that's good news, that it's finally coming out. It should have come out a long time ago. It shouldn't have ever got in in the first place. It should have never occurred that the minister of transportation stood up and said that he wanted the report as if the minister of transportation knew better than the people who are

working on this project at the local level, the municipal level, who have built one, two, three, several arms of an LRT system that is the envy of cities in North America because of the number of people it transports, because of its effectiveness and efficiency. Calgarians and the people at the city of Calgary and the leadership in council for decades have been doing this work and doing it well, and to have the rug pulled out from under them by this government, this minister of transportation, and the Premier is a slap in the face. It was a slap in the face. But now they're correcting it, so kudos to the red tape reduction minister for doing the right thing finally, but no debt of gratitude is owed to any person on that side for voting in support of this today, because they created the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. [interjections]

3:30

The Deputy Chair: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the floor.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll continue with some comments on the green line topic, that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo alluded to in much of his discourse recently, because, of course, it was another omnibus bill that the UCP government brought in under the current Finance minister, Bill 20, which, in fact, imposed upon the cities of Edmonton and Calgary a minimum of 90 days' notice eligibility for the government to revisit or eliminate a grant application.

What happened as a result of this is that it's had a very chilling effect on business, on not only the green line or LRT development in Edmonton and Calgary but just the very notion, Mr. Chair, that the government would see fit to bring in such a draconian measure to basically put a stop-work order on the green line, in particular, in Calgary. It has also had an effect on the valley line in Edmonton. This creates a crisis in confidence amongst the major contractors, who are small in number, who would be able to actually bid on these types of contracts.

It was the largest infrastructure build in Calgary's history, and this government played games with it and let that legislation rest in place until now, finally, it's going to rest in peace after they see fit to react to the immense pressure and outcry that's been raised against it by, of course, former city mayor Nenshi, city councillors, and councillors in Edmonton as well because the measure is one that is a business killer.

At the highest level of finance businesses need to have confidence and certainty, and this is something which we hear the so-called conservative, business-supportive UCP government claiming all the time, that they are looking to create conditions of confidence and an economic playing field that is fair and will attract business. Well, this is anything but, Mr. Chair. This very chilling measure that was brought in by the UCP, that is now being eliminated by virtue of another omnibus measure, was something that the business community is not going to forget.

It was a very, very poorly thought out sledgehammer that this government decided to come forward with. It has a major impact on not only these rapid transit LRT projects but on major projects that either of the major cities of Edmonton and Calgary might want to undertake and other major projects throughout the province that the province will be a funding partner in. It was claimed that indeed the standard practice was the opportunity for the province to exit a grant agreement with certain notice, yet in fact it's not the case.

I know that Mayor Nenshi has commented publicly saying that they looked. They tasked their city managers to take a look and see if indeed there were contracts that enabled the province to exit using similar techniques, but in fact they could find none. I'll table the article that Mayor Nenshi is referenced in when he makes the

statement about the search they made for examples of the city having an opportunity where the province would be able to exit from grants that they had previously pledged legally, if indeed they gave notice to the cities. There's no evidence that it was a standard practice, Mr. Chair.

The very context that we are in right now, where we are hoping that the green line is going to move forward and we're not going to see obstacles to this largest infrastructure build in the province's history put in place again – we'll see the procurement and progress of phase 1 move forward with confidence. That's something, Mr. Chair, that I'm sure the business community, not only in Calgary but throughout the province and the wider Canadian construction industry, looks forward to with interest. Any time a province comes forward with legislation which is so draconian that it actually would seek to put a stop-work order on the largest infrastructure build in a province the size of Alberta, that certainly gets the attention of the business community on a national and international scale.

These are multibillion-dollar projects; \$5.5 billion is the slated cost as it stands currently. That type of planning that has to go into these projects is costly, especially if companies are bidding to be the companies that actually get to build and put in place the infrastructure. They will not have the confidence they need if they decide that the government is going to possibly put in place legislation like this once again because they happen to have some disagreement about the direction of the project or some of the details of the project and the only way they see fit to influence it is to put in this so-called stop-work order, as I call it, by giving themselves a 90-day clause, allowing them to rescind a grant agreement that they had in place, thus, for all intents and purposes, killing the project.

It's a sad commentary, Mr. Chair, that for many, many years this example will be reflected upon by the business community, especially when they see a UCP government involved in major construction infrastructure projects. They'll give themselves pause about whether or not they want to participate. Thankfully, I think that they will find a much more business-friendly government in a few months in this province in the form of the NDP majority government, but we'll let the chips fall where they may there.

I do join my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo in expressing concerns about the effect on the business community of the sledgehammer, the mechanism that the government gave themselves, that they're now rescinding, to kill such a large infrastructure project by withdrawing their grant agreement. It throws question into the confidence of the business community in Alberta's government to be able to promote major infrastructure projects.

I know that the province is fond of poking their finger at the federal government and saying, "Hey, you're the ones who are putting a spoke in the wheels of major infrastructure projects," particularly in transmission in the pipeline field and mining projects. But here is a prime example, Mr. Chair, where this government themselves really created a problem that didn't have to be created, where because they just disliked the project or wanted to change the direction of a project, they created a mechanism by which they could issue a stop-work order by withdrawing their grant funding and, for all intents and purposes, killed the largest infrastructure project in the city of Calgary. Now, of course, we've seen them rescind that, and hopefully they've learned a valuable lesson. But at what cost?

3:40

That's a cost that I think the UCP government has to tally for Albertans, because it is the largest infrastructure build in the province, Mr. Chair, and we need to know what damage the UCP

government has done. I know that the business community certainly would like to see an accounting, and they probably should be part of that accounting to let Albertans know just indeed what damage they've done to the large business community by having this measure in place for so long.

But I'll move on now to something on a smaller scale, that I've had an interest in in my past role as the critic for agriculture, and that has to do with the happy subject of bees, Mr. Chair. All of us, I think, love bees, except maybe if we've had the experience of being stung by them. On the topic of bees, the omnibus legislation before us speaks to a number of measures that enable a beekeeper to register and prohibits the importation of bees without prior consent. It talks a lot about addressing concerns of threats of disease that might be carried by bees that are imported into the province.

Of course, Mr. Chair, many Albertans may be aware that we don't actually produce what are called packaged bees in the province. We do produce some queen bees, and they are sold to beekeepers for honey production, but the beekeeping industry loses, on average, about 25 per cent of the bees in its hives due to overwinter die-off or kill, and there are further losses due to pests and infections. The result of that is that we have to import bees to replace those that have died over the winter, and almost all of them come from overseas.

This act, of course, looks to try to prevent infection from coming from those overseas sources of imported bees, and while doing so – those are good measures, Mr. Chair, to protect the rest of the bees that are in our province. We have a thriving honey industry, a pride of Alberta, and it's a product that is known throughout the world as one of the top sources of honey. There are many opportunities for growth in that industry.

But one of the things that should've been done – and it's a sin of omission once again, Mr. Chair. Rather than dealing solely with the importation of bees and protecting against contamination of those bees by threats of disease or outbreaks or other emergencies – in addition to these measures, insofar as we need to keep supplying bees from overseas to restock our hives each year after the 25 per cent or so die-off, what we should've been doing is investing in our apiary or apiculture industries to ensure that we produce those packaged bees here in Alberta.

There are many arguments about – people will say that it's difficult to do because of the seasonal differences and so forth, that we can't produce a new crop of bees to replace those who have died off because, of course, we'd be doing so in the wintertime to replace them in the spring, but there are lots of creative ideas flowing out there, Mr. Chair, that would allow it to actually be done in this province. That's economic development. That's creativity. We've done things in this province by using the grey matter between our ears, and I think it was incumbent upon the government to listen to a few of the ideas that are out there regarding production of packaged bees in this province so we're not reliant upon importation of bees from other parts of the world such as Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere.

We found during the pandemic, especially, Mr. Chair, that, of course, when the supply chains broke down, we were in a really, really tough spot to replace the die-off each year of the bees, the 25 per cent or so that die off each year, from foreign sources because, of course, air transportation was shut down, and we couldn't get bees. We were looking at importing bees perhaps from the United States, and they, of course, were prohibited because of the impact of inbreeding with so-called African bees. It was the fear of importers that we would actually cause a contamination in our own supply of bees, in our own bee population here in Alberta. It put us in a difficult situation. The whole industry was put at risk because

we did not have a reliable supply of packaged bees to replace those that died off in the wintertime.

That, Mr. Chair, is what I would hope one would have seen as an adjunct part of this omnibus bill when it relates to the Bee Act. It was a real opportunity to build upon the experiences that we've recently gone through during the pandemic, when we saw our supply chain basically eliminated for packaged bees, and to look at how we could become a leader in the apiculture industry by producing packaged bees not only for our own consumption here at home but for export ourselves so that those countries who now buy from countries that we have to buy from – New Zealand, Australia, and so forth – would look to us for a year-round supply or a seasonal supply of packaged bees to replace theirs in their country that may have died off.

I mean, that development, I think, is one element of the beekeeping industry that is a natural extension of where we're at. We're world leaders in the production of high-quality honey, and there are growth opportunities there. We use our bees for pollinators of our major crops. Many Albertans will know that our canola crops in particular, any of our flowering crops, require pollination, and you will find beehives being transported throughout this province during the crop-growing season to pollinate the crops so that they grow properly. Without them, we don't have crops. They're extensively used throughout the province to ensure that our crops get pollinated, and it's an industry in and of itself not only to produce honey but actually to pollinate our crops.

Globally, of course, we have bees at risk of dying off because of encroachment of urban development on our farmland. There are diseases in the bee populations that are threatening them throughout the world in many spots. It's a fragile insect, population of insects globally, that needs to be cared for and cultivated, and we have an opportunity to do that in the province, and this omnibus bill, Mr. Chair, missed the opportunity to develop that industry beyond what it does by enabling a beekeeper registration system and prohibiting the importation of bees to Alberta without prior consent.

As the bill says, the beekeeping compliance system is outlined, including designation and powers of inspectors and the authority of the minister in relation to quarantining bees or equipment, but there could have been a lot more done, Mr. Chair, and I'm disappointed that it wasn't. When we do hear from other members, perhaps across the way, who have had experience with bees themselves, perhaps they could comment on what they feel would have been a better opportunity by the minister to bring forward a more comprehensive piece of legislation when it came to the Bee Act to include in this omnibus bill.

[Mr. Turton in the chair]

I could go on about bees for a long time. I certainly think we've got huge opportunities in this province to develop the apiculture industry to a much larger degree than we have and to expand it into growing and repopulating our bee population each year and exporting packaged bees throughout the globe. That's one element of the omnibus bill that I wanted to shed some light on.

I wonder if I could have a time check, Mr. Chair.

3:50

The Acting Chair: About 30 seconds, hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Well, I can continue on about bees for 30 more seconds, I think, but I'll cede my time and let somebody else have the floor.

The Acting Chair: Excellent.

Next up the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to say thank you to my colleagues, who have – Bill 9, being an omnibus bill that impacts a number of different statutes, has many, many different parts to it, and I’ve appreciated hearing the debate about different parts of this bill, everything from impacts to poverty to bees to the green line in Calgary. But I don’t think anyone in this Chamber will be surprised that I would like to speak very specifically to the parts that touch on the Workers’ Compensation Board within Bill 9. It’s an incredibly important part of the rights that workers have: the partnership, the bargain that has been struck between workers and employers so that when a worker is injured on the job, they will get the help, the compensation, the coverage to be able to recover, or their families will receive the same in the tragic case where a worker has died.

In Bill 9 we touch on the workers’ compensation section specifically because of the Fort McMurray wildfire. The wildfire started in May of 2016 and became one of the largest – the largest – evacuations in Canadian history and had a huge impact on the community, with over 2,000 structures burned and dedicated efforts having to be made to keep infrastructure and people safe on the part of first responders.

In Bill 9 specifically it seeks to ensure that firefighters who are exposed to toxic chemicals and carcinogens will still be covered with WCB coverage should they have an occupational disease develop, specifically cancers. Now, we know that cancer is the number one reason for firefighter deaths, and this type of occupational disease often takes time to develop, so our regulations for cancers for firefighters in this province oftentimes look at something called the latency period – how long has someone been a firefighter? – based on the science that it takes time for those carcinogens to act in the human body and to cause cancer.

Now, in the case of Fort McMurray we know that there were firefighters who started fighting that fire and essentially weren’t able to fully move off shift for six full days. There were firefighters across the additional weeks that weren’t able to properly decontaminate. There were firefighters who were not able to have a breathing apparatus, so they were literally breathing in the toxins of thousands of burning buildings. The health impact of that is something incredibly significant and serious. We’ve already heard from firefighters who were in Fort McMurray who have developed occupational cancers, and in fact there’s the story of a firefighter from Fort McMurray who has already passed.

Bill 9 seeks to provide presumptive coverage for occupational cancers for the firefighters who were in Fort McMurray, but, Mr. Chair, it fails to cover all firefighters who were there, so I’d like to introduce an amendment at this point.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, hon. member. We’ll just wait until we get the original sent over to us.

Thank you. This amendment will be known as amendment A1. Please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be amended in section 15(3)(b) by adding the following immediately after the proposed section 24.1(3.1):

(3.2) For the purpose of subsection (3.1), a full-time firefighter and part-time firefighter includes the following:

- (a) a full-time firefighter or part-time firefighter who has made an application for compensation that was not accepted by the Board for an injury described in subsection (2);
- (b) the estate of a full-time firefighter or part-time firefighter if that worker has not received a payment

from the Board with respect to an injury described in subsection (2).

(3.3) For greater certainty, subsection (3.1) applies to an injury described in subsection (2) suffered by a full-time firefighter or part-time firefighter any time after May 1, 2016.

Now, the “any time after May 1, 2016,” Mr. Chair, is the crux of what I’d like to speak to when it comes to this amendment. Without this amendment the changes in Bill 9 provide presumptive cancer coverage only from the date that this bill is proclaimed, the date the bill is passed, so essentially a date that is going to end in 2023. Knowing that this fire started in 2016, that is a six-year gap, and we need to include the retroactivity because we already know that there are firefighters who have found themselves struggling with the WCB system for compensation. There is the case of a family that has been in dispute with the WCB for years over a case where the firefighter has passed, and there have been other firefighters as well.

Now, the government has had an opportunity to consider this amendment because it was submitted to the minister over a week ago, and we’ve already talked about this through question period. I will say quite honestly to you, Mr. Chair, that the first time we realized that this wasn’t retroactive and we spoke with the APFFPA, the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association, and said, “Oh, this isn’t retroactive; we think this doesn’t go far enough,” they said: oh, no; this doesn’t go far enough; we need to cover them all. I came into this Chamber to ask about it in question period, and I quite literally expected the minister to say: we’d be happy to work with you on an amendment to make sure this is covered. And I was surprised, as a former minister of labour, asking a member who represents Fort McMurray, that we weren’t able to get to: yes, let’s work together and make sure that this is completely covered.

The government’s answers on why they won’t support this amendment up till now – and I welcome them changing their mind at any point; I’d be happy to work with them to ensure we get this done – have not made sense to me. The government seems to be acknowledging that, yes, there are firefighters that this won’t apply to but they will get to go through a fairness review process and that fairness review process will eventually get them coverage rather than accepting an amendment that makes it very clear that we are going to extend this coverage back to May 1, 2016, back to the start, when the fire initially began. I have been listening very carefully through media and through multiple questions in question period, trying to understand the government’s argument for why this amendment will not be accepted today, and I am hopeful that through the debate perhaps I can even get a bit more clarity because it does not make sense to me.

What this amendment does is that it makes it incredibly clear to families, to firefighters and colleagues, to the WCB, and to all Albertans that any firefighter who was on the ground during the Beast who develops occupational cancer because of the toxic exposures that they had, the inability to decontaminate, because of the work they were doing to protect lives and livelihoods, infrastructure, and the citizens will automatically have that presumptive coverage through WCB. Without that, saying that there is a subset of these firefighters that are going to need to go through a separate process does not make sense to me, and I don’t understand why the government is making firefighters and their families go through some alternate way.

Now, the government has said that the Alberta WCB system does not typically do retroactivity, and that’s completely correct. I acknowledge that. As the former minister of labour I am aware of that. But that is also a choice, and that is a choice the government is making in the directions that it gives to WCB, and it is a choice that other provinces make differently. Ontario has made their

presumptive cancer coverage, not specific to an incident but just in general, retroactive by 60 years. They've just updated their cancer regulation to include new cancers, which Alberta needs to do, and the minister keeps signalling that that is coming, which is great news. I encourage him to get on with it and to do that because they've been in government for four years and Alberta's regulation is out of date. But that's great.

In this case we are asking for retroactivity to a very specific, catastrophic, traumatic event that all Albertans are aware of. I think that Albertans understand why retroactivity makes sense in this case given the nature of the toxic exposures that firefighters had to work through. They were doing their jobs. When someone is going to their job and doing their job and they get sick because of that or they get injured because of that, it is incumbent on all of us to make sure that we have a strong workers' compensation system that will protect them. To hear that there are already families that have struggled and had to fight on top of fighting cancer, it's incredibly frustrating to me that we can't get this right.

4:00

The government loves to talk about: why didn't you do what when? Well, today we have a bill in front of us, an amendment in front of us that the government can support, so let's talk about today. Let's talk about getting to a place where both government and opposition can come to agreement on this amendment, providing the clarity to all firefighters and not relegating some to a fairness review process. Let's send this clear signal. It is specific to one event: the Horse River wildfire, that started in May 2016, that first responders spent weeks fighting, first responders who deserve our support.

Now, I would welcome any member of the government to speak on this amendment because I truly am looking to better understand the lack of support. It is not just me and my voice calling for this. The Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association, the firefighters' union in Fort McMurray have been advocating for this for many years. The Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union has been a leader when it comes to advocating for this coverage that we need to have for those first responders. So there are a number of people who are watching this debate and are interested in seeing the government do the right thing.

The fact that Alberta hasn't done retroactive before may be true, but that's not a reason not to do it. We know we can. We know other jurisdictions have. And this is specific to a single event. We are not opening the barn doors wide for chaos and it will disrupt our system. We are just making sure that any firefighter who has been diagnosed with cancer in these past six, seven years that are currently not going to be covered by Bill 9 will be able to find themselves in this legislation, understand that they are getting the coverage, and not have to go through a fairness review process but will instead be able to say with confidence that they know that they are getting the coverage.

I, again, don't understand the government's unwillingness to work with the Official Opposition on this. I would be happy to accept a government amendment that fixes this issue. I just want to see this done right. I just want to make sure that this happens in the correct way. That's one of the reasons why I have been talking about this in the House and with firefighters for years now. The Alberta NDP has committed to making sure that this is done and done correctly should we form government. That commitment was made last year. The government has certainly been aware of this for a great deal of time.

It was an honour to be able to speak to the firefighters' conference and convention back in I think it was May of last year about these very topics and to stand with the Leader of the Official Opposition

when she made this commitment again in December of last year. It's something that we've known for a while.

I think this amendment is clearly written. Really, the key thing is section (3.3), that talks about "any time after May 1, 2016." Although we know of a couple of cases now, Mr. Chair, there quite literally may be other firefighters who've never applied to the WCB because they knew that they fell outside of the latency periods. We can't say that this is only one or two cases. There could be many more.

Changing this and changing this the right way is the best way to manage this. Asking people to reach out to the minister's office is unfair. We want to see consistent coverage, we want to see retroactive coverage for all the first responders who were on the ground in Fort McMurray who battled what became known as the Beast and who were exposed to so many toxins for weeks, days, sometimes without rest, without the ability to decontaminate, without the proper protective procedures being able to be in place because of how catastrophic that event was.

My intent, Mr. Chair, was to be convincing and to really put forward the arguments for why I believe all members should support this amendment. I hope to hear that support from members of the government caucus, because I think this is incredibly important. I know this is important to the members impacted, and it's an important example of making sure we have a strong workers' compensation system that is there for all workers, that we recognize the risks that workers put themselves under and our need and our responsibility to take care of them.

With that, I look forward to debate on this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, hon. member.

Anyone else to speak to the amendment? I see there the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Please proceed.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I realize our time might be starting to grow short in this session of the Legislature. This possibly could be my last time to address this Assembly, so I don't want to waste it, but I do want to be very direct in what I want to talk about today. As you can imagine, I do rise very much in support of this amendment that my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods has brought forward with regard to the proposed changes in Bill 9 for the WCB.

I have had an amazing experience, over the better part of three decades, being able to advocate for hard-working Albertans. I know that during that time the things that I would fight for within labour, within unions also impacted work sites that weren't unionized. If you managed to get higher wages in a union shop, there's a good likelihood that in a similar industry you'll see those wages go up. If you get better safety conditions in a unionized shop, you will see better safety conditions come up in non-union. You know, it's been that way forever.

One of the things that were advocated for way in the past was, of course, WCB coverage for workers. Now, the thing that has unfortunately happened over the years is that the WCB has become adversarial towards workers. It was never intended for that to happen. It was supposed to be much like an insurance policy. If you get into an accident, you have insurance to try to get your vehicle fixed. If you get hurt at work, you have something to back you up until you can get better and return to work in a full capacity.

Over the years, obviously, there have been very, very directed efforts to try to raise that up and to try to stop how adversarial the WCB has become. When we're talking about Bill 9, the changes to the WCB, and the implications they have on what ended up being referred to up in Fort McMurray as the Beast, it is to try to make

sure that the heroes that ran towards that fire while everybody else was running away, as they should – that we have those individuals' backs no matter what. You know, changes to try to protect our firefighters: it's not something new to Alberta. There's been a concerted effort right across the country to try to raise this up, to try to cover the cancers that we know – there's no speculation here; there's no controversy; there's no guesswork – impact firefighters and the jobs that they do.

Again, I'll be very clear. I'm not opposed to the changes to the WCB here in Bill 9. What I'm clearly saying is that it's tripping right at the finish line. All we have to do is change just a little bit of language to push it across that finish line, to make sure that in the event, again, that we should have a major catastrophic fire, our firefighters, these members, will know that they're taken care of, that their families will know that they're taken care of should we lose any of those members.

4:10

Some of the things, I know, I have been arguing for for a very long time, and part of those three decades was another two spent not only on my own work-site Health and Safety Committee but my union's provincial Health and Safety Committee. How do we come up with language to protect people so they go home each and every night?

You know, as they say, we don't live to work; we work to live. Everybody needs to come home at the end of the night. Thinking about the images that I know I saw from Fort McMurray and the stories that I've heard over the years – my neighbour literally right across the street from me was a deputy chief with Edmonton fire. I was surprised the day when I spent time with Edmonton fire not only doing their fire ops, which I've done twice now – and I think that only gave me a tiny, little inkling of what they face. He was telling me about how he finally got up there but that it was a week after they finally got control of it. He said that the conditions were horrendous. It's not like he was complaining; he was trying to tell me what it was the members were facing.

You know, as every member in this House knows, over the past eight years that I've spent here, I've made no bones about where I come from, where my priorities have been, what I advocate for, and I proudly continue to do it now and will continue to do it in my time outside of this House: trying to make the lives of workers better.

Now, here's where I might ruffle some feathers, Mr. Chair. I have heard members of this House, members that are part of the government, part of the government caucus, who've very proudly talked about the roots they have in labour and what they come from. I'm going to issue one final challenge. It's likely what it's going to be. If indeed your roots are in labour, if you believe in fighting for the safety of Albertans, if you believe in trying to make their quality of life better, then it should not be any problem whatsoever to accept this amendment, because that's exactly what it will do. It will make the lives of Albertans better. It will make them safer.

As I'd mentioned, with the WCB being adversarial, this will at the very least take that adversarial role away for our firefighters. I've always said that all it takes is one example. We already have that example where we have lost a member and they're now having to fight to get their claim reviewed. That just simply should not happen. If you really, truly are a labour advocate, if you're fighting to make the lives of Alberta workers better, you need to do what it takes to eliminate that. Saying anything else? I'm sorry. It means you don't actually believe in fighting for hard-working Albertans, and it doesn't mean that you have the backs of firefighters. I know that's rough, Mr. Chair. It's meant to be. I've fought too long to sit here and candy coat things for people.

We have an amendment. Like I said, what's proposed in Bill 9 for WCB: it's not wrong. It's not bad. It's good, but we can make it even better. I cannot urge members of this House anymore. Take the emotion out of it. Take the politics out of it. Just look at the language. We know the language is falling short. It's stepping in the right direction, but it's falling short. We can add this little bit, push it over the finish line. Truly, everyone could then stand up in this House and get to say: we have the backs of our firefighters no matter what. We've already seen examples elsewhere that it can be done. We can do it here in Alberta.

I am adamantly pleading with members of this House, please accept this amendment. I know you don't like other amendments that we've brought forward over the course of the 30th Legislature. This one's genuine. This one will do the job. Going forward, I guess we can always have other arguments later about what we can do to change WCB to make it better for all Albertans.

I'll be supporting this amendment, and again I urge all other members of the House: please accept this.

The Acting Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Anyone else to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Chair. The firefighters can already access benefits for fighting the Fort McMurray wildfire through the WCB process. All Bill 9 does is clear the red tape to those benefits and prevents denial.

I am aware of two cases impacted by the NDP amendment. As part of their standard operating procedure the WCB already has a fairness review panel to deal with these two cases. Our government will ensure that these Fort McMurray firefighters will get the benefits they deserve.

The NDP is playing fast and loose with what's really going on here. Retroactivity does not need to be applied when the WCB fairness review for two people achieves the same thing. Our government has worked hard to reduce red tape in Alberta, and adding another amendment with a process that already covers the situation is an unnecessary addition. That is why I am urging my colleagues to vote this amendment down.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Up next, I see the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. Please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the amendment brought forward by my colleague for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the House leader and former minister of labour.

Now, we have had some stand in this Chamber and say, "Well why didn't the NDP do anything?" or "What did the NDP do about this?" Well, what the NDP did, Mr. Chair, when this member was minister of labour: in 2018 we introduced the workers' compensation amendment act that added a mental health disorder presumption for correctional officers, emergency medical assistants, firefighters, police officers, and sheriffs; expanded that coverage to also include many others; and took action to support firefighters and others who were facing challenges in the system. Our government took action.

Now, of course, as we continue, we learn more and we find more that needs to be done, and I respect that the government finally listened. Certainly initially, when we had the initial debates on these questions and this was brought forward by my colleague on behalf of the firefighters – let's be clear, Mr. Chair. This is not something we dreamed up out of thin air. This is not something that, as the government is claiming, is a politicization of the process. This is

the voice of the firefighters themselves, so I'm pleased that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development eventually came around from his initial position back in December and that now his colleague the minister of red tape reduction is including it in this bill.

4:20

However, the same firefighters who approached my colleague and who she spoke for in December, the same firefighters who stood and commended the government for bringing this forward, are now standing and asking the government to make one further change, that simple change to add retroactivity. Because the government has chosen not to listen to them, my colleague has brought forward this amendment. Mr. Chair, that is not a politicization unless the minister of red tape reduction is accusing the firefighters of our province of being political.

Is he accusing them of attacking his government? Is he accusing them of introducing a redundancy, of not understanding the system, of not understanding the challenge their own members face? That is the reason that amendment is here in front of us today. I, for one, will take the word of those firefighters, will take the voice of those firefighters over that of this government. It's my hope that other government members will do the same, because – let's be clear, Mr. Chair – this is not a government and these are not members that are shy about exceptions in legislation.

When they feel it suits their political interests, Mr. Chair, they are prepared to do all sorts of interesting bending and twisting of convention when it comes to legislation in the province. Let's remember Bill 10, introduced at the beginning of the pandemic, where these government members were willing to stand and vote for the members of cabinet to have the ability to change, alter, or create new legislation out of whole cloth without ever setting foot in this Legislature. But they stand and say: "No. We can't provide retroactivity for these two firefighters; that's going too far."

These government members were willing to pass a piece of legislation giving them the ability to unilaterally tear up their contract with physicians in the province of Alberta and then do so, but it's too exceptional for them to provide retroactivity to cover these firefighters. Instead they say: no; go and fight it out in the system.

The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development is willing to sit in a cabinet with a Premier, who he once said he would oppose that sovereignty act that she intended to bring forward. Let's be clear: another extraordinary piece of legislation, which again attempted to give members of this cabinet the ability to alter legislation, change laws without ever setting foot in this Legislature. He was willing to stand for weeks and support that before this government finally recanted in the face of public pressure, but he says no; he cannot stand and make an exception here, an exception that has been demonstrated to be possible in the province of Ontario, for the sake of these firefighters.

There are government members, Mr. Chair, that were willing to stand in support of this Premier when she was running in the leadership race for their party, when she said she intended to exert extraordinary influence in our justice system. They stood in full-throated support of her then, and the question is: will they say it is too exceptional now to stand in support of these firefighters?

Let's be clear, Mr. Chair. This is not a question of this being a government that is so concerned about the rule of law, that is so concerned about proper procedure that they simply cannot allow this to pass. They have demonstrated time and again on the record that is not the case. If they will not support this amendment today, it is because they don't want to, because they don't feel that it's politically significant enough for them. That is their choice, and that

is the message that they are sending to working men and women, to firefighters across this province.

I'll have more to say on the rest of Bill 9 later, but I think that's enough for now. In a moment we'll get to see just where the priority of these members and this government actually lay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Next up, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to say thank you to the minister for responding to the amendment. I am asking for more clarity because, from a plain-language perspective, I do not understand the government's reasoning, and I would genuinely like to, because we're talking to the same stakeholders. The idea that firefighters who may have been impacted between May 2016 and today need to go through a different or fairness-based process rather than being clearly included in Bill 9, when we know that it is a very defined time period because of the catastrophic event from Fort McMurray: to me that creates an additional barrier or possible confusion because we know that there are a few cases. We believe there could be additional.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

There could be people, firefighters, who have been diagnosed with a cancer that, because the cancer latency period is 25 years, they have not even applied to the WCB because they knew that they were not covered, they did not match it. Without this amendment, which clearly indicates that this is retroacted back to May 2016, there may be firefighters who were on the ground in Fort McMurray who will never approach the WCB or get the compensation that they are owed. That could happen.

I think that the amendment shows a very clear: firefighters who were on the ground from May 2016 on who develop occupational cancers will get the coverage that I believe so strongly all Albertans support that they should get. I hear the government saying, "Oh, they will get the coverage but through a fairness review process," so my question is, then: why not just accept the amendment? Why not accept the amendment that clearly provides the coverage and responds to what firefighters have asked for? If the end result, according to you, is that, through the chair, Mr. Chair, I'm trying not to – if the end result is that they will get coverage, then why not accept this amendment, which makes it clear and will ensure that no firefighter falls through the cracks because they were unaware and did not know?

Why have a hidden, unclear fairness review based process that only some firefighters will go through rather than having clear coverage and retroactive support for all firefighters? I've been listening closely. I am trying to understand, and it does not make sense to me. So I would ask the minister if he could please try to clarify for me and for – I know there are firefighters who are watching our debate today. I am asking this in a very genuine way because this doesn't make sense, why you are rejecting this, when accepting it would provide the clarity, respond to what firefighters are asking for, and ultimately, according to the answers we've been given, provide the exact same result.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to pose questions or make comments on amendment A1? I see the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development.

Mr. Jean: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to stand up today and talk about inhaling and exhaling at the same

time. Now, Mr. Chair, the firefighter they're referring to that fought the fire died while that member was the minister of labour, while that member had the opportunity to sign on the dotted line and change things. If she thought it was so important to change at that time, why didn't she? Well, I'll tell you. The reason why is because they're playing politics today.

It sort of reminds me a lot of the comments in relation to advertising before campaigns. Now, Mr. Chair, we saw \$20 million being spent by the NDP advertising before the last campaign, before the 2019 campaign. It reminds me of the \$9 million they spent advertising the very popular carbon tax just a little while before that.

What we have in place here is a piece of legislation that works, that is going to work because it has a fairness provision. We don't have exactly the same legislation as Ontario or other jurisdictions; we have legislation made in Alberta for Albertans, and that's why we have a fairness provision within that legislation to make sure that there's nobody that falls through the cracks. Now, Mr. Chair . . .

Ms Renaud: You know they're falling through the cracks.

4:30

Mr. Jean: No one is going to fall through the cracks of this government.

They did through the last government, the NDP government, when they were in power. We know that. That's why I say to you today that inhaling and exhaling at the same time takes a talent, saying one thing and doing another thing and being all of that righteous indignation that is coming from the opposition – because they know that they had the opportunity to do it, and they didn't do it. We are doing it. We're getting it done. We're going to make sure we do it properly. We're going to do it on the evidence, because WCB is there for the people of Alberta, the workers of Alberta, and it's very important.

I've met with the groups of firefighters. I was actually at the fire. I was there during the time that that fire was burning my town down. Mr. Chair, I was providing food and water to firefighters, I was supporting them, and I was in there. I don't remember any of them being there. In fact, all I remember from them is a lot of chatter, a lot of talk but no substance. This government has substance, and we are standing up for the firefighters. We are going to make sure that no one falls through any NDP cracks because we actually care about firefighters and we care about the workers in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree with the minister. This government has substance. It's a substance that, if I were to name, would be unparliamentary.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

To be clear, Madam Chair, our government made substantive investment, did substantive work to support Fort McMurray through that fire. That minister knows because that minister was briefed every day by our government about the situation, had access to the officials, unlike his government throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We provided open access to the opposition during the time that he was leader. The minister knows full well.

He certainly has creative interpretation of the facts both today and of what occurred then. I don't question that the minister was there. It was his hometown; it was his constituency. He looked out for the people there, and I recognize that he looked out for the firefighters then, but the question is whether he will today, Madam

Chair. There's certainly plenty of righteous indignation on that side of the aisle, too.

The fact is, as I said, that what we are bringing forward today are the voices of those firefighters. They are asking the minister of red tape reduction, they're asking the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development to make this amendment. Again, as I've laid out, they are not shy of making all kinds of other exceptions when they feel it suits their political interests, when it's their job that they feel is on the line as opposed to the lives, livelihood, and health of these firefighters. I suppose we'll leave it for those firefighters to judge when we hold the vote today.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Chair. To all of our colleagues here today, honestly, across the aisle: we're all trying to work through something here with genuine intent. To the minister: obviously very near and dear to your heart since that was your home. I understand that there was personal loss as well. A real plea to everyone in the room: if we can just keep our sticks on the ice, so to speak. There are a lot of emotions here, and we don't want to politicize this, honestly. It comes down to looking out for good folks that stepped into harm's way when most of us would have run the opposite direction.

I remember full well, you know, the Fort McMurray fires. There were no recorded deaths at the fire scene, but there was a young couple that had a traffic incident getting out of there again, coming back to areas to get out of there. Coincidentally, up in that area we'd been pipelining a couple of years prior, and we still had a thousand-man camp sitting at Christina Lake, or Mariana Lake, I should say. The camp manager there was Glen Brooks, former lance corporal from the airborne, and he ran the camp for us. He started welcoming people off the highway to get them in and find a place for them to stay.

The firefighters went above and beyond trying to do what they could. I remember, you know, hearing some testimony from the command centre and the chief that was up there, that had that responsibility to take care of it. It took an awesome toll, and not one of those people, first responders, whether it was firefighters or otherwise, flinched. They literally went headlong into that. So I can understand that there's a lot of emotion here today because we all feel compelled to do the right thing for those folks that stepped up.

One of the best things that we can do, I would hope, since this might be one of my last speeches in this place as well, is that honestly we can hang our hat on something good, that we had a meaningful impact on them. It's with that spirit that I believe the member opposite brought this motion forward and is really just trying to take something that's good and trying to make it a bit better. Now, with that intent there are invariably some issues that could arise, and I think that maybe it's not being fully articulated here in the House, again, with some of the emotions and where we're at in this season – I think someone said it – on the eve of an election. We all know we're looking down the barrel of a gun in that regard.

But I won't be voting in favour of this. I do really appreciate the intent of it, wholeheartedly, from my heart right across the aisle to the member. But looking at a prior lens in a prior life, looking through contracts and processes and procedures, I think where a lot of the hesitancy on this is is that if we try to tweak it too much more than what we have in the existing legislation, the new legislation coming forward might inadvertently cause some issues on the back end. Again, when there's already a process in place to catch, with the fairness review panel – I think fully that's what's taking place here. The fairness review panel has to run its process as well.

If the folks in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, through you, Chair, to the member opposite that brought this motion forward, choose to have me as their MLA again and if that process falls through the cracks and it doesn't meet the intent, then you have my full commitment that we review this at a later date and take a look and see if we can do that. But it's with that, too – and, hopefully, the member can understand, through you to that member and the others opposite, that I'm fully supportive of the concept, but I'm concerned that we might cause some other issues in behind the process. Again, it's with that full intent to make sure that none of our first responders have any issues.

So I would compel folks to understand the spirit of the intent of this, with the amendment, but to vote against it so we can get the bill through and then allow that process to take place. Again, a full commitment from me, if there is an issue later on, that we can go back and look at that, if it has to be tweaked through regulations or an amendment in an act. But I think we should take our win. I think we should do what we can while we can to make sure we get it there – if it's not a hundred per cent, at least it's 99.9 – and then review those items later.

So it's with that to everyone here, Madam Chair, if we can keep the emotions down – I know it's emotional, but it's really with good intent on both sides of the aisle. Thank you.

The Chair: Any others on amendment A1? We'll go to Edmonton-Meadows and then the hon. minister.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't take very long. I just wanted to thank you, Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, for jumping into the debate, but unfortunately that doesn't serve nothing at all, actually, what we are asking here and what is the issue. We open the bill, we are debating the WCB, and all we see is a real case, that we are discussing here. It's not a principle. It is not just a thought process. We are guided by the principle: we learn more, we do more or learn better, do better. This is exactly what this case is. This is the real-time case.

More of this – this area belongs to the member from Fort McMurray. He's well aware of this, and it's very sad to see and hear the kind of rhetoric we're coming to. Even this should have been very personal to a member from Fort McMurray. He didn't see who in Fort McMurray even it was warning. I don't know if he was able to see there were firefighters actually putting their life on the line to control the fire, a national disaster, and protect the people in Fort McMurray. That is what we are discussing here today. "Have something the NDP didn't do": if we come to your rhetoric, is that the basic principle: you wouldn't do it? If this information was not there then and we have the case here and those hard-working firefighters – and I don't call them workers. National heroes, because they go into the situations: they're not ordinary work; they're not at ordinary work. When people are dying, when people are in danger, they jump on the situation, risking their life to save others.

4:40

We had a natural disaster, one of Canada's largest natural disasters, and that's what we're discussing here, and there's a live case on this. It's sad to see the government House members' attitude and approach towards this, and they couldn't understand it. In a few days I'm really disheartened when I see the government has a very big heart on a number of those issues that are not related to Albertans at all, but when it comes to helping real people, I don't see that approach. Once again, I will request and I will encourage, I hope, that you might show big hearts and look at this amendment with a bit more sympathy.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Madam Chair. You know, I do get emotional about this issue. It is a very important issue to me. I've fought hard for this.

I just want to say that historically in Alberta WCB does not do retroactivity because they have in section 17(3) of the act – and that's the fair process review centre – the ability "to reconsider any matter that it has dealt with and to rescind or amend any decision or order previously made." Now, I would also note that not only did the member opposite, when she was the minister, not make this particular issue for that firefighter that died on her watch retroactive, but she never made one WCB issue retroactive. Not one, Madam Chair. Not one. She didn't do that because she knew it was not the right thing to do. It wasn't necessary because under section 17(3) of the act they have the ability to reconsider and go back in time and to deal with the issue if it's considered unfair. The process is there; the process works.

I've said it in question period; I'll say it again: there's more good news coming for firefighters. In fact, we were number one in Canada for firefighter coverage, for WCB coverage, and then other provinces copied us. The great news is that very soon Alberta is going to be number one by a large margin, number one again, because this government cares, because this government cares about those people that take care of us. We're not going to let this firefighter or any other firefighter from the Fort McMurray fire or other fires that contracts cancer that's directly related to any of these fires behind. It's just not done, Madam Chair.

This government is a caring government, is a government that relies on evidence and makes sure that the people of Alberta that put their lives on the line for us and their families are taken care of, because that's what a caring United Conservative Party government does. We take care of those that can't take care of themselves. The minister of affordability: he came forward with a huge package, over \$2 billion, to take care of those less fortunate than some of us, the people that are the most vulnerable: seniors, young people, families. During a time when inflation is hurting everybody – and might I add, Madam Chair, that that initiative has made Alberta the lowest jurisdiction in Canada for inflation, under 4 per cent whereas the rest of the country is above 5. That speaks to the caring nature of our government, just like this does.

In the coming weeks, the coming days possibly, I encourage all members of this House and all firefighters, all families of firefighters to watch, to watch what we're doing to take care of the most vulnerable, to take care of our firefighters, to take care of Albertans, because we know that the only people that are going to take care of Albertans are this government.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The minister can't help bringing politics into this, and that's fair. I'm very proud that in 2018 under the NDP, as I was minister of labour, we were able to make sure that Alberta had the strongest primary site firefighter cancer regulation in the country.

I'm glad, genuinely glad, to hear that the government, after four years, is finally going to do the adjustments to make sure that our firefighters have the coverage and support that we are now behind on because other provinces have done more. That is wonderful and a success for firefighters, and I would encourage him to do that as soon as he can, because we've been asking about that for some time.

But I'm incredibly disappointed by this government ignoring this amendment and not providing clear retroactive coverage for firefighters, because it does absolutely cause firefighters who are

already fighting cancer to have to go through an additional, different process to fight for coverage, which they should not have to do but the minister has clearly described that they will, and it does risk letting firefighters fall through the cracks. What does that look like, Madam Chair? That is firefighters who are fighting cancer or possibly passing away from cancer not getting the coverage they and their family deserve and possibly having to go through an additional bureaucratic battle to get that coverage. That's what this government is risking with not accepting this amendment, which clearly provides very narrow support to firefighters who were on the ground in Fort McMurray and retroactivity in this one case.

As I've said in my remarks, I fully understand that retroactivity is not something Alberta has typically done with the WCB, but it makes sense now and in this case because of the catastrophic, traumatic event that we are talking about. I've heard the government. I've heard their response. I don't think I'm going to hear any new arguments. At this point, Madam Chair, I disagree. I think the government is doing the wrong thing, and they are forcing firefighters who are fighting cancer, families who have lost loved ones to go through additional steps. It is disappointing to me, but I appreciate the debate that we've had here today, and I look forward to a future NDP government rectifying this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:48 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Gray	Renaud
Dach	Nielsen	Shepherd
Deol	Pancholi	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Long	Schow
Allard	Lovely	Singh
Fir	Madu	Smith, Mark
Glubish	Nally	Stephan
Hunter	Panda	Turton
Jean	Rehn	van Dijken
Jones	Rosin	Walker
Loewen	Rutherford	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 24
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We'll go back to debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 9. Are there members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 9. [interjections] Oh, I apologize. And report progress on Bill 12 and progress on bill – I apologize. I do not move any motions at this point in time.

Let's move on to Bill 10.

The Chair: Let's do that.

Bill 10

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I think what we can clearly see is that this is a bill about giving the Premier every tool she needs to use taxpayer money to try to secure another term. What it does, this piece of legislation, is create the Alberta fund, which is a \$1.4 billion election campaign slush fund to buy votes. That's exactly what it is. In addition, it sets up conditions to bypass this place, the Legislature, oversight, by allowing the minister to designate a number of things, which we'll get to a little later.

You know, this couldn't be any more clear, Madam Chair, that this is a government – I mean, we are just weeks away from an election. We see a government spending millions on advertising, and now we see that they have put \$1.4 billion aside, basically for a slush fund. It bypasses oversight, and – you know what? – it's vote buying. That's what it is. Now, this UCP has a horrible track record when it comes to spending money on things that are questionable at best, and I think it's important to remind this government and anybody paying attention of their track record.

Let's talk about the first – one of the things. I mean, there are so many things. Going back to 2019, we saw them bring in another piece of legislation, an omnibus piece of legislation, that included all kinds of things. In addition to deindexing benefits of some of the most destitute, I would say, people in Alberta, people that are living in poverty for the most part, people that have disabilities so they're on income support and AISH – they deindexed that benefit and told them that they wouldn't find it onerous and that it was really important to get our fiscal house in order. That's what they said, all of them. They stood up, they defended it for years as we continued to tell them about the problems.

At the same time, they decided that they were going to designate about \$120 million for a war room, an energy war room. Now, all of us know how ridiculous that has been, what an enormous waste of money that has been, and actually embarrassing on the world stage a number a times. But it is what it is.

The next big fiscal train wreck happened around . . .

An Hon. Member: Was you.

Ms Renaud: You know, it's unfortunate that they can chirp but they can't stand up and contribute to debate. It is unfortunate that we have to remind this government about that.

Now, here's another one, Madam Chair, that you'll find interesting, I'm sure, because it's almost as big as the slush fund that's being created here, and that's when this government decided right before an American election that they were going to bet a whole bunch of money on then President Trump being re-elected. Kind of interesting that they would bet on this person being re-

elected. I mean, all it takes is looking at polling. Clearly, they look at polling. They know what polling is about.

Mr. Schow: Hillary looked at polling, too.

Ms Renaud: Sure.

You know, the point is that they bet Albertans' money, resources, on something so ridiculous, never mind that he had a track record that there is no need to mention here because it's – well, there's no need to mention it here. We'll see, I guess, in the next few days if there's something that happens, first time a previous President being indicted on crimes. Sort of looks like that's the way it's going. It's interesting that this government chose to bet a whole chunk of Albertans' money on his being re-elected. That tells you a lot.

At the time, Alberta's Finance minister said that this \$1.3 billion investment of taxpayers' money to the now defunct Keystone XL pipeline project was a prudent gamble. That's what this government said, that it was a prudent gamble, when polling was pretty clear – I'm not American; I don't vote in American elections, but just being an observer, it was pretty clear what was happening. But this government thought it was a prudent decision.

5:10

And here's another quote, actually a quote from something the Energy minister at the time said: added that this decision to put all of this money behind this was meshed with the broader commitment to grow Alberta's wellspring industry. That doesn't even make sense when you look at the state of American politics and that this government chose to waste all of those resources on a gamble. That's a fiscal train wreck. They made a comment a day after the project operator, TC Energy Corporation of Calgary, officially abandoned the multibillion-dollar cross-border project. They said that it was a good idea still, that it would mesh this wellspring of industry.

Around that time, you know, there were also numerous court challenges. Of course, this government doesn't actually like to pay attention to fact and what's going on. We also had the person that was also running for the job, the Democrat, Joe Biden, the now President of the United States, who was very clear that if he was successful for his bid for the presidency of the United States, this would be over. There was no sort of hedging or hints. It was very clear, crystal clear. Still this government chose to waste Albertans' resources on a bet that was sure to fail. That was one thing.

Here's some reporting, some public reporting, around the end of June in 2022. You know, you heard from, actually, the Auditor General this time telling us that there were some serious problems around \$4 billion in COVID spending in 2020-21, serious problems in COVID spending. This is a government that wants to create a \$1.4 billion slush fund. This is their track record. So \$4 billion in COVID spending that wasn't really clear. Now, we have a really terrific Auditor General. I believe we have a really terrific Auditor General in Alberta, and I think that that office is certainly looking at the financial statements but also looking at ways to improve. I think, you know, the report did talk about what we could do better in the future. Unfortunately, this government really chose not to take those recommendations. They just chose to not follow the recommendations and to not do the work, so we continue to see these financial problems going forward.

You know, some of the findings: the audit at the time could not trace how \$1.3 billion in federal aid for the safe restart agreement made its way through the ministries and was spent. This is the Auditor General of Alberta saying that there's a problem here. With billions of dollars, it's not clear where it went. Did it actually help? Did you meet any targets? Did you meet any goals? Did it make life

better for anybody? This government has not been able to demonstrate that with \$4 billion in COVID spending. This is a government that wants another \$1.4 billion for a slush fund just weeks away from an election. That is not good.

Some of the other findings that the Auditor General shared with Albertans going back a couple of years. This government has a problem – they don't have a problem announcing the spending that they're going to do; they do have a problem sort of coming out the other end and saying: well, we did spend this much, and here were the results.

One key finding was that the results analysis did not always include the spending end results. Here's a list. Ministry of Health, disclosing the quantity of PPE and rapid tests distributed but not how much was spent on each of the categories of PPE, contact tracing, or rapid testing. There was no information. There was no clarity about where that was spent. The Ministry of Health, again, not disclosing the number of vaccines received by the federal government. This is the Auditor General saying that we have a problem here.

The Ministry of Health not describing what it achieved by spending \$260 million to protect staff and residents in long-term care. Still we know they were devastated. People living in long-term care during COVID were devastated. They were devastated by illness, by death, by isolation. This government – there's just no clarity on where the money went and what were the results.

The Ministry of Education not disclosing individual initiatives spending or results for \$263 million in spending for the safe return to class. These are federal dollars that the province of Alberta received during COVID to distribute for a number of programs, and the Auditor General of Alberta is saying: whoa; we have a problem. It's not the first problem this government has had. There have been many. Let's fast-forward a little bit further to the Auditor General telling Albertans about some of the errors that this government has made in their accounting that they actually had to go and correct.

One of the things that this government did – and maybe you will remember this – is that they decided that they were going to make life better for disabled Albertans by changing the date that they received their benefits, so changing the date that the money showed up in their account. Before the UCP decided to mess with this, they used to get their funds a few days before the end of the month so that there was enough time to go and get a bus pass if needed, to make sure the rent was paid on time, all of those things. This is a group of people typically with not a lot of resources. As you can imagine, they're living from month to month on that deposit, so when things are a little bit late, life gets difficult.

This government decided to just unilaterally change the date. "We're going to make it for the 1st. We're doing it to line up all the programs," which wasn't really true because they didn't do it for seniors. They only did it to the big programs to make the budget look better. They actually only recorded 11 months of expense in a 12-month period to make their books look better. They got caught by the Auditor General, and they had to make that change. They had to reverse this because it was wrong. In the meantime tens of thousands of Albertans were impacted by this decision. They didn't bat an eye.

This is the kind of fiscal mismanagement you get from this UCP government. It just goes on and on. That's just one teeny example from the Auditor General. They flagged \$1.6 billion of accounting blunders. That's not me. That's the Auditor General of Alberta's report card on this government.

He noted that the government also had to make a hundred-million-dollar adjustment to the Keystone XL pipeline investment. The government made that investment before the fiscal year-end,

but the money wasn't reflected in the balance sheet. Just a little error on this government's part.

There was also \$152 million added to costs for two more income support programs. This is what I was talking about. Assured income for the severely handicapped: they recorded 11 months out of the 12. I mentioned that. The Auditor said that the department adjusted the numbers to "appropriately disclose that Community and Social Services exceeded its budgeted appropriation by \$120 million."

The Auditor also criticized the environment department for muddled oversight on grants handed out under a \$563 million fund that places a levy on heavy industrial greenhouse gas emitters. The Auditor said that there wasn't enough evidence to show that projects receiving fund money were, in fact, reducing emissions. Another example: \$563 million and this government could not prove the results. This is not me saying this. This is the Auditor General of Alberta. This is one more financial disaster from this government. This is a government that wants to create a \$1.4 billion slush fund weeks before a provincial election. It's not good.

Well, we heard yesterday – it was actually quite funny. I think the Finance minister corrected one of our comments, saying that it was a structured slush fund. I think he said it in jest, but I would suggest that's exactly what this is. This is a whole bunch of money sitting there for this government to decide where they're going to spend it depending on where they need the most votes. That's all this is. There is no transparency. There's no oversight. There's no debate in this place about deciding where these resources are most needed or how they will most make life better, none of that.

This is a pure and simple partisan slush fund. It is unfortunate that so many of the funds that Albertans need to make health care better in this province, to make education better in this province, to reduce class sizes, to do all of the things, to properly reindex benefits that were cut in 2019 – instead of just going forward, making people whole, and getting rid of those cuts that started in 2019, no, this government would rather take \$1.4 billion and put it in a fund for them to decide unilaterally what they're going to fund right before an election. You think that's not partisan? That is. That is partisan.

It's incredibly disappointing that this UCP government has so little respect for Albertans that they have the audacity this close to an election to say: "Yeah. Don't worry about it. We're just going to put \$1.4 billion over here, and we'll let you know where we're going to spend it as we go. Don't worry. Trust us." Albertans don't trust this government. This government will find out soon enough; Albertans don't trust them.

Thank you, Madam Chair. That's all I have.

5:20

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm really excited to stand in support of Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. There's a lot of good material in this act. I won't have time, of course, to cover all of the merits of this bill, but I'll just cover a few.

When you go to page 6, it talks about amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. Of course, one of the great things that this Legislature has done – and I appreciate the members opposite. They supported this amendment as well. In Alberta we have the most generous charitable tax credit in the entire country. I love it that Alberta – you know, we have the highest per capita of giving – compared to any other jurisdiction in Canada gives the most to charities. I think that speaks to the many great individuals and families that we have in Alberta. It is truly a place of freedom and prosperity.

What the amendments to this act do is that individuals, on the first \$200 that they donate – you know, this Legislature as a whole voted to increase that tax credit, from a provincial perspective, to 60 per cent. So when an Albertan gives \$200 – on their first \$200 of charitable donations now they receive 75 cents on the dollar back. Wow. What a great – I think it's something that I hope that each and every one of us in the Legislature can be proud of. It's a wonderful thing. It helps and recognizes, perhaps, Albertans that have more modest means. Perhaps they want to donate to a charity, and now that we partner with them – the Alberta government, the taxpayers partner with individuals who give to charities – they can receive, for their \$200 donation, \$150 back.

The reason why I love that amendment as well is that it establishes parity with the political donation tax credit. Of course, if individuals donate to a political party here in Alberta, they receive a tax credit of 75 per cent as well on the first \$200, and now we've established parity with that. The donation limits on charities, rightfully so and from a policy perspective, are much higher for charitable donations than political donations. I love the fact that we have created parity of treatment for our charities in Alberta.

Not only are we the most generous, most beneficial place to donate for individuals donating over \$200, but now, of course, we also have established ourselves as the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada for people donating \$200 or less. Now we give a 75 per cent credit. And you know what? Bill 10 amends that to make it effective for this year. Any Albertan that donates in 2023 will receive a tax credit, 75 cents on the dollar back. What a wonderful thing. I hope that the members opposite don't find that offensive. In fact, I expect they wouldn't. I certainly hope they wouldn't. They supported the bill, and I appreciate that they did that. That's a really good thing.

Again, of course, I don't have time to cover everything, but one of the other things in Bill 10 is that we've amended the Local Government Fiscal Framework Act. You know, in Alberta we are blessed with natural resources. We are a land of prosperity. We have eliminated the 50 per cent factor, now making municipalities a full partner in terms of 100 per cent, you know, sharing under the fiscal framework. That increases the amount and resources they get through the provincial government to help them as they seek to serve Albertans. My understanding is that they're very excited about that. Again, another positive aspect of Bill 10.

I want to talk a little bit about the Alberta fund because it seems that the NDP doesn't necessarily understand how we have an Alberta fund in the first place. The Alberta fund is really a surplus fund. If we didn't have a surplus, we wouldn't have any amount in the Alberta fund. Of course, the NDP, if they were ever in government, would never have an Alberta fund. They only have a deficit fund – right? – and a debt fund. That's the NDP fund: a debt fund, a deficit fund. We have an Alberta fund. The only reason there is an Alberta fund and that there's a billion dollars in it is because we have a surplus, right? Of course, well, the NDP never had a surplus. Why? Because they were very bad fiscal managers. They were a horrible government.

When they came into power, they jacked up corporate tax rates, of course, making us very uncompetitive. Guess what happened to our corporate tax revenues as a province when the NDP came and jacked up corporate tax rates? Overall revenue from a corporate revenue tax perspective actually fell. We've reduced corporate tax rates so that we are the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada to start and grow a business. You know what our corporate tax revenue has done? Even though we reduced corporate tax rates, we actually now have record corporate tax revenues. You know, that is a wonderful thing.

I think, you know, when we kind of talk about surpluses and prosperity, we're having record migration to Alberta, right? That is a wonderful thing. While the NDP like to talk about us being a fiscal train wreck or they like to talk about fiscal management, well, people seem to be voting with their feet, and they're coming to Alberta. We see people coming from all across Canada, from all over the world because this is a land of prosperity and freedom, and I love that. In the fiscal framework it talks about expense growth, and it seeks to limit expense growth to inflation and population growth.

Before I became an MLA – of course, I am from Red Deer. I love Red Deer. It's where I grew up. It's where I came back with my young family. I raised my family in Red Deer. It's a beautiful place. It's centrally located in the Calgary-Edmonton economic corridor. You know, it's not too big, not too small. We have a beautiful river, parks system, trail system, and we're close to these beautiful lakes, the beautiful west country, which I love. It's such a great playground. Of course, we have the mountains nearby. Most important, it's a place where I raised my family. I love the individuals and families in Red Deer, as I think each and every member in this Legislature loves and cares about the individuals in their community. What we're seeing in Red Deer – and I expect that we're seeing it throughout the province of Alberta – is that people are coming here, right?

Even though from a macro perspective we live in a very challenged economic environment, Alberta is sort of a shining star, not only in the world but in Canada. People are wanting to come here. Why do you think that is? Do you think that's because they want to come to a woke, socialist, fiscal train wreck? No. They're coming to Alberta because we are leading Canada in economic growth, right? We have the lowest taxes and the highest incomes. That is our inheritance and our legacy. That is the Alberta culture, freedom and prosperity. Does that have anything to do with the socialist, woke NDP? Madam Chair, it does not. It has nothing to do with them. So, of course, they wouldn't understand the concept of an Alberta fund being a surplus fund.

Ms Renaud: A slush fund.

Mr. Stephan: It's a surplus fund because if there was no surplus, there would be no balance in it.

Of course, the NDP: it's a foreign concept to them because they were horrible people in terms of how they managed this province. Yeah. Madam Chair, sorry; I didn't mean that. They were horrible fiscal managers. They were very incompetent. They did a horrible job. The reason I know that is because when I visited individuals and families when I was knocking on doors in Red Deer-South, you know, there would be individuals that perhaps worked in the oil and gas sector, right? Under, unfortunately, this horrible government they chased out capital. They drove away businesses. They've never apologized for the economic harm that they did.

5:30

When they were in office, when they became government, during the four years that they were in government, private-sector jobs actually shrunk under their mismanagement. They've never apologized for that, but that – of course, they had their billion-dollar deficits. They were horrible government. I mean, they did a horrible job. We know that. But they inflicted a great human cost kind of underlying their incompetence. They drove away Albertans from being able to provide for themselves and their families. They chased away capital under an NDP, socialist, woke government. Businesses didn't want to come and invest in Alberta. No; they left, right? They were, like, partners with their bosom buddy Justin

Trudeau, part of an NDP-Trudeau axis, a socialist, woke alliance. They were just a horrible, horrible government, and it's so good that they're gone. Really, because they were a horrible government, what are the fruits of horrible government? Huge, billion-dollar deficits.

I'm so grateful that we find ourselves now in a place of freedom and prosperity. We have record migration coming here. You know, I know why Albertans are coming here: because it's a place of opportunity. The clouds have lifted under this horrible grey NDP storm cloud going away, and in the next election they'll be even further away. I'm very happy about that because we've be able to repair the damage that they've done.

I'm really excited, Madam Chair, about supporting Bill 10. I love individuals living in their means. Of course, this government never understood what that is. They were a horrible government. We have surpluses. We are on the right track, a place of freedom and prosperity, and I'd invite the members opposite to vote in favour of Bill 10. Vote in favour of freedom and prosperity. Vote in favour of us undoing the horrible things that they did.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 10. I'd like to thank the Member for Red Deer-South for a colourful speech, perhaps his last in this Legislature. Certainly, it was one that allowed me to completely fill out my Conservative cliché bingo card, so I certainly appreciate those efforts on his part.

Madam Chair, the Member for Red Deer-South spoke at length about the Alberta fund being a surplus fund. Certainly, this government does have a surplus, in part because of the social debt, infrastructure debt, debt they've created in many other areas in the province of Alberta and in part due to a soaring price of oil, for which they can take absolutely no credit. But, certainly, I would note, Madam Chair, that it has been observed by economists in the province of Alberta that with the drop in the price of oil this government could in fact find itself running a deficit under its current projections. So while the member celebrates and claims fiscal responsibility, we know what the realities actually are, that this a government that continues to gamble on a high price of oil, which is about the opposite of what this member is claiming.

Again, it's very similar with this Alberta fund slush fund. The fact is, Madam Chair, that even if this was actually a surplus fund, it is not fiscal responsibility to set \$1.4 billion aside for the government to simply spend on a whim one month before an election. That is not the kind of integrity or fiscal responsibility the Member for Red Deer-South was just claiming that his government champions. Certainly, if any other government before had attempted to do such, I'm pretty sure that member would have been in strong opposition and spoken vocally against it. When it is his government approaching an election in which he is perhaps in danger of losing his seat, he's in favour.

Now, there are many things that could be done with that \$1.4 billion, Madam Chair. When we were speaking about the legacy of this government, as many of their members have and as the Minister of Finance did and took extensive time during their discussion on Bill 10 to brag about their record on investing in health care and other areas – let me tell you a bit of a story about a current situation under this government while they are setting \$1.4 billion aside in a slush fund for their election campaign.

Down in High River, for nearly 15 years the High River youth and adult or teen clinic has been providing safe, confidential,

accessible sexual and mental health services to teens and young adults in and around High River. It is celebrated. It is respected. I received a letter in support of it from the boys and girls club in the area recognizing the deep impact it has on supporting young people, youth, in that area. Many of the youth they serve come from vulnerable groups, like the LGBTQ2S-plus community, or from Indigenous communities. I received letters from doctors, from the boys and girls club, others calling it a vital part of health care in their community, important and life-saving, a vital preventative service.

Madam Chair, under this government as they were preparing this budget, as they were preparing to set aside \$1.4 billion for their election slush fund, on February 7, just a few hours before Dr. Jennifer Norheim, who has been at that clinic since it began, was getting ready to open the clinic for the day, she gets a call from her local PCN, who had gotten a call from Alberta Health telling that local PCN that they could no longer use their funding to pay for her work at the young adult and youth clinic. No warning, no offer of time to negotiate, no suggestion of how they could find another way to fund that work, just simply an ultimatum: you cannot fund that with your dollars anymore.

Now, the argument, Madam Chair, was that that work should be done under fee-for-service. Well, the Minister of Health is crusading on having accepted the recommendations of the MAPS committee, the early recommendations, which talk about trying to get away from fee-for-service. Regardless, while this government was preparing to set aside \$1.4 billion, as in here, in Bill 10, for their election slush fund, they told that local PCN they could no longer use their dollars to fund the work of Dr. Norheim.

So Dr. Norheim is left with the choice, Madam Chair, of choosing to volunteer her time at the clinic, do that work unpaid, as this government demanded so many family doctors do throughout the course of the pandemic while they were still maintaining their war against physicians in the province of Alberta. Dr. Norheim can't afford to do that, so the clinic will be closing as of March 31, the end of next week.

And you know what, Madam Chair? Dr. Norheim mentioned that there are no family doctors accepting new patients in their area. None. So those young people will lose their access at the youth and young adult clinic, and they will have no other options in the community to access that care. None. That is the reality on the ground while this government celebrates their \$1.4 billion in this apparent surplus fund that the Member for Red Deer-South is so proud of. What better use of a surplus than to actually fund access to care in the community for vulnerable youth? But, no, they're not doing that; they're setting this \$1.4 billion aside to campaign for their jobs. It flies in the face of everything that the Minister of Health and the UCP say they're actually working to support.

In the words of Dr. Norheim: this is a decision that will add more chaos and instability to the system. It will hurt access to primary care. It will increase the pressure on their local emergency departments while this government stands with their chosen fixer, Dr. Cowell, and claims that they have solved all of these issues. Again, Madam Chair, more interested in their re-election than actually doing the work they were elected to do for Albertans.

5:40

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that this clinic is precisely the kind of model of care that an Alberta NDP government will invest in, that we will support regardless of the price of oil, because that doesn't change the need in the community or the needs of these youth.

The Member for Red Deer-South talked about people voting with their feet. When we're talking about family doctors and care in the

community, Madam Chair, better places where we could be spending this \$1.4 billion that they're using for an election slush fund, let me tell you that just today we got the results for residency positions across Canada, young, graduating doctors making their choice of where they want to go do their residency, training, and potentially build their career. In family medicine Alberta had 42 vacancies. From what I've seen, that's the highest of any jurisdiction in Canada. B.C. had two vacancies. Young doctors are voting with their feet in the face of this government and its decisions and its supposed fiscal responsibility.

That is a different kind of debt, one that doesn't show up necessarily on the actuarial table but certainly does show up for these youth in High River and the tens of thousands of other Albertans who do not have a family doctor and don't face much of a prospect of getting one under this government.

This is part of a pattern, Madam Chair. This government, as they're preparing for this election, you know – and in their debate on Bill 10 and in some of the other debate this government has talked about election advertising. “Boy, the Alberta NDP in 2018” – let's see; so that's a full year they're talking about here, about the amount of government advertising that was spent on an election that took place four months after that, when they themselves are massively increasing government advertising spending directly before the election, including \$9 million that they're awarding themselves in supplementary spending.

You know an interesting thing, Madam Chair? On February 1, 2019, the former Premier, the hon. Jason Kenney, committed that a UCP government would extend a ban on nonessential government advertising to include not only the campaign period but also the months leading up to it. Promise made; promise not kept. Indeed, instead what we saw this government do was, through Bill 81, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2021 (No. 2), create a fixed election date, which then removed the existence of that campaign period. All of a sudden, conveniently, there are no rules and restrictions anymore on government advertising right up to the red line.

What we see, again, Madam Chair, is that through this \$1.4 billion slush fund, through the massive increase in government advertising spending, which the Member for Red Deer-South would have decried if any other government were doing it but he's happy to support to potentially try – and I do say “try” – to save his own seat, this government is willing to abuse the use of taxpayer dollars, the same dollars that they claim they're so proud to protect, the \$1.4 billion, as I noted yesterday, that they clawed out of the pockets of AISH recipients, folks on income supports, seniors that receive the Alberta seniors' benefit, students who needed special-needs support in schools, family doctors as they were scraping to get by, having to close clinics and lay off staff in the midst of the pandemic. None of those folks, none of those causes, none of those issues were as important as this government needing to save its own skin. That is the reality of what we see before us in Bill 10 with the Alberta fund, a \$1.4 billion slush fund for the next election. But Albertans see it, Madam Chair.

Now, certainly, there are a number of things in this bill that we don't find objectionable. Certainly, as the Member for Red Deer-South said, making it easier to begin the expansion of the tax credit for charitable donations: we have no issue with that whatsoever. The government choosing to force Albertans to make donations, which, basically, is what we have with this \$1.4 billion slush fund: that we do have an issue with.

Nonetheless, we've seen quite clear where this government's standards lie and what its intentions are and how far it's willing to go when it's seeing the writing on the wall as Albertans make quite clear what their thoughts are on this government's record, on the

choices it has made, on the level of arrogance and entitlement that they have brought forward, that rivals that of the 44-year dynasty of the PC government. Indeed, you could say that in some sense it exceeds it, because they managed, where it took 44 previously, to get there in four.

Thankfully, in May, Madam Chair, we have the opportunity to cut that short and make sure it ends at four and bring some integrity and respect for Albertans back to this government. I look forward to the opportunity to do that.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is always a pleasure to rise and speak in this Chamber. I stand today to express my support for Bill 10.

Firstly, I would like to applaud the Premier, the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, all the ministers for coming up with a budget that will secure the future of Alberta. It 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, Madam Chair, 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 government. What they did was to accumulate more debt. The members opposite were not even able to balance the budget, and it seemed that they never intended to balance it, as can be noticed in their continuous assertion of a spending spree. They even hinted that they would increase taxes. As we already have seen, it drove away job creators and billions in investments. While they plan to spend more and incur more debt to Alberta, leaving future generations to pay for it, they have yet to mention any shadow budget.

On the other hand, this government has planned to balance the budget from day one of assumption of office. It is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. In fact, during the start of this government in administration, the deficit has decreased even faster than initially planned. A balanced budget would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and pay down the debt. It would remove the burden to future generations to pay debt that they did not incur.

When the previous government assumed governance of the province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were ousted from office, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. As this government pays down the debt, Madam Chair, we are able to redirect this debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

5:50

Budget 2023 is another opportunity for this government to create and build Alberta's future, with a forecast surplus of \$2.4 billion and robust economic activity poised to lead the country in economic growth. It is aimed to have financial stability, and it ensures a greater, successful future for Alberta by growing the economy, creating good-paying jobs, strengthening health care and education, and keeping Alberta communities safe. Through the well-thought-out strategy of this government our economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery and growth, but there is a lot more

to be done to further diversify, to strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help for all Albertans.

Madam Chair, Budget 2023 also includes inputs from Albertans and stakeholders. The government received feedback and submissions from Albertans and various stakeholders through consultations conducted by way of online surveys, written submissions, and telephone town halls. Everyone's views were considered by the government, and all received were of great help in understanding the priorities of families, businesses, and communities. Having said that, let me express my appreciation to all who participated with the Budget 2023 consultations. Alberta is continuously moving forward through the government's focused, responsible fiscal management and relentless pursuit of economic growth. It has put the province on the most sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity and resulting in additional government revenues.

The job-creating corporate tax cut introduced by this government, Madam Chair, is proving to be a more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach it is estimated that for the fiscal year 2023-2024 there is about \$1.6 billion more collected in annual corporate tax revenue at the 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent in 2018-19, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since this government took office.

Multibillion-dollar investments have started to come into Alberta, Madam Chair. It has been forecast that Alberta will again have outstanding economic growth this year. Amazon Web Services is building its second cloud computing hub in Calgary, amounting to \$4.3 billion. Infosys and Mphasis opened their tech hubs last year in Calgary and created thousands of jobs in the province. RBC has also established a tech hub in Calgary, with about 300 jobs. EY created a new finance hub, with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce. Just recently Appexus technology is to open its new Canadian headquarters in downtown Calgary, creating 125 jobs in the process. An additional huge investment that has landed in Alberta is Lynx, Madam Chair. Canada's newest low-cost airline joins Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines.

These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy, Madam Chair. We saw the employment rate hit prepandemic levels in December 2021 by gaining about 130,000 jobs for the year, including 6,100 to the oil and gas industry. Moreover, in January 2022 we heard that Canada lost 200,000 jobs, but Alberta's economy gained over 7,000 jobs; 8,200 jobs were created in February 2022, which means that more Albertans are returning to work and receiving a regular paycheque.

Alberta got off to a strong start in January this year, with our province gaining 20,600 new jobs, and almost 11,000 more Albertans gained full-time jobs in February. Since 2021 Alberta has created more than 221,000 jobs. Our plan is working, and we are putting the right policies in place to grow and diversify the economy.

Under the NDP 183,000 Albertans lost their jobs, and businesses fled our province. This proves that Alberta's economy has momentum, and this government is focused on even more job creation in Alberta, which continues to be the economic engine of Canada. With a strong focus on investment attraction, job creation, and economic growth, Budget 2023 sets the stage for Alberta to remain Canada's economic engine for decades.

A \$176 million grant to the already successful Alberta at work initiative will help Albertans build their skills and find good jobs. It

will also assist employers in their search for workers in existing and emerging sectors. Further investment in aviation and aerospace, agrifood manufacturing, and \$24.5 million for the Alberta technology and innovation strategy will enhance emerging and innovative technologies and help attract even more venture capital investment to Alberta.

Let me also add that Alberta continues to be a world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development among oil-producing jurisdictions. This shows that while we recognize that Canada's largest exporter is still the oil and gas industry, we're experiencing broad-based investment and economic diversification in our province. Nonetheless, this investment climate and composition does not mean that the government's approach in carefully handling the province's finances will twist.

Alberta's government continues its disciplined spending to maintain balance and to secure Alberta's future. Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. That is why Alberta's government is also setting new records for spending in health care through Budget 2023. Madam Chair, we have the best front-line health care workers in the world, and Budget 2023 provides the right supports to ensure that Albertans get the care they need when and where they need it.

We are seeing a record-high investment into the Health ministry's operating budget. An additional \$965 million this year will help the Ministry of Health continue building a stronger health care system and ensure that the government can do what's needed to improve wait times for ambulance services, emergency rooms, and surgeries.

EMS services will be strengthened with \$196 million in funding over three years. This means that more staff will be hired, and it implements the recommendations made by the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee. Over three years \$15 million will be spent to source more EMS vehicles and replace or upgrade related equipment.

As we aim to increase surgical capacity and help reduce wait times, Madam Chair, Budget 2023 commits \$237 million over three years for the Alberta surgical initiative capital program, including \$120 million in new funding to support additional projects in Alberta Health Services owned facilities.

To attract, recruit, and train more doctors and nurses, with a focus on family physicians for rural areas, Budget 2023 also allotted \$158 million for these initiatives. This record investment also ensures . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee is now recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	709
Statement by the Speaker <i>Alberta Hansard</i> Special Edition.....	709
Introduction of Visitors	709
Introduction of Guests	709
Members' Statements	
Cost of Living and Affordability Plan	709
Ramadan.....	710
NDP Government Record.....	710
Crown of the Continent Tourism Region.....	710
Government Policies and Rural Albertans.....	711
Eavor Technologies.....	711
Retrospective by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka	711
Oral Question Period	
Cancer Treatment Wait Times.....	711
Anaesthesia Care	712
Government Advertising	713
Energy Company Municipal Tax Payment.....	713
Affordability Plan and Fiscal Policy.....	714
Energy Company Liability	714
WCB Cancer Coverage for Firefighters	715
Allergy Awareness and Supports.....	715
School Construction in Northeast Calgary	716
Francophone Services and Education	716
Education Funding and Parental Choice.....	717
Seniors' Support.....	717
School Construction in North Edmonton.....	718
Mental Health and Addiction Services	719
Notices of Motions	719
Tabling Returns and Reports	719
Orders of the Day	719
Government Motions	
Adjournment of Spring Sitting	719
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023.....	720
Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023	720
Bill 9 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.....	720
Division	733
Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	733

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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