



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 1, 2023

Day 3

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
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McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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(UC)
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Hunter
McDougall
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 1, 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.

Dr. Marie J. Laing
July 30, 1937, to March 24, 2023

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I mentioned yesterday, we have a number of tributes over the next number of weeks, and we are pleased to be able to be joined by the family members of one of those former members, Dr. Marie J. Laing. Dr. Laing served two terms as an Alberta New Democrat party member for Edmonton-Avonmore from 1986 to 1993. Marie Laing taught elementary school in Stettler before moving to Edmonton and completing her bachelor of arts and master of education degrees at the University of Alberta. After graduating, she worked as a psychologist and was the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. Election to this very Assembly interrupted her PhD studies, which she completed after seven years in the Legislature. Dr. Laing said that her training as a psychologist prepared her for her political work, the art of listening before speaking. After politics she returned to counselling professionally, also teaching and training, and maintained her commitment to women's issues and equity in our society. Dr. Laing passed away on March 24, 2023, at the age of 85. In a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask you to remember Dr. Laing each as you may have known her. Rest eternal grant unto her, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure and honour to introduce a family member of Dr. Marie Laing. We all know the great debt of gratitude we owe to family members of those who have served, so it's my pleasure to be able to introduce to you in the Speaker's gallery Marie's granddaughter Katelynn Pascoe. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader has two school groups joining us today, and she'll introduce them now.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, both of them joining us from the Knottwood community league. They are both on Knottwood Road in the Mill Woods constituency. I'm delighted to welcome 28 students from Ekota elementary school and 29 students from Menisa school. These are both grade 6 classes. I had the chance to read to the Ekota students for Read In Week, and I hope to visit the Menisa students soon. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the grade 5 and 6 students from Overlanders elementary school in the heart of Clareview. Again, I had the pleasure of reading with them during Read In Week. They are here with their teachers and all the other adults that have come with them today. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of Airdrie's finest constituents. One of them happens to be the mayor, His Worship Mayor Peter Brown, and Leona Esau. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, propane is a wonderful product, and made-in-Alberta products are far cleaner than diesel and home heating oil. Today we are fortunate to have Shannon Watt, the president and CEO of Canadian Propane Association, and her delegation of members. They bring billions of added value to Alberta's economy. A great organization.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It's an honour to rise to introduce to you and through you members of the Canadian Propane Association – I know my colleague mentioned Shannon Watt – but also association vice-president Katie Kachur, who is also a constituent of Calgary-West. Please join in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has an introduction.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of my constituents, Mr. Roy Skoreyko. As a man, an Albertan, who lives with a disability, he has been an active advocate for the same. He was the first Albertan with a disability to sit on a persons with developmental disabilities community board. I ask Roy to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce through you and to you to all the members of the Assembly the Association of Alberta Registry Agents board and team members – their CEO Rikki McBride, president Bud James, Steve Cutting, Miriam Rycroft – and Mathew Preston of CSG. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Bill 1

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election we made a promise to Albertans that our government would keep taxes low, and we are doing just that. If passed, Bill 1, Alberta's taxpayer

amendment act, would ensure Albertans and Alberta businesses continue to benefit from our low-tax, pro-growth environment. The fact that this policy was the first bill on our legislative agenda shows just how dedicated we are to standing up for the interests of Albertans.

Unlike under the NDP, Alberta has the lowest business tax in the country. This gives us a clear advantage. If passed by this House, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, will protect Albertans and Alberta business against future income tax hikes and ensure that we maintain our province's status as one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in all of North America. Mr. Speaker, we have heard from Albertans and Alberta businesses that they need more certainty when it comes to income taxes, and this proposed legislation gives just that.

Thanks to the job-creation tax cut Alberta's general business income tax rate is now the lowest in the country by a wide margin, and with it we are generating the highest corporate income tax revenue the province has ever seen, far more than the NDP ever did with a rate that was 50 per cent higher. We are however forecasting that we'll be bringing in almost \$900 million more this year in business tax revenue than we anticipated.

Albertans can be assured that keeping taxes low and life affordable for Albertan families is a priority for our government.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, I think about what it means to be a teacher and plan lessons, unit plans, and year plans. In those year plans teachers include required outcomes, and even though they don't precisely know what a particular lesson will look like on a particular day, they have a goal and the outcomes to follow. It is a critical part of doing the job, to create a plan. Teachers share that plan with their principals and with their students. They don't just wing it with those yearly plans, but that is precisely what this government did.

During the election the UCP said over and repeatedly that we didn't need to talk about an Alberta pension plan, that Albertans didn't need to worry about it. Turns out Albertans did need to worry because during the election the government failed to tell Albertans about their plans to take their hard-earned pension dollars out of the CPP. They hid their plans from voters. Folks like my teaching colleague Tracey wonder why. And as she says, if the UCP had truly believed that an APP was good for all Albertans, they would have campaigned on it.

1:40

Why wouldn't they trust Albertans with the details of their plans? Maybe it's because they knew Albertans wouldn't believe the fantasy numbers in the UCP's report. Perhaps it's because they knew groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and many small-business owners would be very concerned. Or maybe it's because they always knew, like we do, that the majority of Albertans want them to keep their hands off the CPP.

We know this because we've actually talked to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, we talked to Albertans during the election, and we are still talking to them. Over 33,000 Albertans have answered our survey, where we asked one very simple question: do you want an APP? Over 90 per cent of survey respondents have said no. On this side of the House we will not let the UCP recklessly gamble with Albertans' retirements. Our message and the message of tens of thousands is: hands off our CPP.

Farmers

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, in celebration of the close of harvest this year I want to take us back to the iconic words spoken by the great radio orator Paul Harvey. In 1978 at the Future Farmers of America convention Mr. Harvey captured the essence of what it means to be a farmer. Today I would like to present an updated version of this 50-year-old ode to farmers.

On the eighth day God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker," so God made a farmer. God said, "I need somebody that will swath all day and night and then do it again the next day because laborers are few and the snow is on its way," so God made a farmer. God said: "I need someone willing to be dirty from head to foot, day in and day out, because production of food can be dirty. I need someone who can be jack of all trades, agronomist, economist, ecologist, plant and animal whisperer, fertility specialist, veterinarian, mechanic, tech specialist, engineer, accountant, salesperson, futures and crop insurance specialist, and still have time for kids, family, and community," so God made a farmer. God said: "I need someone whose hands can endure years of hard toil but gentle enough to cradle a newborn calf. I need someone with hands for praying when the rains are needed yet that also has hands of steel to deal with the blistering heat and the bone-chilling cold," so God made a farmer. God said, "I need someone who still recognizes that we are partners in this grand adventure we call life and that will nurture life in all its forms, from sprout to towering plant," so God made a farmer.

Thank you to all our farmers for being the quintessential entrepreneurs, the eternal optimists, and the hands that feed our world. And thank God he made farmers.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this government has taken office, Albertans have been paying more and getting less. In their first few days in office the UCP raised income taxes. They lifted the cap on utility bills, auto insurance, and more, causing those bills to skyrocket. The price of electricity in Alberta this summer was over 100 per cent higher than the previous year. This government, as one of their first acts, cut benefits for seniors and Albertans with disabilities and then stated that that wouldn't be onerous. When we warned about the risks facing Albertans with higher utility costs, this government stated that their plan was to do nothing. Albertans are paying the highest auto insurance premiums in Canada. The Finance minister at that time told Albertans they should, quote, shop around.

Despite the boast of this government the facts are obvious. Albertans are facing an affordability crisis. A study from the School of Public Policy estimates over 115,000 Calgarians are at risk of homelessness. Rents are getting unaffordable, there's less affordable housing, all as a direct result of the actions of this government. We see and hear the consequences of those decisions from constituents and neighbours every single day, but this government remains laser focused on their primary objective: gambling away Albertans' pensions. Rather than supporting Albertans, this government has made the deliberate choice to spend millions of taxpayer dollars on trying to convince Albertans that this government can be trusted with their pensions while the vast majority of Albertans know they can't.

But there is some good news, Mr. Speaker. I'm here with a fantastic team of 38 MLAs committed to standing up for Albertans, the largest Official Opposition in Alberta's history. We will stand up for Albertans and ensure that their concerns are heard and that

this government is held to account for their actions and their failures. We will stand up for Alberta.

Thank you.

Propane

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, summer barbecues are an integral part of communities across my riding of West Yellowhead. They serve as more than just an opportunity to enjoy delicious hot dogs and hamburgers but also bring the community closer together.

The propane used in these barbecues also serves an integral function. However, I would like to remind this Chamber of how much more valuable propane is than just lighting barbecues. As a low-carbon energy source, propane is recognized by governments around the world for the contribution it can make toward improved indoor and outdoor air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Most of Canada's propane is produced right here in Alberta, and this production is expected to increase in alignment with natural gas production from the Montney basin.

Propane also brings economic benefits to the province with almost 14,000 jobs, \$2.8 billion in provincial GDP, and \$950 million in royalties and taxes coming directly from the propane sector. Currently propane serves as a primary heating source for almost 19,000 homes across Alberta, and this number could grow, replacing wood and heating oil for thousands of homes across the province. This would provide immediate emissions reductions while still providing reliable and affordable energy to remote communities not connected to natural gas or other electrical systems.

Propane is an affordable alternative energy choice. During the winter of 2022-23 propane cost up to \$1 less per litre than heating oil. Propane can also be used as a backup energy source for critical infrastructure like hospitals and schools, thus decreasing our exposure to grid unreliability.

As this province seeks to reduce its emissions, it is important to recognize the key role that propane could play not just provincially but globally. Propane exports have grown steadily over the past decade. In 2017 Albertan propane started being exported to non-U.S. markets, and in 2021 exports to non-U.S. destinations surpassed those to the U.S. The world needs more Canadian energy, and surely propane is a large part of that energy future.

Violence against Sikhs in India

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I represent the riding of Calgary-Falconridge, which is home to many diverse communities, including people of Sikh faith and background. This November marks the 39th anniversary of the 1984 Sikh genocide. From October 31 to November 3, 1984, thousands of Sikhs were hunted and murdered throughout India. Days of fierce violence saw thousands of Sikhs killed, and many others were injured across the country. Their properties were looted and burned, leaving them homeless and without refuge. Many families lost their sons, brothers, and fathers, all because they were Sikhs.

Unofficial estimates of deaths range up to 30,000 over four days across India. Killing, torture, disappearance, and mass cremations of Sikhs continued for many years; 39 years on, survivors and families continue to be denied justice. These events are still very present in the lives of many constituents, their families, and the community.

We must honour those whose lives were taken and their families who continue to grieve their loss. We recognize the anniversary of these atrocities, and we continue to raise awareness of the horrors of the past. We also have a duty to seek answers, accountability, and justice on behalf of those who still live with this trauma. We

must remain steadfast in our commitment to openness, justice, human rights, and fairness both at home and abroad.

I wish to personally extend my sympathies to the families who lost loved ones in November 1984 and all those who have lost their loved ones in the time since. The trauma continues to live with us. We all must stand with the Sikh community in the search for justice and reconciliation to ensure that there is never... [Member Boparai's speaking time expired]

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, pursuant to section 4(6) of the Election Act, I'm pleased to table the Chief Electoral Officer's 2022 by-election report, which includes the March 15, 2022, by-election in Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and the November 8, 2022, by-election in Brooks-Medicine Hat. An electronic copy of the report will also be provided to all members.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has repeatedly made claims about transparency and confidence in her plan to gamble away Albertans' pensions, yet when pressed yesterday to release the government's internal polling, a poll paid for by taxpayer money, she stalls, stating that consultations are apparently still ongoing. So to the Premier: why is she withholding information that belongs to Albertans, that they have not only paid for but are fully entitled to review? Will the Premier please release the government's internal polling results and just be honest with Albertans about how much she knows they are opposed to her plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone knows that when you do a poll it's a sampling of the public, sometimes in the order of 500 or 800 responses, and that's going to be one of the things that we look at, engaging whether or not Albertans are interested in going to a referendum on the Alberta pension plan. We're looking as well at the 70,000 people who have so far participated in our online consultation. We're getting more than 10,000 people participating in each of the public consultations that Jim Dinning is doing, and we continue to get letters and texts into our offices. We'll look at all of that information when we make our decision.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the online consultation doesn't actually ask people the question.

Now, yesterday the Premier said the government would, I quote, continue listening to Albertans throughout the consultation process, but the process includes one-way telephone calls and biased surveys. Our caucus did the government's job for them and conducted a survey asking Albertans a simple question: should Alberta leave the Canada pension plan? Over 33,000 responded and, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, 92 per cent said no. Albertans' opinions have been made absolutely clear, so why is this Premier pretending she doesn't know that? Why is she gaslighting...

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fair Deal Panel discussions that took place over four years ago had 350,000 people who participated, and one of the things they asked for was for us to do the work, do the assessment of what it would take to create our own pension plan, and then to, if Albertans were interested, put it to a referendum to be able to make a decision on that. So we are acting on the direction that we got years ago from Albertans. It takes a little bit of time to get results. We got an interim report in 2021. We got the final report in 2023. It's been released, and we're having the discussion.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, just today the Finance minister's letter to the feds effectively confirmed that this UCP plan is built on uncertain numbers. Last week the Premier suggested that a referendum would not move forward until a final number was agreed on by the courts. So for the record here in the House, will the Premier confirm today that Albertans will not be asked to vote on leaving the CPP until there is either a conclusive number negotiated by all the provinces or determined through a final and binding decision of the courts? Yes or no?

Ms Smith: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Automobile Insurance Rates

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Back in 2017 the Alberta NDP capped car insurance. The UCP claimed that was too mean to the insurance companies, so they decided to remove the cap, and premiums spiked 30 per cent. Now Albertans are paying the highest rates in the country by far. Today the UCP announced they would reimpose a cap, but here's the thing: the train has already left the station, and Albertans are left holding the bag. So to the Premier: will she admit that the Alberta NDP had the right solution all along?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, today the Finance minister and myself announced another interim step towards finally addressing the accelerating costs of auto insurance, and we have informed them that they are only allowed to increase the rate on good drivers by 3.7 per cent, which is in keeping with inflation. We've been told by the insurance companies that that will cover about 80 per cent of insured drivers, which means that the people who are going to be paying higher rates are going to be the ones who are bad drivers and who are causing the accidents. I think that's what Albertans expect.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Premier claimed she was capping insurance rates, but days after that announcement some insurance companies went ahead and increased their rates by 16 per cent. Fast-forward to today and the UCP decided to lift the most ineffective freeze in history, inviting insurance companies to raise their premiums by up to almost 4 per cent. Wow. With friends like this who needs enemies? Will the Premier actually take action to help Albertans, or will she simply make more empty promises?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition knows that there were rate board hearings that happened at the end of last year, which is part of the reason why we knew we had to act to make sure that there weren't double-digit increases. Over the course of the last year we've done our consultation, and we've come up with some proposals. So the insurance companies

will be allowed to increase rates on new drivers by no more than the rate of inflation. They are going to, as well, be capped at their level of profit. If they have a level of profit that exceeds that cap, it's going to have to be rebated back. Those are the protections I think consumers want.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the bottom line. Under this Premier's watch, Alberta boasts the highest insurance rates in the country. According to an EY report from 2022 a young student driving a Honda Civic in Calgary pays a staggering 550 per cent more than their friend in Saskatoon. Today's announcement does not help that driver or, frankly, any others. Why won't the Premier keep her empty promise and actually take action to bring down these outrageous, over-the-top insurance costs brought on by the policies of this UCP government?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have commissioned a report which will be received either by the end of this year or in the first quarter of next year, that is looking at the full range of options for how we can address this issue once and for all. There are a number of promising jurisdictions that have been in a situation like we've been before. The Finance minister this morning, for instance, mentioned New Jersey. They went from having very high rates; they restructured their market, and now they have some of the best rates. We're looking all around the world to see if we can get some good advice because we know something needs to change, and we're going to be acting on that early in the new year.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal (continued)

Ms Phillips: On the weekend the Finance minister told a national TV audience that his UCP government doesn't have a precise plan to move ahead with a referendum on gambling with Albertans' pensions by pulling out of the CPP; the Finance minister is going to consult his feelings. And then just a couple of days ago the Premier said that it will be a confluence of inputs, whatever that word salad means. The UCP's plan to gamble with our retirement security is based on feelings and vibes. Albertans are not sold. A referendum campaign, that the government will lose badly, sounds like my kind of fun, so when is the date, Minister?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They know a lot about word salad on that side of the House. I'll give them that. I would say that there are many ways that we're going to be able to gauge the interests of Albertans to proceed with this.

Ms Phillips: Vibes. Ouija boards.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Horner: We commissioned this panel. We're going to hear a what-we-heard document. They're going to provide recommendations. As the Premier said, they already have 70,000 submissions. There are many ways we're going to be able to understand exactly where Albertans are at on this issue, and we look forward to the conversation continuing.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been noted at 1:59.

Ms Phillips: Well, that answer was weak and vague.

Sending the UCP a message to keep their hands off our retirement is fine by me. Certainly the thousands of Albertans we've heard from would love to send this government that message. Seems like it's the UCP and the Minister of Finance that are the ones scared of the referendum. That must be because business voices, local and national, big and small, are also opposed to the UCP's plan to gamble with our CPP. So I'll ask the minister one more time. Let's give business the certainty they're looking for. When will the referendum be held; '24, '25? How long are we dragging this unpopular . . .

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what is clear is that the NDP has a problem with referendums, has a problem with maybe elections, like maybe they should change their name to the Nearly Democratic Party. I don't know what they would be so scared of. All I know is that this is a conversation that's live with Albertans, with the federal government, obviously, with the other provinces, and I look forward to continuing the conversation. We have an FPT at 9 a.m. on Friday, where that conversation will continue.

2:00

Ms Phillips: The minister doesn't want to talk, Mr. Speaker, about when the referendum will be. It must be because there's turmoil in the caucus and the cabinet whether to even have a referendum. During the election the UCP refused to talk about pulling out of the CPP. The minister of agriculture said that he was committed to remaining within the CPP; no APP gamble for him. The MLA for Livingstone-Macleod . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Ms Phillips: The MLA for Livingstone-Macleod said that her party had no plan to withdraw from the CPP. The MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul said that pulling out of the CPP wasn't in the UCP platform. Yeah. We noticed. To the Finance Minister. Tell Albertans: when will the referendum be held? What is the date? How long do we have to sit through this propaganda?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. One thing that we've been very clear on is that this cake isn't baked. We have not decided to proceed to a referendum. We've decided to continue with this conversation and engage with Albertans. The Premier has been very clear that we would not proceed to a referendum unless we had a firm number to take back to Albertans. She's made that statement in this House, she's made it to the media, and she's made it to Albertans. That's what we're committed to.

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

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't want new coal mines on the eastern slopes. Indigenous and municipal leaders, environmentalists, ranchers, and folks who value these distinctly

Albertan natural landscapes joined together in 2020 to say no to coal, but the UCP didn't listen to Albertans, and they refused to pass or even debate the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. Now the same Australian mining company is back with a new application to drill dozens of new exploratory holes on Grassy Mountain. Will the Premier finally listen to regular Albertans, pass the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, and say no to coal mines?

Mr. Jean: As the member knows, Alberta right now has some of the strongest regulations and restrictions on coal mining in the world. Now, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the minister.

Mr. Jean: They might not want to hear the truth, Mr. Speaker, but the truth is real, and the truth is that Alberta has some of the best regulations in the world. The application for these exploration drilling activities is being reviewed right now by the independent AER, and an application does not necessarily mean it will be approved. The ministerial order right now restricts coal projects but does allow for exceptions, including for active coal mines and a small number of advanced projects.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little bit of déjà vu because I'm pretty sure that's the same answer I heard yesterday, which is basically a non answer.

The Eastern Slopes Protection Act would have made this mining exploration illegal, but instead we have a ministerial order that places the decision in the Energy minister's hands. I asked him yesterday, and I heard nothing again today. The Premier and the minister don't need to wait for the AER. They can tell Albertans right now that they will not let this coal mining go forward. My question for the Premier: mountains or mines, Premier?

Mr. Jean: Albertans: that's who we stand up for on this side of the House. Now, let's talk about who doesn't stand up for Albertans. Let's talk about what the NDP did when they were in government. Mr. Speaker, they didn't protect the eastern slopes. In fact, they opened up the eastern slopes to applications and opportunities for coal mines. They don't protect Albertans, and they didn't protect Albertans. In fact, if we look just east, the largest port of coal export in North America: brown coal, brown thermal coal. The NDP right across this country should be ashamed of themselves.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, clearly, the Premier and the minister don't really know enough about the issue, but that's okay. We've got your back. We're hosting a town hall tonight online. We've had a really great, strong response from Albertans, and it's clear that they're organizing again to resist the UCP's bizarre fascination with coal mining. Here's a chance for anybody in the UCP to learn what regular Albertans think about open-pit coal mining on the eastern slopes. Will the Premier and the minister join our town hall tonight? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I find it difficult to find in the question a piece of government policy that the minister might respond to, but if he chooses to answer, he's welcome to.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be there so I could discuss the NDP retirement plan. Now, we know that the king of coal now is John Horgan, who in March of this year received a very nice board appointment for the Elk Valley coal resource company. Now, he's the king of coal. We have, of course, Moe Sihota, who is the

past president of the NDP in B.C, who is now at the Woodfibre LNG company. Maybe that's the retirement plan. Maybe the queen of coal will come as a retirement from the NDP party in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Support for Calgary

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, last week the Leader of the NDP Official Opposition, the Calgary caucus, and I met with the mayor of Calgary and city council, and it's clear that the provincial government needs to step up and fund urban transit adequately and sustainably. Calgarians deserve a robust green line that goes both south and north, but was it in the throne speech? Nope. Nada. Zilch. Not one word about the Calgary green line. Did the minister responsible fail to advocate for Calgary transit riders, or did he advocate and fail?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to congratulate you, as this is my first time rising in the Chamber, on your election win not only in the outstanding riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills but also as Speaker.

I'd also like to thank the member for that very important question. On this side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker, we support the green line. We support transit projects all the way across this province. It's with \$1.53 billion that this government has committed to the green line, and we're going to help the city of Calgary get it built.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Calgarians and Albertans all across the province deserve a provincial government that will work to keep and put a roof over their heads and given that Calgary needs 2,700 affordable housing units because the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Calgary is nearly \$1,900 a month – and now the Calgary housing corporation is set to lose hundreds of affordable housing units because of UCP mismanagement – why doesn't the Minister of Municipal Affairs care about keeping roofs over the heads of Calgary residents, including those in Calgary-Hays?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report to the House that housing starts have increased in this province by 21 per cent in the month of September at the same time as they've decreased on average by 8 per cent across the country, which shows that Alberta's plan is working, continuing to invest in affordable housing but, most importantly, continuing to make sure that we create an economy where people will come and be able to build homes. That's why I'm also so excited to report to you and to the entire House that last month Calgary saw the most purpose-built rentals built in their history.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the majority of Calgarians voted for a party that cares about them and that's fighting for affordable housing, efficient transit, actually building schools and hospitals and given that the throne speech doesn't address a single one of these concerns raised by Calgarians, Mr. Speaker, does this government think that Calgarians deserve a forward-thinking and caring government? The people of Calgary-Acadia, Calgary-Beddington, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Edgemont, Calgary-Falconridge, Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Klein, Calgary-Mountain View, Calgary-North East, and Calgary-Varsity sure do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we care about Calgary and all cities. Some of the things we're doing for Calgary: LRT, \$540 million in the next three years; Deerfoot Trail, \$429 million; Springbank off-stream reservoir, \$282 million; Calgary cancer centre, \$166 million; Calgary ring road, \$134 million over three years; Peter Lougheed emergency department, \$84 million; \$59 million for the Glenbow Museum revitalization; \$57 million for Bethany care continuing care modernization; so much more. We care. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has risen.

Bill 1

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity, but we must be vigilant to keep it that way, and it is in the public interest for all future Alberta governments to live within their means and to make legal roadblocks for them jacking up income taxes on Albertans. To the Minister of Finance: how will this protect Alberta as the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow a business, to live, work, and raise a family?

2:10

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Alberta is expected to lead the nation in economic growth not only this year but next as well. Our government continues to build a prosperous future for Albertans with a focus on supporting growth, job creation, and investment. In fact, Alberta's projected surplus is \$2.4 billion by the end of this year. Yesterday the Premier tabled Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, and if passed, it will be our first campaign promise filled. Keeping taxes low for Albertans and maintaining a competitive edge for Alberta businesses is a top priority.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP was very bad, jacking up income taxes and forced their hated carbon tax on Albertans, and given that the NDP hate the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act because it creates a roadblock on jacking up Alberta taxes and given that we have restored the Alberta advantage with the lowest tax rates, leading Canada in economic growth, to the minister: how does the Taxpayer Protection Act build investor confidence, creating jobs for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If passed, the legislative amendments in the taxpayer amendment act would prevent government from increasing personal and corporate taxes without first consulting with Albertans through a referendum. This is one way we're ensuring Alberta maintains its pro-growth, low-tax, business-friendly environment. Did you know that under our government's tax policies Alberta generates more corporate tax revenue than the NDP did with a 50 per cent higher tax rate? While the NDP is focused on raising taxes, killing jobs, and chasing away investment, Alberta businesses can rest assured that on this side of the House we're focused on creating jobs.

Mr. Stephan: Given that affordability is a top concern for Albertans and given that Trudeau and his NDP puppets and these NDP puppets

seek to undermine affordability for Albertans with hated carbon taxes and given that Alberta elected our government to stand up to the fiscally and morally bankrupt Trudeau-NDP puppet alliance, to the minister: what steps will we be taking to protect Alberta as a land of freedom and prosperity?

The Speaker: I'll remind the member that all questions should be directed through the Speaker.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. Affordability still is a main concern of Albertans, and Albertans deserve certainty when it comes to their household budget. The taxpayer amendment act, if passed, would prevent government from increasing personal income tax rates without first consulting with Albertans through a referendum. Protecting families and single-parent households from unexpected and unnecessary costs is a top priority for our government. We're keeping life affordable for Albertans.

Renewable Energy Project Approvals

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, you'd think that if the government was going to risk \$33 billion of investment and 24,000 jobs, they'd take a moment to talk to people, yet not a single business or person who works in generating our electricity or trying to make investments here in Alberta was consulted in advance on the government's moratorium on renewables. How can the minister reassure Alberta entrepreneurs, landowners, and investors that they will not be blindsided again by this government's intervention without consultation in the future?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Since that time we've done hundreds of consultations with every business across the entire spectrum. Not only that, once we explain that the reason why we've had to do this pause on renewables is because the NDP didn't do their job in the first place, by transitioning early off coal and sending electricity prices straight up for the years since their – we're going back. We're doing the responsible thing. We're fixing the mess that the NDP left for us.

Ms Al-Guneid: A scheduling glitch.

Given that public data shows that 118 projects have been impacted by the government's ban on renewables and given that total investments at risk are estimated at \$33 billion and given that \$263 million in annual revenue from municipal taxes and land leases in 27 different municipalities is also at risk, can the minister see the damage he's causing Albertans, especially landowners and farmers, who have had incomes jeopardized by this abrupt and heavy-handed government intervention?

The Speaker: Just for the benefit of all new members, that would be an example of a quip or a preamble that's unacceptable after question 4.

The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: And affordability is top of mind for this government, and that's why we are talking to landowners and farmers to make sure that they have the land to continue to grow the food that we eat. We are making sure that we fix the messes to make sure that users of that land, from tourists to municipalities to farmers and ranchers, all have access to that precious resource. We're doing the work that the NDP failed to do. This is what responsible government does: fix problems.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Premier has promised that this ban on renewables will last six months and only six months and given that companies and industry leaders in Calgary-Glenmore and all across Alberta will be waiting for the government's final regulations – the minister has done long-term damage to investor certainty – will the minister confirm right now to Albertans, entrepreneurs, and the investor community that this ban on renewables will be lifted by midnight on February 29, 2024?

Mr. Neudorf: Absolutely. But we are going to continue to do the work and make sure that we solve this problem. Ironically, since the pause was put in place, we've seen an increase in interest and investment. We've seen more people wanting to come to Alberta because we have the best market in all of Canada. I'd like to remind all members of this House that every other province in Canada has a permanent moratorium on renewables. They can only build there if the government has opened an RFP and allowed it to happen. Not so in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Foundational Learning Assistance Program

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, it has been just over two months since the start of the school year, and this government has already announced that grants to help vulnerable kids finish high school are being capped. We have seen this UCP make housing for students a living nightmare, and now they're taking away a lifeline that could support them to get through this housing crisis. To the minister: is the UCP's idea of fully spent on the foundational learning assistance program basically a fancy way of saying, "Sorry, kids; you missed the budget bus; better luck next year"?

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Our government is proud to support underemployed Albertans seeking to develop job-ready skills to be successful and build rewarding careers through the foundational learning assistance program. We know this program has provided hope. It's opened doors and secured jobs for tens of thousands of ambitious, driven Albertans. In Budget 2023 our government increased funding by \$6.9 million from the previous year. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Given that this government can find funds for issues they really care about – let's just look at \$7 million being spent on advertising gambling away Albertans' pensions – and given that the reasoning for capping this program is sharp increases in demand and budget constraints, will the minister commit to reopening FLA and supporting initiatives that Albertans actually need and want?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the FLA program has experienced a significant increase in demand due to several factors. Students who defer . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I had no problem hearing the question. I am having a challenge hearing the answer.

The hon. the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students who deferred their studies during the pandemic have returned, and the eligible student population has grown along with Alberta's population. I'm pleased to share that Advanced Education has added an additional \$1.25 million that will support up to 225 more high school learners this year.

Member Hoyle: Given that students are already fighting incredible challenges – the demands of campus food banks have increased up to a hundred per cent, and many students are living in unsafe spaces because they have nowhere else to go – and given that this is the first time in history that this program has been capped this way, how does the minister justify this decision to take away critical support from vulnerable students when Albertans are facing one of the worst cost-of-living crises in our history?

2:20

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, this program has not been capped, and as I just mentioned, we are adding an additional \$1.25 million to help high school students get through this program, so that funding is available. The opposition is hearing about it probably for the first time, but the answer to the question is: yes, we are supporting vulnerable Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a question.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of Leduc-Beaumont and indeed all Albertans are deeply concerned about the future price and reliability of electricity, particularly now, in light of the unrealistic electricity regulations being proposed by this out-of-touch federal government. Could the Minister of Affordability and Utilities please explain to the House what steps the government is taking to protect Alberta residents and consumers from the potential impacts that these regulations would have on electricity costs and reliability?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this very timely, important question. In addition to our suite of affordability measures, that distributed nearly \$800 million to 1.4 million households, our government is currently taking an in-depth look at all systems in an effort to maximize existing electricity infrastructure while also reworking the regulated rate option to ensure all Albertans have a reliable and affordable electricity grid.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that during the cold winter months Albertans need reliable and affordable electricity to heat their homes and given that the proposed out-of-touch regulations from Ottawa will increase electricity costs and make Alberta's electricity grid unreliable, can the same minister please tell the House what the government is doing to push back against these federal regulations to ensure Albertans are not left to freeze in the dark?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. While the opposition supports the federal clean electricity regulations and refused to stand with us yesterday in our motion for the feds to repeal the carbon tax, unlike their colleagues

in Saskatchewan, we are committed to being carbon neutral by 2050. We continue to meet with Ottawa and make sure Albertans' interests are served. Instead of meeting the Prime Minister's ideological goals, we will do what is best for Albertans by charting a realistic and affordable path for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that it is essential that this government maintains the competitiveness of Alberta's energy sector while also addressing the concerns of high electricity costs for Albertans, can the same minister outline any strategies, policies, or investments that the government is considering implementing to support clean and affordable energy sources within our province while simultaneously protecting the interests of our residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to ensuring that we have the right energy mix. This includes improving reliable baseload capacity. We have an additional 2,714 megawatts of baseload power that will come online by September 2024. This will push electricity bills lower and ensure reliable electricity for decades. In addition, we have record amounts of wind and solar applying for permits. Alberta is the best place in Canada to invest in renewables, and we'll make sure it stays that way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North East has a question.

Small-Business Owners' Concerns

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP's idea to pull out of the CPP is putting all Albertans at risk, including small-business owners. Small businesses are an integral part of our economy, employing hundreds of thousands of Albertans, yet the UCP is putting the vital part of our economy at risk. Small businesses rely on stability and predictability. Last week I joined small-business owners from my riding to ask this government: why are they putting our province's small-business community at risk by continuing to push for a risky Alberta pension plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Small businesses are essential to the vibrancy and success of Alberta's local communities and economy, making up about 96 per cent of businesses in the province and employing a major part of our labour force. Alongside the Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development I plan to work closely with Alberta's small-business community to ensure their short-term and long-term success. Alberta's government provides a range of supports to help small businesses grow and succeed, including access to advice and coaching, financing and training information, and market expansion and funding opportunities.

Thank you.

Member Brar: Given that the national small-business lobby is questioning the benefit of APP for Albertans and given that the Calgary Chamber of commerce has expressed concerns about the uncertainty that gambling with Albertans' pensions would create and given that the president of the Calgary Chamber of commerce has said – and I quote – that we have benefited from being part of a bigger pool, why is the UCP ignoring the concerns of business leaders about the inherent risk of an Alberta pension plan?

Mr. Jones: Small businesses drive Alberta's economy, creating jobs and fostering innovation. Alberta's government is committed to helping small businesses thrive and succeed. Through the government's Biz Connect services small businesses receive help accessing available supports and are referred to local resources, associations, and organizations for additional support. Alberta's government is also investing over \$700 million over four years through the Alberta at work initiative to help Albertans develop new skills and grow their careers.

Member Brar: Given that the minister has no real answers and given that small-business owners are telling me how much they oppose this idea and given that I was recently joined by Sukhi Sadioura, a small-business owner in Calgary, who said, quote: I do not need the headache of implementing another system when the one we have is not broken; I do not want whatever complications come my way to satisfy the whim of a politician who doesn't care about the challenges facing the average small-business person, won't the Finance minister agree this time to listen to small-business leaders rather than the Premier's ideology and end his plan to gamble with Alberta's . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP government every economic indicator in Alberta went down with the exception of the debt, which skyrocketed. They increased taxes. They increased regulatory burden . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Record business closures, record unemployment, 13 quarters of Albertans leaving the province, 180,000 jobs lost. I would encourage the NDP to stick with our policies on job creation and small-business support because their record is failure.

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

Addiction and Mental Health Services

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction and I recently heard a heartbreaking story from one of my constituents. Her son is facing extreme mental health challenges and is suffering from addiction. Her voice and her son's story are so important, and it echoes a sad reality that many families in Alberta are going through every day. Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction share with the House some of the Alberta model initiatives that our government has taken to support Albertans and their families, such as my constituents who suffer from addiction?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed, and thank you for having him introduce me to his constituent. It was a heartbreaking story, and it reminded me that it's something that we all see day to day. It's not always talked about. Every member of this Chamber and every citizen of our province knows individuals affected by these crises, so we are doubling down on recovery. We believe recovery is the antidote to addiction, which is why we're focusing on expanding

our virtual opioid dependency program, which is why we're moving forward with our 11 recovery communities, which is why we've added 10,000 new spaces for treatment above and beyond what was there before.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that we're seeing an increase of individuals battling with addiction and the strains it puts on their families and given that our government was elected on a platform commitment to develop the compassionate intervention act and continue to implement the Alberta model, could the same minister please provide the House with some details on how this policy would work and how it would support Albertans and their families who struggle with addiction?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you, for the question. The truth is that there is nothing compassionate – there's nothing more un-Canadian and un-Albertan than leaving our most vulnerable individuals on the streets. There is no laughing matter when it comes to those who are suffering from the deadly disease of addiction, and I ask members opposite to take very seriously . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask everyone in this province to take very seriously the fact that the only way out of addiction is through treatment and recovery. The deadly disease of addiction will continue, which is why we're bringing forward legislation that says that when an individual is a danger to themselves or to others because of their substance use, we have an obligation as a caring society to intervene . . .

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

2:30

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for the answer. Given that our government was elected on a commitment to expand mental health resources to assist our youth who are currently battling with mental health issues and given that mental health classrooms provide clinical mental health support to students who need it the most, could the same minister please share with the House more about this initiative and the importance of addressing mental illness early?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for this second supplemental because it highlights that there is no way to address the deadly disease of addiction and its crisis without also looking at the mental health crisis that so many of our youth are in today, which is why we've expanded CASA mental health supports and CASA House to four new locations that we're currently opening up with more to come after that, which is why we work very closely with a number of different local providers to get into our education system so that we can have preventative resources. Of course, for those who have very serious psychosis and mental health issues, we have a number of different spots, including the centennial centre for mental health in Ponoka, to support those individuals.

Digital Media Tax Credit Policy

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, this government cancelled the digital media tax credit in 2019. This has had a profound impact on our economy and industry. Jobs were lost, businesses left, gone to friendlier jurisdictions, yet this government continues to toy with this industry. The Premier promised to introduce one. The technology minister promised to reintroduce it, and it is in his mandate letter. However, another throne speech has come and gone and not a single word of it. Did the Minister of Technology and Innovation forget about this promise?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. As we've said before, we are actively looking at a possibility of a tax credit of this nature, but unlike the NDP, we're going to do our homework before we consider making a policy decision that could cost hundreds of millions of dollars. We need to make sure that we make a decision that is in the best interests of all Albertans, not just one stakeholder group. You know, while the NDP are really good at just throwing money at things without doing their homework and by extension creating enormous debt and burden on all Albertans, we will not make that same mistake.

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, given that Scott Nye, the COO of Inflexion Games, reported that the building that his company was looking to move into now sits vacant, with that impact on the economy of downtown Edmonton, given that we have seen British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec develop thriving postproduction and gaming industries, given that these industries have created thousands of good-paying jobs, and given that the digital media tax credit would generate new economic activity and revenue for this province, why has this minister failed yet again to introduce the digital media tax credit?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're going to take the time to do our homework to make sure that before we make any long-term decisions that could cost hundreds of millions of dollars of hard-earned taxpayer dollars, we make sure it will make sense for all taxpayers. In the meantime, though, Alberta's tech sector is booming like never before. When the NDP were in power back in 2017, we only saw \$30 million of venture capital investment into Alberta tech companies. Last year alone we saw \$729 million. That's exponential growth. Our government is doing all of the right things to make Alberta one of the most attractive places to invest in a technology business in the entire country.

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, given that digital media industries are generating trillions of dollars in GDP world-wide, given that we have excellent digital media training programs in place in Alberta, given that youth are leaving Alberta to find digital media jobs in other provinces, and given that a digital media tax credit is a natural extension to the film and television tax credit in Alberta, will the minister today commit to implementing a digital media tax credit? Will he follow through with this promise this time?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, before we commit to a massive hundred million dollar plus subsidy program, we have to be sure and certain that it will be in the interests of all Albertans, not just the recipients of that program. That is what we have committed to Albertans to do. We will continue that important work. But in the meantime we have the strongest performing tech sector in the country. While the rest of the industry across Canada is on a steady decline, ours is shooting through the roof, and we are

seeing exponential growth in technology investment across all sectors of the technology sector. There has never been a better time to be in technology in Alberta than today, and our best days lie ahead. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is still in the grips of a health care crisis. The number of family doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent – yes, 80 per cent – under the UCP. We need more doctors and better access to primary health care, but this government does not have a plan, only task forces. Why is the minister okay with Albertans forced to use the emergency room for family care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, once again the members opposite are late to the party. In my mandate letter I was tasked with addressing the workforce challenges. I'm happy to share with the Assembly that, according to the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to share with the Assembly that, according to the latest data from the CPSA, 255 physicians have registered to practise in Alberta in the last four months alone, Mr. Speaker. In addition, 248 physicians and surgeons chose to remain in Alberta after completing their training. In short, we continue to address this issue across the province. That is why I'm working with the College of Physicians & Surgeons.

Mr. Haji: Given that we need to fix the accreditation crisis that has grown under the UCP's watch and given that we need to attract more doctors for Albertans and make it easier for more doctors to be able to come to this province and given that the UCP went in the opposite direction when they started a war with the health care workers, will the minister apologize to doctors for this government's actions, that have worsened the health care crisis?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm also happy to share that AHS has been able to successfully onboard 190 of those doctors to work in hospitals right across the province – 190 – in communities such as Vermilion, Grande Prairie, and Crowsnest Pass, a clear sign that our efforts to recruit and retain doctors in Alberta are working. Additionally, yesterday the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta released new numbers that show a net increase of 3,896 nurses, more nurses working in Alberta. Great news for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Haji: Given that while the UCP has failed the health care workers, not only the health care workers but also families that rely on them, our team has a plan and idea to repair the UCP's health care crisis. Given that we have called for revamping the Alberta advantage immigration program and given that I have sent this government a letter with all our proposed actions, will the minister agree to adopt our plan and fix the accreditation crisis?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, while the members opposite continue to write letters, we are solving real problems. I want to highlight for the Assembly that we are also working directly with the Alberta Medical Association to address issues with the payment model for primary care. Last week I signed an MOU with the president, the new president of the AMA, Dr. Paul Parks. I look

forward to seeing that great work come to fruition. We're taking real action to solve real problems, unlike the members opposite, who continue just to write letters.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, the chief government whip.

Natural Gas Export

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a colleague and I had a chance to attend a legislative study in Germany to look first-hand at their energy transition file. Given what we observed, Germany will clearly be dependent on conventional energy and especially natural gas for the next 15 years while they transition. To the minister of energy: can you advise of the known quantity of conventional energy that Alberta has, which would help provide that bridge for Germany, Europe, and all the others that need to transition until their energy transitions are complete?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Yes. I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. I thank him for attending around the world to find out what the world wants. In fact, Germany was just one of many countries that came to Canada and said: listen, we need LNG. I don't think I have to tell you exactly why they needed it, but they needed it for their own people, for security, much like we would do for our people here on this side of the House. But what was the answer? Well, our Prime Minister said no, and it's a shame he did that, because now we see that Germany has gone back to coal, burning coal. Now, we don't think that's the right answer. We want to make sure the world moves away from coal in a responsible way. That's why we have such a miracle in LNG. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

2:40

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Again, that was the same observation we had, that lignite is still being mined, and they'll keep doing it until 2030, until they can stabilize their grid.

Given that the goal of many places in Europe, Asia, and North America is to move towards hydrogen as a primary fuel source, can you tell the House what Alberta has done to position ourselves as a world leader on this file?

The Speaker: For the benefit of all members, that would also be a good example of a preamble and what's not allowed after question 4.

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll help him with that. Given that we are in such a great position here on this side of the House to respond to what Albertans need, which we are, because we've invested in hydrogen, in chances for hydrogen to happen right here in Alberta, for Edmonton to be the hub of hydrogen in North America, at least in the conference we are, and we're moving forward with it aggressively. Japan wants our LNG for hydrogen. Korea wants our LNG for hydrogen. Germany wants our LNG for hydrogen. The world wants our LNG. Why won't they let us deliver it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that Alberta is a world leader in the energy business and has been improving our environmental incomes, can you please also advise what your department and the government as a whole are doing to share our made-in-Alberta solutions to the world? Given that our federal government and our colleagues across the aisle fall woefully short to recognize that in our own country, let alone on the world stage.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we must take this issue seriously. The federal government is not. We have the opportunity here in Alberta to use our natural resources to decarbonize the world, to have the first carbon-abated oil field in the world. Right here in Alberta we can lead the world on making sure we reduce emissions, but we can't have the federal government stand in our way. We can't have the NDP here from Alberta stand in our way. We must work together to decarbonize the planet, and Alberta is the place that can do it.

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

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 4

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Bill 4 proposes legislative amendments that would help formalize a key part of Alberta's commitment to affordability, provide clarity around the collection and remittance of Alberta's tourism levy, and update a number of technical and administrative aspects of Alberta's tax system. Keeping our tax legislation up to date is essential to maintaining Alberta's low-tax environment and minimizing red tape.

I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance, prior to moving the bill, do you have anything else that would indicate that this is a money bill?

Mr. Horner: This is a money bill. Can I do that?

I request leave to introduce a bill being Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. It is my pleasure to recommend to your consideration the annex bill being Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, and it's a money bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 5

Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

This legislation would enable government to implement a new, flexible governance model for public-sector compensation. It

would also maintain government's strong fiscal oversight to ensure tax dollars are spent wisely. If passed, the legislation would change the compensation governance structure for non-union employees at entities currently governed by the reform of agencies, boards, and commissions compensation regulation. This change is intended to alleviate the challenges public-sector employers have been facing for years recruiting and retaining staff because the current regulations do not account for inflation or evolving labour market conditions. These changes would ensure Alberta can continue to attract and keep top talent and streamline and harmonize the government's direction for compensation across Alberta's public sector.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of the *Oxford Dictionary* definition of the English language word "contravene."

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. I have one which is a letter to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services on behalf of my constituents, residents of The View in Lethbridge, which is a private seniors' retirement home. They have a number of concerns about the annual service fees adjustments. I've also written to the minister and Member for Lethbridge-East, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, on behalf of my constituents at The View. They also have a petition that I will table, probably next week.

I also have, Mr. Speaker, five requisite copies of the Alberta NDP caucus Alberta's Future paper entitled Your Pension is Yours: Protecting Albertans' Retirement, that was released by the caucus on March 23, prior to the election, which was the appropriate time for that conversation.

Then, finally, I am tabling five copies of a paper released on October 27, 2023, by Dr. Trevor Tombe of the University of Calgary entitled The Alberta Pension Advantage? A Quantitative Analysis of a Separate Provincial Plan, that all members should find instructive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling today. Pursuant to section 45 of the Legislative Assembly Act I'm tabling six copies of the annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office covering the period from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2023 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Ms Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the environmental protection security fund annual reports 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:59 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order that was called at 1:59. It's disappointing. I thought we could at least make it to 2 o'clock without one of these. But while the hon. Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board was answering a question with regard to the Alberta pension plan, the Member for Lethbridge-West had a strange and unusual outburst – maybe it's on par for that member – saying: lies. Now, you have provided ample caution in this Chamber about the use of the word "lies" or "lying" or "lied," regardless of tense. I don't think that this language is appropriate now, has not been in the past, and shouldn't be in the future. That's a member that has been in this Chamber for a number of years, a number of terms and even sat on this side of the House, luckily for Albertans only for one term. This is under 23(j), language to create disruption. I ask that that member apologize for her unusual and unnecessary outburst and refrain from such language and decorum in the future.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of sitting next to the Member for Lethbridge-West, and I can inform the Government House Leader that she did not in any way, shape, or form heckle the word "lies." That would be unparliamentary in this Chamber.

2:50

However, the question under debate was the Finance minister's desire to consult his feelings about the Alberta pension plan and the Premier talking about confluence of inputs, and what I did hear the Member for Lethbridge-West heckle was: will you talk to your Ouija board? I think that the Government House Leader may have misheard that. Should it be necessary, we'd be happy to have you review the recordings, Mr. Speaker, because I'm incredibly confident she did not heckle the word "lies" in this case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

I am prepared . . . [interjections] Order. Order.

I'm prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues, and while I always advise caution with respect to the Speaker making rulings based on words said off the record that I may or may not have heard, in this case I certainly did not hear any use of the word "lies." I have the benefit of the Blues, and the Blues support my position with respect to the words used by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. For the benefit of clarity, I believe that it was: "Vibes. Ouija boards." This is not a point of order, and I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, before . . . [interjections] Order. Order.

Statement by the Speaker

Royal Canadian Legion Poppy Campaign

The Speaker: Before we move to Orders of the Day, I want to take the opportunity to remind all members that in advance of Remembrance Day the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is encouraging everyone to wear a poppy as the enduring symbol of remembrance for those who have served and are serving and who fell in service of Canada. There are boxes of poppies in the east and west members' lounges as well as the Speaker's office. Please ensure you make a generous contribution

to the poppy box, not just receive the benefit of the location of the poppy boxes.

I'd also like to point out to members that on their desks this afternoon there are amendments to the standing orders that were approved by the Assembly yesterday, October 31, 2023. They've been printed on green paper. This is meant to be a temporary record of the standing orders. Replacement pages for your standing orders books are being prepared and will be distributed in the coming weeks.

With that, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to move second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.

This fulfills a spring election promise to keep taxes low. Taxes, the members may or may not know, are the biggest item for families when it comes to their household budget. If you look at the Fraser Institute's Tax Freedom Day for 2023, the families of Alberta did not achieve the date where they would finally start working for themselves until June 14. Imagine that: all those first five and a half months of the year, all of that, being consumed in taxes.

Now, of course, in Alberta there's only so much that we can do to be able to move that date back, and, darn it, we're going to keep on trying to move it back because that includes all of the taxes that Albertans have to pay: personal income taxes, corporate income taxes, payroll taxes, fuel taxes, and every other tax and premium at the municipal, the provincial, and the federal levels.

The average family in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, makes \$140,986, and of that total taxes comprise \$65,863. This is the reason why we see it as a matter of urgency to bring through a bill that will strengthen the environment that we have in Alberta as the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country and continue to strengthen taxpayer rights. This is the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act.

Now, remember that when this was first passed, it was passed to ensure that no PST would be introduced into Alberta without a referendum. We happen to believe that that's the responsible thing to do: if you're going to have a major policy change that's going to impact people, you should put it to a referendum so they can decide. So that is what the current act says.

The revisions that we are proposing would apply as well to personal income taxes. What that would mean is that no one would be able in future to raise the personal income tax rates or lower the basic personal exemption – which, by the way, Mr. Speaker, is the highest and most generous in the country – the spousal exemption, the equivalent to spousal exemption, or any of those tax brackets. It's meaningful that we are almost standing alone in having the highest basic personal exemption, because that means that the lowest income members among us, the most vulnerable, are the ones who are removed from the tax rolls first, and we're going to make sure that that continues.

The second part of the act is to apply to corporate income tax rates, and once again those will not be increased without a referendum of the people. I'm sad to say that this is necessary. Just back in 2014 it was the members opposite who surprised Albertans with tax increases across the board. You may remember that

election, Mr. Speaker, the way they talked about the wealth creators of this province and the high-income earners in this province. They slapped them with higher rates on the personal income tax side, and they increased the corporate tax rate by 50 per cent. They brought through a carbon tax, that they didn't even campaign on, increasing the cost of everything. We tried to get rid of it, and the federal government, with the NDP supporting them federally, won't let us. Now it's up at a point where even the federal government has realized that it's causing affordability crises for the people who vote for them in Atlantic Canada, unfortunately not for those of us here in Alberta, who seem to not elect enough Liberals and NDP members for their liking.

This is the reason why we have to put this legislation in place now: because a low tax environment is key to our success. Just before I came into the Legislature, I saw a tweet by an economist named Trevor Tombe, who I think is known to this Assembly. One of the things that he has just done is that he has looked at his calculations and has determined that our GDP in Alberta is now at an all-time high as of August 2023. So not only have we fully recovered from the days of the pandemic, but we are higher than we have ever been in the past.

This does not happen by accident. This happens by good policy, good policy like what we did with the job-creation tax cut, reducing the 12 per cent rate that the members opposite brought in down to an 8 per cent rate. And what has been the consequence of that? Well, let me tell you. From 2021 till now we have seen private-sector investment increase 13 per cent. We have seen the number of business incorporations go up for three years in a row. We have had job gains year over year over year so that we are now at 70,000 job gains in just the past year, and we even have 90,000 jobs that currently go unfilled. So we want more people to come to our great province so that we can continue to grow the economy.

Alberta continues to be forecast – it's not enough that we are already at the all-time high for our GDP; Alberta is forecasted, by virtually anyone you ask, to lead the country in increase in GDP growth. The importance of this is that we stand out in North America as having a low-tax jurisdiction. Our 8 per cent corporate tax rate is 30 per cent lower than the next lowest jurisdiction in Canada. Now, I know the NDP wanted to sneak in a corporate tax hike back to 11 per cent, and they were trying to argue that that would still leave us with the lowest corporate tax rates in the country. I suppose they're right, but let's just look at what is happening in our neighbours across the country: 11.5 per cent is the next lowest rate in Ontario, Quebec, and the Northwest Territories; 12 per cent is the rate in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba; 14 per cent in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; 15 per cent in Newfoundland; 16 per cent in P.E.I.

We on this side of the Chamber think that it is not good enough to just be marginally better than everyone else; we want to be dramatically better than everyone else, and we are. In fact, we also have a combined corporate tax rate that is lower than the combined rate for state and federal taxes in 44 U.S. states. That's the reason why so much investment is flocking here.

On the personal side, I should point out that we have no sales tax, we have no capital tax, we've got no payroll tax, we have no health premiums, and as a result when you look at the entire tax picture, comparing what an average family would experience for taxes in Alberta versus our friends in British Columbia and Ontario – in British Columbia, if you were a family earning \$75,000 with two kids, you would be paying \$1,700 more. You'd be paying \$4,200 more in Ontario.

3:00

If you happen to have a higher income, \$150,000, that same family would be paying \$5,300 more in British Columbia and \$8,900 more in Ontario. That underscores the tax advantage that we have here.

Now, when the NDP had the opportunity to raise taxes on businesses, I think they falsely hoped that somehow that was going to result in an increase in revenue. The exact opposite happened. Businesses fled, investment fled, and corporate revenue went down. The reason we feel so confident that we can offer this price protection, this rate protection, is because when we decreased rates, revenue not only went up, it went way up: 2022-23 had \$8.2 billion worth of corporate income tax revenue, which is the highest amount of revenue on record. Venture capital, as the Minister of Technology and Innovation has said, went from \$34 million to \$729 million in 2022. That is the measure of how many people want to move here just because of the tax environment that we have created and that we are continuing to grow.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In case the members may have missed some of the announcements, let me give you a few examples of how our tax environment is attracting more investment, and this is just a small example: De Havilland in Wheatland county, a manufacturing facility for aviation, 1,500 jobs; CGC in Wheatland county again, manufacturing facility, \$210 million investment, a hundred jobs; McCain actually announced the largest investment since the 1950s right here in our province in Coaldale, potato processing, \$600 million, 260 jobs; Phyto Organix in Strathmore, pea processing plant, \$225 million, 320 temporary and full-time jobs; Super-Pufft in Airdrie, a potato chip processing facility, \$50 million investment; Garmin Canada, Cochrane, technology, 200 jobs; Eventcombo, Calgary, technology, \$10 million and 250 jobs; of course, Air Products, which is going to be the centerpiece of the Industrial Heartland and our hydrogen strategy, \$1.3 billion with 2,500 jobs; and Dura-Line, also in St. Albert, manufacturing, 90 jobs. You know, Madam Speaker, I could go on and on and on. There is so much excitement happening in this province.

I think one of the other great successes that we've had in the last year is the Alberta Is Calling campaign. Alberta is calling and people are coming in droves. In 2023 Alberta has seen a net growth year over year of 184,000 people, levels not seen since 1981. If this keeps up, we'll be approaching 10 million people by 2050. Under the NDP – let's remember – with their high tax, their unpredictability, their carbon tax they didn't campaign on, the increase in personal and corporate income taxes, we ended up seeing net migration out of this province for 13 consecutive quarters.

Alberta is now once again open for business. We have tens of thousands of people coming here, we have tens of billions of dollars in investment coming here, and not only is it in conventional energy, which we know is doing well, but it's all in new energy too. We've got hydrogen investment, helium investment, carbon capture utilization and storage, geothermal. We've seen major investments in agrifood and venture capital, in aviation, in film. Travel Alberta just won the silver at the Cannes Film Festival for such a heartwarming video that celebrates everything that it means to be Albertan. My heart warms every time I see it.

My whole life we have talked in this province about diversifying our economy. Now we are, and we cannot go backwards. Alberta is a place of innovators and entrepreneurs. We are the greatest wealth creators in the entirety of Canada, and you know what? We on this side love our wealth creators. We want more wealth creators to come here. We want to support our wealth creators because we also know that every wealth creator in this province is also one of our greatest philanthropists. You can see it all over the province, from buildings that are named at universities or wings of hospitals or any of the many, many nonprofit and charitable organizations that have been founded and supported by people who did well in this province giving back. We want to make sure that we keep that virtuous cycle

going. We want to make sure as well that that kind of investment allows for that benefit to go far and wide.

People come here and they will keep on coming here for so many reasons. We have affordable homes. We've got a fantastic education system, so they can pursue their dreams. They can then end up with the job of their dreams. They can have a high quality of life, enjoy our majestic landscapes and outdoors, and we want to make sure that we keep this affordable by guaranteeing that taxes stay low. They are already low, and they're going to stay that way.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Lovely moved, seconded by Mr. Lundy, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LL.D., the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate October 31: Dr. Elmelig]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I've been provided with a list, so I will ask the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. No? Or any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Madam Speaker, I rise before you today with profound gratitude and a deep sense of responsibility as the newly elected member to this Legislature for the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat to deliver my response to the Speech from the Throne. I stand here today, and I'm reminded of the immense privilege and duty that comes with being the newly elected representative of the people. I'm acutely aware of the trust that has been placed in me, and I'm committed to serve my constituents to the best of my abilities. To this end I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the wonderful people of this constituency.

Cypress-Medicine Hat and southeast Alberta, with their diverse communities and vibrant cultures, are a microcosm of this great province of Alberta. It is a place where hard work, determination, a strong sense of community define who we are. From farmers and ranchers who toil in the field to provide for their families and contribute to our province's agricultural strength, to entrepreneurs like myself who drive innovation and economic growth, to the men and women who serve in our military and defend our freedoms, we are a community that exemplifies Alberta's spirit and its heart and soul. As I take my seat in this Chamber, I want to reiterate my commitment to representing the interests and aspirations of Cypress-Medicine Hat with unwavering dedication. I'll be working as a tireless advocate for the issues that matter most to our constituents, issues such as economic growth, job creation, all aspects of prosperity and opportunity, personal responsibility and accountability for generations to come.

As a husband, father of three, local business owner, and active community member, the question arises: why run for public office? Well, having immigrated to Alberta from another province in the late 90s, I immediately sensed something was unique and extraordinary about this region. Since then I've been passionately committed to safeguarding and nurturing our Alberta advantages

and passing on these values to my children. I'm determined to ensure that we leave behind a province that is in a better state for future generations of Albertans.

The foremost advantage that caught my attention and the one that stands out as our greatest strength is our abundance of opportunities. This provided a fresh start for my parents, my aunt, my uncle, and grandparents on my mother's side, who all understood the abundance of opportunities here, and it was something that was distinctly different from London, Ontario, where we just moved from. This belief in and recognition of our boundless opportunities has been a guiding force behind my entrepreneurial journey, empowering me to become a devoted advocate for business and granting me the privilege of launching my own venture early in 2021 during the heart of the pandemic.

With over 18 years of experience in business and management I've honed my skills in identifying market opportunities, which in turn enabled me to establish my own business and lay a foundation of lasting legacy for my children. It is this Alberta advantage that empowered individuals like myself with the opportunity and capability to initiate a small business and build it from the ground up, empowering small and medium-sized businesses to thrive and aligning their achievements with the scale of their aspirations and the depth of their ambition.

In these pivotal times, Madam Speaker, in Alberta's history we stand at a crossroad where the choices that we make today affect the future in significant ways. We will be defining the destiny of our province for generations to come. I firmly believe we must adopt a bottom-up approach to governance, one that empowers the voices of our communities and ensures their concerns are not only heard here in the halls of Edmonton but also acted upon.

3:10

The people of Cypress-Medicine Hat have spoken clearly through the ballot box, and it is my moral duty to heed their call. The resounding message from my constituents is that we must listen and enact local solutions here in the Legislature, relying less on our centralized decision-making in Edmonton and certainly less from Ottawa. We must emphasize the imperative value of local solutions, prioritizing the experience and expertise that emanates from the communities we represent. While Edmonton serves as our provincial capital, we must remember that the solutions to our unique challenges are found right at home in the communities we represent. Our mission should be empowering local voices, recognizing that regional diversity is a strength that enriches our collective identity as Albertans. Furthermore, we must remain vigilant in our interactions with Ottawa, demanding the respect and recognition that our jurisdiction and contributions warrant in the Canadian Confederation.

Albertans have sent a clear message. They desire a strong, stable government, one that provides reliability, fosters prosperity, safeguards the fundamental freedoms that are integral to our way of life. Albertans have always been known, Madam Speaker, for their resilience, and our citizens are always recognized for their unwavering work ethic and deep love for freedom. We are a people who cherish our heritage, take pride in our lands, and fiercely uphold those values when challenged. Our constituents yearn for stability, prosperity, and freedom to pursue their dreams.

Madam Speaker, as Albertans we share a profound sense of pride and love for our heritage, our lands, and our way of life, and we were elected to protect those. As we deliberate on pressing matters before this Legislature, let us never lose sight of our primary duty to serve the people who have entrusted us with their hopes and dreams. We must work tirelessly to ensure that Alberta remains a province of boundless opportunity, unwavering resilience, and

enduring prosperity. Together we can build a future that honours those values and aspirations of the remarkable people not just of Medicine Hat and Cypress county but also all of Alberta.

Economic prosperity continues to be a cornerstone of our vision for our province going forward. We must ensure that we are working collaboratively to create an environment that fosters innovation, attracts investment, and supports small and medium-sized businesses. By doing so, we can ensure that our communities thrive and that our citizens have access to good jobs and a high quality of life. Time and time again Alberta has shown that small and medium-sized businesses similar to mine have shown that they are the backbone of our economy and growth.

One exciting avenue of achieving economic prosperity is in research development and adoption of new technologies into existing industries to drive Alberta's economic growth, innovation, and diversification. In today's rapidly evolving global economy, embracing technology advancements isn't just an option anymore, Madam Speaker; it's a necessity. By integrating technology into our traditional sectors such as energy, agriculture, and manufacturing, Alberta enhances productivity, reduces costs, creates new avenues of economic diversification and new job creation. This innovation not only ensures the sustainability of these industries but also opens doors to entirely new sectors like advanced life sciences, artificial intelligence, digital services, or unmanned aerial drones like we're seeing in Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Furthermore, the integration of technology is not just about staying competitive; it's about securing prosperity and dynamic futures for Albertans to come, creating jobs, attracting investments, and contributing to our province's long economic resilience.

Madam Speaker, another piece that we need to really recognize is supporting the reservists and servicemen and -women of our Armed Forces here in Alberta. It must be our utmost focus. These constituents should have access to exceptional health care and services. As they are working diligently to protect our freedoms afar, we must ensure that we are striving to look after their families at home and, while they are home, ensure that we have available necessary health care programs for their betterment and well-being. It is our responsibility to advocate for the resources and policies that we can turn this commitment into a reality.

Alongside these critical objectives it's imperative that we place a strong emphasis on safeguarding our rich agricultural history and sustenance. Alberta is graced with breathtaking agricultural landscapes, ranging from the picturesque Cypress Hills to the agricultural heartland and beyond. Our hard-working food producers rely on us to avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on them like Bill 6. We hold a responsibility to acknowledge their responsible stewardship of our heartland, ensuring that we assist rather than impede this way of life in securing food production for the betterment of future generations.

As we work towards these goals, Madam Speaker, we must remember that we do not stand alone. We are part of a larger provincial community, and our decisions here in Edmonton have a ripple effect that touch every corner of Alberta. It is imperative that we collaborate with our new fellow representatives from across the province to find common ground and solutions that benefit all Albertans.

Furthermore, it is essential that we advocate for our provincial interests on the national stage. Whether it be matters of resource development, infrastructure investment, or equalization we must ensure that Alberta's voice is heard and respected in the corridors of power within our province as well as our nation's capital. Alberta's relationship with the federal government is a crucial one, and we must engage in constructive dialogue with our federal counterparts in Ottawa but never waiver on Alberta's interests and jurisdiction.

As we continue to build a stronger Alberta, personal accountability and responsibility remain fundamental virtues of the grassroots citizen here in Alberta. These serve as the cornerstone of a strong and prosperous community. As residents of this province we must recognize that our actions have ripple effects that impact not only our own lives but the lives of everyone around us and the broader grassroots of Alberta's communities. Embracing personal accountability means taking ownership of our choices, whether they relate to the grassroots community building, provincial responsibility of fiscal and social harmony. By doing so, we contribute to the well-being of Alberta's unique natural landscapes, our economic stability, and our social fabrics that bind us together. Ultimately, by fostering a culture of personal accountability and responsibility we empower ourselves and future generations by shaping a brighter, stronger Alberta.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I want to express my gratitude once again to the people of the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat for entrusting me with the privilege of representing them here in the Legislature. I'm deeply humbled by this opportunity, and I'm committed to working tirelessly on their behalf. Together in this Chamber and as Albertans we can overcome the challenges that lie ahead and build a brighter, more prosperous future for our province. Let us be guided by the values of hard work, integrity, and community that define us as Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to rising to the occasion to serve the people, the grassroots, of Cypress-Medicine Hat and all of Alberta to the best of my abilities.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a humble privilege to rise and address this Assembly for the first time on behalf of Lacombe-Ponoka. I greatly look forward to representing our families and communities to the best of my ability and to do so working with all the other members here in attendance today.

There is nothing better for uniting people than a good story. In many ways I believe Lacombe-Ponoka's story is Alberta's story. It's a story of innovators, of defenders, and of game changers. If you'll indulge me, in the spirit of goodwill I'd like to share this story with all of you. First and foremost, I firmly believe that the Lacombe-Ponoka people, like most Albertans, are true innovators. You see, Madam Speaker, historically speaking, innovation has been driven by necessity, and that certainly was the experience shared by many of our constituencies' pioneer ancestors. Many of these folks arrived here with nothing but a chest of seeds, maybe a few head of cattle, some assorted hand tools, and all of their earthly possessions loaded on a wagon.

Today our constituency is home to the Field Crop Development Centre, or the FCDC. It is a world-class research facility that's been developing enhanced cereal crop varieties for feed, forage, malt, food, and bioindustrial uses since 1973. They release two new varieties of barley every year. This is significant, considering it takes eight to 11 years to develop a new variety, and this has led to this year's record-breaking barley crops across the province of Alberta.

The FCDC is also collaborating with Olds College to produce new barley and triticale varieties, and with reliable, long-term funding they will continue to drive innovation in one of Alberta's core industries.

3:20

Our constituency is also home to the Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury, the foundational mental health facility in western Canada. As a former registered nurse I really can't say enough about the good work being done at this stunning,

historic facility. It serves all of western Canada, treating a variety of mental health and addictions issues. This centre plays a crucial part in the assessment, treatment, and stabilization of individuals aged 18 to 64 who are having a severe and ongoing acute mental health crisis. The Centennial Centre also helps assist individuals to integrate back into their community by ensuring they have the contacts and services they need. In addition, it serves as a postsecondary school for psychiatric nursing.

Our constituency is also home to the Rahr Malting production plant in Alix as well as Doef's Greenhouses near Lacombe. Rahr's plant utilizes the latest in European and North American technologies to produce an annual capacity of 180,000 metric tonnes of grain. In a more practical sense that means one batch of grain every day, 365 days a year. To put that in a more reliable or relatable breakdown, that means literally 3 million bottles of beer every day. You heard right. That is six zeros. About 90 per cent of the barley necessary for those 3 million bottles of beer comes directly from our Alberta farmers. [interjections] Yes.

Doef's Greenhouses is a valuable contributor to the area also, operating on a 37-acre, state-of-the-art site. They employ as many as 120 people, and it's the largest producer of eggplant and peppers in all of the prairies. What sets Doef's apart as a unique business and greenhouse is their extraordinarily innovative efficiency. They bought about 125 natural gas wells a few years ago. They rerouted them all back to the greenhouse and built a power plant to generate their own power. Both the heat and the carbon dioxide are recovered from these generators. The heat is repurposed within the facilities, and the CO₂ is piped into the greenhouse for plant food. All leftover power goes into the grid, where it is being used to power up to one-third of the city of Lacombe's electricity costs. It is the perfect combination of energy, utilities, and agriculture, all working in perfect sync.

Additionally, all of their water is collected from rain and snowfall, and all excess within is captured and recycled. It doesn't stop there. The waste vegetation is either fed to local animal operations or turned into compost and returned to the land. It's a world-class example of innovation, efficiency, and sustainability. They also work in collaboration with S4 Greenhouses to employ advanced hydroponic methods to produce vegetables year-round at two locations.

Of course, innovation isn't only about increasing production. It can also be about making communities a better place to call home, and in this regard I can't say enough about the Ponoka Stampede. Officially born in the '30s, with roots that go back even farther, the Ponoka Stampede represents community innovation at its best, bringing neighbours together in the spirit of goodwill while bringing thousands of spectators and millions of dollars to this community.

It is one of the top five rodeos in the world, and with all due respect to another stampede in our province, Ponoka's annual event is the best rodeo in Alberta, in my opinion. This week-long event, including bull riding and chuckwagons, is made possible thanks to the selfless efforts of more than 800 volunteers, a true testament to our western heritage and our hospitality.

Another example of hard work can be found in a local university group called the Acronaires. This dynamic team of acrobats and gymnasts has travelled the world. They've won international competitions, and they're celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. They've showcased their skills for other Legislatures, and they've even helped to lend a hand in changing light bulbs in a chandelier in the Michigan Capitol Building. I hope to have them perform at our own Legislature soon.

Over the summer I had the opportunity to get to know the amazing constituents of Lacombe-Ponoka better. I visited nearly 350 businesses and witnessed first-hand the diversity, talent, and

hard work that can be found, from the villages of Gull Lake and Alix to our larger namesake communities.

Now allow me to say a few words about Lacombe-Ponoka's defenders. Alberta has long been home to those who stand up for justice, peace, and what is right no matter how long it takes. Lacombe-Ponoka is no different. Lacombe itself is named for French-Canadian Roman Catholic Father Albert Lacombe, whose many deeds live on in history. Most notably, I believe, he should be remembered for his efforts in brokering peace between the Cree and the Blackfoot. His namesake, incidentally, is home to the Lacombe Police Service. Established in 1900, it's one of the oldest and longest running municipal police services in Alberta today. That is certainly something worth celebrating.

Of course, when it comes to defending our province's interests, one must remember the primary achievement of the hon. Premier John Edward Brownlee. Alberta's fifth Premier, who represented the electoral district of Ponoka, won what proved to be the most important battle with Ottawa in our province's history. You see, when Alberta and Saskatchewan were formally created by Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government, Ottawa refused to live up to the letter of the British North America Act, which required the new provinces to be granted control over our natural resources. This set off a 25-year jurisdictional battle upon Alberta's creation, which only came to an end when Brownlee's United Farmers government doggedly pressured Ottawa to finally live up to the terms of the BNA Act. Beginning in 1930, control over Alberta's resources finally belonged to Albertans.

The importance of this victory cannot be overstated. The hon. Premier Lougheed minced no words describing this importance, and I quote: I rate it in the top one or two events in our history. When it comes to defending Alberta, Lougheed knew what he was talking about. When the Pierre Trudeau government sought to undermine Alberta with the national energy program, Lougheed throttled production until the program was modified. He also won a key constitutional concession that guaranteed the province the exclusive right to make laws regarding exploration, development, conservation, and management of our nonrenewable resources.

Today it seems the current federal Liberal government is once again seeking to undermine provincial jurisdiction when it comes to resources. On this account, let me just say that the people of Lacombe-Ponoka would like to congratulate the hon. Premier and the government of Alberta for the recent Supreme Court legal victory that once again upholds Alberta's natural resource rights. Moving forward, we encourage the province to continue taking a page from Premiers Lougheed and Brownlee and defend the rights of the people of Alberta no matter how long and difficult this fight may be.

Of course, when it comes to telling Alberta's story, this book cannot be complete without taking a chapter from the Famous Five. I don't need to tell the people here in this room about the colossal changes brought about thanks to the efforts of Judge Emily Murphy, Henrietta Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, and the hon. Irene Parlby. They were true game changers. As a daughter, a mother, a small-business owner, and now a woman in politics I can find inspiration in their fight, especially Parlby.

It's been said that her public life truly began in 1913, when she was chosen as secretary for the Alix Country Women's Club. That same year she helped to form the first women's local of the United Farmers of Alberta. In 1921 she was first elected to represent the electoral district of Lacombe and was immediately named to cabinet, only the second woman to hold such a position in the entire Commonwealth. Of course, the Supreme Court case she will ever be associated with, the Persons Case, was wrapped up in 1928, and the verdict was reversed in 1929.

Her political career continued on, and she was re-elected to this Assembly in 1930. Of course, her community service never really stopped, and she continued advocating for improved health care in various forms for years to come. At the time of her passing in 1965 she was the last surviving member of the Famous Five.

3:30

More than 100 years have passed since Irene Parlby was first elected to represent Lacombe, the electoral district that I am proud to call home. I don't know that I will ever face the challenges she did – you know, that's a good thing – but I think there will always be a need for the kind of dogged determination that she personified, and if I'm able to bring that to the Assembly, I will count myself truly blessed.

There you have it. Those are a few of the stories from Lacombe-Ponoka that I think exemplify the best of Alberta.

I've been closely involved in the process of uniting conservatives across this province, and I've seen first-hand what we can accomplish when we come together for the betterment of Albertans. In this difficult time I find it reassuring to remember that we are all truly standing on the shoulders of giants, and we are up to any challenge that comes our way. For my part I want to congratulate the hon. Premier and all members of this Assembly for your election victories in May of this year. I also want to acknowledge and thank my predecessor hon. Ron Orr for his many years of hard work on behalf of the good people of Lacombe-Ponoka. I do hope he's enjoying his retirement alongside his beautiful wife, Donna Marie.

On a personal note I want to thank my parents, my husband, Dwayne Johnson – yes, otherwise known as "The Rock"; I certainly did marry up – and I thank my kids for their love and support. Truly, I wouldn't be here without you.

Finally and most importantly, I want to thank the families and the communities of Lacombe-Ponoka for choosing me as your representative. In the spirit of all those reform-minded conservatives who came before me, I pledge to always put your thoughts and concerns first. As Irene Parlby once said, "The farmers put me in." You can rest assured I won't forget why I'm here or who I work for.

Thank you.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the House today in response to the Speech from the Throne and to share some words about myself, the communities I am privileged to represent, and the land for which we all bear responsibility as treaty people.

In preparation for this, my maiden speech, I read the speeches of many current and past members, both from my riding and across the province. From this reading I learned that the members who sit in this Chamber, particularly over the last decade, have followed an astounding myriad of paths to these seats. We come from business, from law, from nonprofit. We were born here, or we came here from any corner of the world you could think of. I know that when I look amongst my fellow caucus members, I am truly seeing a reflection of the diversity in Alberta.

Just a few weeks ago, celebrating Thanksgiving with my family, I had the chance to reflect on my own path to this House. I overheard my mother say that she'd known for a long time that I would end up serving in government. This was news to me, so I leaned in to hear the story. She reminded me of what happened in 1993 in a federal leadership contest. We watched together as Kim Campbell became the first female Prime Minister of Canada. With all the teenage sarcasm I could muster, which is to say quite a lot, I

said that I still had a shot. I could still be the first elected female Prime Minister of our country.

Well, what I tossed out as a quip, my mother remembered as a spark that just needed a bit of nurturing to grow. My mother told this story as a way to illustrate how I was inspired by the mighty women who came before me in this arena, the women who did the hard work and blazed the trail to make the caucus that I sit in, a gender-balanced caucus, a possibility. She told the Thanksgiving table that Kim Campbell was the reason why I ever thought to pursue the opportunity to serve from elected office. This isn't true, of course. I spent a decade of my life watching my mother balance a full-time job, raise two children alone, and complete an accounting degree over that many years of night school. I didn't have to look outside of my own home for all the inspiration I needed.

Being raised by a single mom meant we didn't have the luxury of extras. I was always warm, always fed, and always loved, so certainly I grew up with more privilege than many. The resources at my disposal were found in the public school down the street and my Calgary public library card. These two institutions, public schools and public libraries, are the great equalizers in our society.

Much like Judith Umbach, the mighty woman after whom my community library is named, books and libraries have always been a part of my life. Books provide an invaluable window to the world, and the library itself provides an important third place in communities, a place for an incredible diversity of people to gather. The Judith Umbach Library is just such a vibrant community gathering space in my riding. When I first moved into the riding I now represent, Calgary-Beddington, my top two criteria were how far the walk would be to the local public schools and the local library. My community of Huntington Hills won my heart when the answer to both was under 15 minutes.

Today I am proud to serve my own community of Huntington Hills along with Beddington Heights, MacEwan, Sandstone Valley, Hidden Valley, and Country Hills. The communities that make up Calgary-Beddington have schools teeming with a wonderful, diverse population of kids. We live in single-family homes, apartments, duplexes, co-op housing, social housing, and senior centres. We have active community associations run by extraordinarily dedicated volunteers who are doing the heavy lifting of community building. I see community spirit in my riding every single day. I see it in my neighbours clearing snow for the elderly homeowners on the block. I see it in the library volunteers helping newcomers navigate our systems. I see it in the moms advocating for their kids by patching all the holes and gaps and cracks in an education system more focused on funding per capita than per student. For me, it is no surprise that my communities are this way because we live every day in the shadow of a monument to the power of community action.

Nose Hill park, one of the largest urban parks in North America, delivers my favourite aspect of living in Alberta, swaths of rolling grass under a huge prairie sky. The land on Nose Hill is special. You feel it as soon as you set foot in the park. You feel it next to the Siksikaitapi medicine wheel. This is a park that exists because of the communities surrounding it. In the early 1970s plans to develop land atop Nose Hill park began forming. Community members who knew the immense historical value of this place and the benefits of protected urban parks took a stand. Their advocacy saved this piece of land for future generations. Nose Hill park is an important place to allow us to reconnect with this land and the legacy of all the struggle and sacrifice and hope that led us to today, and it exists because ordinary people sensed it was important, more important than its price tag, to set aside a place so that we could stay connected to the land and to what came before us.

Today I am speaking to you from Treaty 6 lands, but in my riding we honour and recognize the Mohkinstsis and the traditional Treaty 7 territory. It is with enormous gratitude and respect that we acknowledge the ancestral home, culture, and oral practices of those Treaty 7 signatories. A land acknowledgement is imbued with as much meaning as its speaker chooses to put into it. On the occasions when I am delivering a land acknowledgement, my head and heart are often on Nose Hill park. I am sitting amongst that rough fescue prairie grass. I am warming my back on my kids' favourite climbing rock. Above all, I am underneath that prairie sky.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude with gratitude. I am grateful for Nose Hill and the legacy of its history. I am grateful for the communities of my riding and their legacy of lifting each other up. I am grateful for my mother and all she showed me about hard work and humility. In this House my guiding star will be to honour these three legacies. I very much look forward to working with you all.

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise with a profound gratitude and a deep sense of responsibility to address this Assembly in the response to the Speech from the Throne eloquently delivered by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I am deeply humbled to stand here as the voice of the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, a region encompassing over 15,870 square kilometres and the home of approximately 50,000 Albertans.

Our constituency is a diverse tapestry of communities, each with its own unique history and character. We have the city of Cold Lake, the town of Bonnyville, the town of St. Paul, the town of Elk Point, the village of Glendon, the Elizabeth Métis settlement, the Fishing Lake Métis settlement, the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, the Cold Lake First Nations, Frog Lake First Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, the MD of Bonnyville, and the county of St. Paul.

I stand before you with a deep sense of appreciation for those who have dedicated their time and effort to serve our constituency. It is not my intention to turn this into a mere list of names, for these individuals are more than that. They are the heart and soul of our past, and their contributions have left a mark on all of us.

Among those exceptional individuals we find Genia Leskiw, a retired member renowned for her unwavering commitment to the Ukrainian community and her tireless work with seniors. We remember her contributions with great gratitude.

Another retired member is Denis Ducharme. He is distinguished for his role in creating opportunities with the business community, and his service as the minister of community development has also left a lasting legacy in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

In the town of Bonnyville we still hold a high regard for businessman Leo Vasseur, who ushered in a transformative change and a new direction for our community.

Then there's the retired member, my close friend Ernie Isley, who served many pivotal roles within the province of Alberta, from the minister of manpower to the minister of agriculture, food and rural development.

Then there's the irreplaceable Ray Danyluk, a farmer and fisherman, who also served as the minister of municipal affairs and housing as well as the Minister of Infrastructure. He is a man I hold with high esteem.

Among our distinguished former members we find Shayne Saskiw, a respected businessman who held the position of Justice and Solicitor General critic as well as the deputy House leader in

the previous iteration of our party. His contributions to our legislative process are undeniable.

Last, but certainly not least, my friend Dave Hanson, a former UCP critic for Indigenous Relations and an unwavering advocate for the oil and gas industry. He deserves our heartfelt – heartfelt – appreciation.

I would also be remiss in not mentioning Lloyd Snelgrove, a former Minister of Finance. While he did not represent my constituency, he is a current resident, and I wish to take this moment to acknowledge his innumerable contributions to our great province.

These men and women stand as pillars of our constituency's history, having laboured tirelessly to shape our region into what it is today. We owe them a profound debt of gratitude for their service and unwavering dedication.

And speaking of people, I owe an immense debt and gratitude to my own wife, Megan, and my daughters, Amelia and Charlotte, for their constant support and love that they send my way. Without them I wouldn't be able to do anything with what I need to go through right now.

Now, please allow me to briefly delve into the rich history of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of Denesuline pottery and tools along the Cold Lake shoreline dating back an impressive 5,000 years. Our region played a role in the Cree uprising during the Northwest Rebellion in western Canada, notably marked by the Frog Lake massacre. The enormous Saddle Lake Cree Nation was established in 1876 with the signing of Treaty 6. St. Paul was founded as a Métis settlement in 1869, following the petition of a renowned Albert Lacombe to the Canadian government for a land grant dedicated to the Métis people. This shows a rich history of First Nations and Indigenous belonging to our local region.

Bonnyville's roots trace back to Angus Shaw, a fur trader who explored central Alberta in the late 1700s. In 1952 Canadian Air Force base Cold Lake was created, becoming a critical training hub for our future fighter pilots. The subsequent exploration of Cold Lake oil sands marked a pivotal moment in Canada's energy history, and it remains one of the richest oil-producing regions in the nation, Madam Speaker. Currently 4 Wing Cold Lake stands as one of Canada's largest and strategically most significant air bases, playing a pivotal role in the safeguarding of our national security and serving as a new home for one of the world's most advanced fighter aircraft, the F-35.

Our constituency's economic vitality thrives on oil and gas, providing livelihoods for over 14 percent of Albertans in our constituency. We are a cornerstone of Alberta's economy, contributing billions of dollars annually. We have a blooming hemp industry, well suited for our climate, which adds an incredible strength to our agricultural system. Our ranches also produce some of the best beef in all of Alberta. That's something I can be proud of.

Now, Madam Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I also must address some pressing concerns from my local communities. There's not a single community in my constituency that hasn't been impacted by the opioid crisis, substance abuse, and the crime that generally follows. All major communities within our region have suddenly ranked within the top 30 for violent crime on the nationwide crime severity index. This significantly surpasses the national average. Cold Lake, in particular, witnessed an astounding 33 per cent increase in violent crime in 2022, underscoring the acute nature of the crisis. For nonviolent and violent crime, multiple communities within my constituency are ranked amongst the highest in the entire country. This marks an unprecedented rise in crime in communities where only a short time ago residents could

leave their homes and their car doors unlocked. Despite this, I remain hopeful that our UCP government's creation of the new treatment and recovery centres in Alberta will demonstrate real results and enhance broader health outcomes to combat the multifaceted impacts of the opioid crisis and substance abuse.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to draw attention to an issue of vital importance to our region. Highway 28, which traverses our constituency, deserves to be designated as an Alberta economic corridor. This highway serves as a major resource transportation hub, playing a crucial role in the oil and gas industry and the utilization of the Cold Lake oil sands deposits, which are a cornerstone of Alberta's economy, contributing billions of dollars annually. By designating highway 28 as an economic corridor, we acknowledge its pivotal role in the facilitation of the transportation of valuable natural resources to both domestic and international markets. This designation would emphasize the importance of this transportation link and encourage its continuous improvement and maintenance.

3:50

Moreover, highway 28 is not only vital for our economic prosperity but also crucial for our defence and national security. The presence of 4 Wing Cold Lake, Canada's second-largest and most strategically important air base, is a compelling reason to designate highway 28 as an economic corridor. This base plays a vital role in safeguarding our national security and supporting the aerospace activities within Canada. Recognizing the highway as an economic corridor underscores the significance in facilitating the movement of personnel, equipment, and supplies to and from the base, contributing to our country's defence.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I stand before you as a representative of the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, which has a rich history, breathtaking natural beauty, vast economic potential, and also pressing needs. The crime wave has had devastating impacts on our region, and the UCP's promising initiatives aimed at addressing addiction-related issues deserve our attention and support.

Furthermore, the designation of highway 28 as an economic corridor is crucial to our economic prosperity and national security. Together with the dedication of this Assembly, we can work towards ensuring Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul remains a safe, prosperous, and thriving part of the great province of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. First, I wish to acknowledge that I am speaking today on the territory of Treaty 6. I acknowledge that Alberta is also the traditional home of the Métis people, region 3.

I would like to thank the people of Calgary-Varsity for electing me. I'm honoured that you chose me to represent you. I know you have high expectations, as you should. So do I. I will work tirelessly to represent you. I know that you are likely to think about ideas and policies rather than being attached to any political label. I know that I must work very hard to keep your support.

Calgary-Varsity is in northwest Calgary, just beyond city centre. It comprises the districts of Silver Springs, Varsity Acres, Varsity Village, Varsity Estates, Brentwood, Charleswood, Banff Trail, Andrews Heights, University Heights, University District, Parkdale, and Point McKay. These communities largely surround McMahon Stadium, the University of Calgary, Foothills hospital, Alberta Children's hospital, and the Tom Baker cancer centre. Soon

we will open the Arthur Child comprehensive cancer centre, a project that was initiated by the Alberta NDP.

Calgary-Varsity is home to many educators and health care workers. I have lived in the constituency almost all of my life, and while door-knocking, I enjoyed finding the parents of my children's classmates and teammates and even some of my own classmates and teachers.

While most constituents of Calgary-Varsity continue to prosper, there are growing numbers of people in our community who are struggling to pay their rent and afford groceries. Seniors, who comprise 20 per cent of constituents, are struggling with high electricity and grocery bills, and many no longer have a family physician. Even those who can afford to pay for private elective surgery fear that our health care system won't be there for them when they have a stroke or a heart attack. Students are more and more relying on food banks, and with housing in such short supply, it was not uncommon to find students who do not even know the names of the other housemates. There are so many packed into a home. The huge increases in tuition have been devastating. There is much work for us to do. I will advocate for all of you.

I want to thank the many generous donors who supported me and the volunteers who joined me on this journey. Many came onboard more than two years before the last election.

I appreciate also the help of Harry Chase, who was the Alberta Liberal MLA for Calgary-Varsity from 2004 to 2012. He canvassed with me and shared humorous and thoughtful insights from his years representing Calgary-Varsity.

I am also grateful for the support of my many colleagues from across the province, and I am particularly touched to have had the support of many of my former patients throughout all of southern Alberta. Most of them live with multiple sclerosis. I will continue to stand up for you and for the many people who live with disability and chronic disease.

I also want to thank my family, especially my sister, who encouraged me to run. Perhaps you, maybe I, can credit her and blame her for this career change.

Now I would like to tell you a little bit about myself. I have been a physician, a leader, and a medical researcher for over 35 years. I've had a highly rewarding and successful career. And, yes, it is uncommon for physicians to become politicians, but I came from a very political family. Politics was a regular dinner table discussion through my entire life. My father, Frank Metz, supported the CCF and later the NDP long before I was born. He was a typical grassroots member and was in time honoured as a lifetime member of the NDP. My mother, Joan Metz, supported the Progressive Conservatives and from the time of Peter Lougheed was very involved in the Calgary-Varsity PC Association.

However, while my parents supported different teams, respectful political conversation was normal, and it was also a lot more interesting to have differing points of view to discuss at the dinner table. My mother, however, did not remain a Conservative. She questioned her support for the PCs during the Klein cuts, when she saw the terrible impacts that the aggressive cuts were having on the mental health system, but she really only left the PCs when they dropped the progressive part of their agenda and removed it from their name. She, like many other people I met door-knocking, began to vote NDP.

I owe a lot to my mother besides her passion for politics. She was a nurse who became a lawyer when she was in her 40s and eventually was a Queen's Counsel. She was a feminist. Because of her example, I saw misogyny as a systemic problem that placed hurdles but not barriers to my dreams. I now see the advantage this gave me and that rather than getting past barriers, I have a

responsibility to try to remove them. I know that both of my parents would be very proud of me.

Despite my immersion in politics, I never imagined myself running for office. However, the actions of the UCP government since 2019 compelled me to do so. I was motivated to step up when they started their agenda of privatization of health care, because evidence had already shown that privatization would erode access, be more expensive, and erode patient safety. We have now witnessed that come true. It was, however, when the UCP began to abuse Albertans and especially those that make us stronger and smarter – teachers, health professionals, scientists – that I knew I had to stand up for health care, education, science, and for a compassionate, inclusive society. I decided to run for public office to offer my knowledge and experience to make Alberta a better place at a time when everything seemed to be regressing. I still honestly believe we can turn it around.

4:00

My constituents can count on me to advocate for inclusivity, for using evidence-based processes, and for spending wisely. I will speak up when our government spends \$80 million on Turkish Tylenol but gives less than a quarter of that to support our primary care system, which is in crisis. I will speak up when we have solutions in front of us that are being ignored. For example, there is nothing in the throne speech that suggests any real improvements are coming for health care, yet it is clear what we need. Examples are even included in the March 2023 report, Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System. After studying this report behind closed doors for over six months, we are told: I will think about it; we will talk about it more. We need action. We saw the Premier's promise to fix health care in 90 days. That has been over a year, and we haven't had a fix.

If we use evidence, we can improve our health care system. I know we can improve access because I've done it before. In collaboration with primary care in Calgary I led improvements in neurology to reduce the wait times for routine nonurgent appointments from 21 months to four and a half months. There are many other examples of successful improvements in our health care system. I'm incredulous that none of these solutions are being implemented. We do not need harmful, costly experiments. We need to act now on evidence-based solutions. I will keep pushing.

As a university educator and physician I have experienced the postsecondary system as well. We need our universities to generate the evidence we need for our future and to educate our future leaders and professionals. We need to assure that education is affordable for everyone, and we need to provide stable funding for our academic institutions.

I'm proud to be the voice representing the 45,000-plus people who live in Calgary-Varsity, a community that is filled with thoughtful and generous people who told me they want a better future for themselves, for their children, their grandchildren, and for others, a community that appreciates expertise, collaboration, kindness, and believes in long-term plans. I will stand up for my constituents and for all Albertans. I am so proud to be part of the Alberta NDP. I'm proud of the expertise and the diversity that we bring, and we will work together to support all Albertans. My family has benefited from excellent public education and health care, and I want to give back to the society that has benefited us. We don't want to lose all the gains that have been made.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my sincere honour to rise and respond to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. Firstly, I want to thank my family. To my son: I am so proud of the man you have become. Keep going, even when life gets hard. To my daughter: stay strong. Your ability to stand out and go against the norm is commendable. To my dear husband: thank you for being the man who trusts and supports my calling. You are the leader our family needs, and I am so grateful for you. To the little boy back home who calls me auntie: happy first birthday. To my friends and family who have supported me through my career as well as the residents of Livingstone-Macleod who have trusted me to represent their values and priorities in this Chamber and this government: I hope my words effectively convey my experiences, my dedication to my riding, and the change I aim to bring.

Becoming MLA for Livingstone-Macleod was an unexpected turn in my life. In the summer of 2021 a family member encouraged me to submit nomination papers for a local municipal election. I soon became Claresholm's first female and youngest mayor ever. Although it is an accomplishment to become the first, we must ensure that I do not become the last. With that, I must thank the hon. Louise McKinney, the first woman elected into the British Legislature, one of the Famous Five, and a resident of my hometown, Claresholm, Alberta. This unexpected event of becoming mayor led to my participation in the 2023 provincial election, where I became the fourth MLA from Claresholm and, once again, hopefully not the last. Prior to this moment I had little interest in politics and did not align myself with any specific party. Even today I have no desire for self-advancement in this position. My sole aspiration is good governance and representation of Livingstone-Macleod.

My life outside of politics has been marked by both joy and sorrow. I am first a proud mother and wife before any political designation. Growing up I experienced the impact of a broken home, addictions, and poverty, and how these issues affect one's mental health and personal well-being. These experiences have shaped my perspective. I see myself as an imperfect individual earnestly striving to bring about positive change. In all truthfulness, this has been one of the most challenging roles of my life. I carry the weight of responsibility daily, fully aware that the issues at hand extend far beyond my term. I eagerly anticipate debating critical issues in the Legislative Assembly and actively participating in solutions that foster real change.

My ultimate hope for the government is to not just hold power but to enact legislation that makes life better for everyday, hard-working Albertans. We cannot let good legislation get sidelined due to partisanship. We must all act in a manner that strengthens our province irrespective of whether it aligns with popular opinion or our partisan leanings. We must address the prevailing epidemic of our eroding communities' spirit and fulfillment, which stems from neglecting the core values and beliefs on which our society was founded. I hold deep respect for all the elected members here. I am aware of the tremendous responsibility that rests on all of our shoulders, and I firmly believe that good governance is anchored in serving the best interests of our constituents.

Livingstone-Macleod is rich in energy and agricultural resources. We have always believed in the power of responsible and sustainable growth. Southern Alberta embodies a spirit of community and perseverance that runs deep within its roots. The constituency of Livingstone-Macleod is complex and arguably one of the most beautiful. From the rugged peaks of the majestic Rocky Mountains to the sweeping prairies that stretch as far as the eye can see, Livingstone-Macleod boasts a landscape that encapsulates both magnificence and tranquility. Its untamed wilderness adorned with

glacial lakes, cascading waterfalls, rich grasslands remains a testament to the raw beauty of its nature.

Although we are the most beautiful riding, we may be one of the most challenging in the province. We encompass various communities, schools. We have five hospitals. Our riding stretches across nearly 200 kilometres and embodies the diverse facets that make our province remarkable. The needs of each community vary significantly, with the concerns of the constituents in the Crownsnest Pass differing greatly from those in High River. Each community in Livingstone-Macleod is unique and diverse and presents us with challenges at every turn. Some towns grapple with unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, substandard educational facilities, a scarcity of medical professionals and facilities, and in some cases a lack of sustainable water sources. Moreover, we share common concerns with the entire province, including the high cost of living, school curriculums, parental rights, health care delivery, unattainable environmental goals, resource development, and the federal encroachment on our local jurisdiction.

4:10

As a former LPN with a primary focus in rural and emergency care I have lived first-hand the challenges that we faced in rural Alberta. I worked in health care under the NDP. It was disastrous, and I am now critical of the changes that affect my friends and former co-workers. The direction that this government is headed is one that not only I support, but I am proud to be a part of.

The people of Livingstone-Macleod exemplify resilience, embodying a rich history of triumph over adversity. This region has a strong economy led by our farmers and ranchers, who produce the food that feeds the world. Even when faced with extreme weather events like drought and hail, our agricultural producers find a way to persevere. We are all proud of our farmers and farm families, and we congratulate them on another harvest season.

We in Livingstone-Macleod have a diverse economy with new jobs being created in energy, agriculture, manufacturing, business, and health care. We also have a film and television industry that is booming, as seen in major productions like *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* and HBO's *The Last of Us*. Livingstone-Macleod is a place where you can find a good job, breathtaking natural beauty, and world-class quality of life.

We know that the world will present us with trials and tribulations as it has promised us throughout our lives. Previous generations have weathered challenges far greater than those we face today. From the Spanish flu to the great recession, these events have taught us valuable lessons emphasizing the importance of family and unity. Unfortunately, the sanctity of the family unit is fading and the timeless beliefs of mutual respect, support, and love are fast disappearing. In conclusion, I humbly request your prayers asking for guidance in making decisions that will bring prosperity to our homes and our families. Let us remain bold, diligent, and steadfast in our commitment to our province and our families.

To my family and friends: thank you for your unwavering support. To the constituents of Livingstone-Macleod: you have elected me to represent you, and I feel the weight of that responsibility. I'm humbled that you have entrusted me with this, and I'm eager to get to work for you. I recognize that many of my constituents offer viable solutions to their own circumstances, and I am there not just to listen but to learn from their experiences and concerns. May God bless us all.

Thank you.

Member Tejada: Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in response to the Speech from the Throne, representing the beautiful and bustling constituency of Calgary-Klein. I'd like to start first by

acknowledging that the Legislature is located on the traditional lands of the Treaty 6 signatories. This includes the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, and Nakota Sioux as well as the Métis people who share a deep and lasting connection with these lands.

The constituency of Calgary-Klein itself is located on the traditional lands of the Treaty 7 signatories, the Blackfoot Confederacy. That includes Siksika, Piikani, and Kanai First Nations, Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda First Nations comprised of the Chiniki, Bears paw, and Goodstoney First Nations as well as the Métis people of district 6.

Acknowledging the land and on whose land we reside is important to me as the daughter of Salvadorean immigrants with ancestral roots in Central America. I am part of a diaspora, and I know well how I came to be here and that by virtue of being here, I am a treaty person as we all are.

I am thankful to the residents of Calgary-Klein for entrusting me with the honour of representing them in this Legislature, to bring their concerns forward, to celebrate their joys, to actively listen, and to hold this government to account on issues of priority for them. The affordability crisis, access to public health care when they need it, reducing class sizes and investing in public education, addressing climate change, and, of course, their retirement security.

While the constituency boundaries of Calgary-Klein, as we know it, were re-established in 2019, it has gone through several iterations since 1905, both in communities represented and political representation, including the NDP, UCP, PCs, Liberals, and Social Credit. In recent memory some of the notable MLAs that have represented the communities I now represent are, of course, one of the great community builders, Bob Hawkesworth; Yvonne Fritz; the recently departed Moe Amery, may he rest in peace; Kyle Fawcett; fellow NDPer Craig Coolahan; and, most recently, Jeremy Nixon. I thank them all for their service to community.

For many decades Calgary-Klein has been representative of our city and province. We have a wide range of income levels, families that have lived here for generations, and new Canadians from all over the globe. My constituents speak many languages: English, French, Mandarin, Punjabi. I was greeted warmly in Radisson and Albert Park by Amharic and Tigrinya, Tagalog, Arabic, and, as I noted on the doors, some Spanish as well. I'm very fortunate to represent a community with dozens of cultural organizations and places of worship. It has been wonderful to connect with them all, and I will continue to.

Calgary-Klein is also home to an incredible array of community-serving organizations like ActionDignity, the Calgary Scope Society, Calgary Deaf & Hear, the Alex community health centre, the Calgary Centre for Newcomers, the Veterans Food Bank of Calgary, Families Matter, the Calgary Drop-In Centre, and Momentum, to name just a few. The impact these organizations have on our community cannot be overstated. In the last few months I've learned so much about the good work they do to provide a sense of belonging, basic needs support, employment training, and resources.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the beauty of our natural spaces, including beautiful Confederation park, which is home to barbecues in the summer and weddings as well and then a very wonderful light display in the winter. As some of my other colleagues have mentioned, Nose Hill: we do border on Nose Hill, so we get a lovely view of Nose Hill, and of course that features the Siksikaitapi medicine wheel and many more beautiful green spaces in Calgary-Klein.

Our community associations are active and organize events like the Crossroads Harvest Festival, the Highwood Hoedown, Highland Park's Music in the Park, North Haven's community garden and mural project, the Triwood farmers' market, the Tango

2 Echo Festival put on by the Greenview BIA, and the Winston Heights annual community cleanup. I'm grateful and proud of the work they do to connect neighbours old and new. Calgary-Klein is also home to many exciting small businesses, who are thriving and contribute to our strong local economy.

I owe a debt of gratitude as well to the many people who helped get me here prior to and during the election. Fred Rogers quoted his mother as saying: always look for the helpers. There are always helpers, and I was blessed to find many of those helpers. I was joined by teachers, social workers, parents, community leaders, health care workers, folks from all walks of life who devoted their time and energy with the hope of a better future for our province. I was supported by my loving partner, my mother, my aunt, my sister, and my two teen daughters, who gleefully and sometimes not so gleefully join me in some of the work that we do. The future that I dream of for them is the same future that I want for all the youth of this province. I want them to feel free to be who they are, to feel loved, to be accepted, to set roots here, and to stay.

My path to this place is somewhat unconventional but also relatable to a lot of first- and second-generation Canadians. My parents are Salvadoran immigrants. They left before a 13-year civil war would ravage their homeland and acted as scouts, guiding the rest of my family here to safety, to a place where their human rights were protected, where they could access public education and public health care and build a bright and peaceful future.

In my early life we could be counted among the vulnerable. We struggled in poverty, moving often to wherever was affordable and often not for very long or not with enough bedrooms. As a result, I went to 10 schools from kindergarten to grade 12. I worked for a tiered minimum wage at ages 16 and 17 to help pay our bills. Our life was an affordability crisis, but we persevered. Looking back, I can say things like: it made us stronger; it made us more resilient. That is true, but in recent conversations with my sister, who is an amazing and skilled nurse, we ask ourselves: what were the possibilities if we hadn't struggled? Indeed, what potential do we lose when we don't properly fund public education and provide the supports needed to families and children who struggle? Eventually, through my mother's resourcefulness and volunteerism, we moved into an affordable housing co-op, of which I later became treasurer. Not worrying about how to pay our rent opened up new possibilities. Postsecondary then became plausible, and our horizons expanded.

4:20

I became a designer by trade and worked in the northeast and southeast industrial areas of Calgary when we still had factories. The women on the sewing floor were my bus mates. They told me their stories as immigrant women and how their work was always for the betterment of the next generation. Through those friendships I developed a passion for the protection of workers' rights, knowing that these hard-working women needed safe working conditions to do their highly skilled work so that their hopes and dreams for their families could be fulfilled.

Throughout my life I have volunteered for many causes and organizations. While my work as an apparel professional was exciting, I always felt the pull to be one of the helpers if I could, and after 44 years of Conservative governments in this province I saw that the most vulnerable were not being served by policies that ignored their needs or made matters worse. The volunteer work eventually led to my work in constituency offices after we celebrated the wins of an NDP government led by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Under her leadership we reduced child poverty by 50 per cent. We increased the minimum wage, which was the lowest in Canada at the time, and increased the economic

participation of women by creating low-cost child care. Through this work I was able to advocate for everyday Albertans as they navigated government systems to get the help they needed.

Sadly, under this government there are more vulnerable folks. Their human rights are rolled back, questioned, and even ignored. We have more people on the cusp of houselessness or already houseless, unable to pay the bills even as they hold up to three jobs. I hear a lot about our prosperity in this province, but I've not seen that translate into ensuring that all Albertans can meet their basic needs and live in dignity.

I am here to advocate for better. Albertans deserve better. Throughout my life I've been very fortunate to work and live within the constituency of Calgary-Klein. I attended Collingwood and Colonel Irvine schools. I lived in Thorncliffe as a teen. I worked in Vista Heights and have had many life-defining moments in the neighbourhoods there, and now I'm very proud to be representing these places and all the people who live in them as their MLA.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to stand in the Alberta Legislature today as the elected representative for the residents of Calgary-Fish Creek, Alberta's finest community.

Calgary-Fish Creek is an urban community rich in diversity, with an increasing number of people from other parts of Canada and the world. Many families choose to live here because of the good schools, excellent recreational facilities, and community-based programs, many of which are generously led and operated by volunteers who value their communities and families. Calgary-Fish Creek is indeed a community in all the best senses of the word, where people tend to know their neighbours and look out for each other. It is an ideal place to raise a family.

The community is bisected by one of the world's largest and most beautiful urban parks, Fish Creek park, from which our constituency bears its name. Although I suspect some members may wish to debate this, I am prepared to defend the proposition that Calgary-Fish Creek is the best constituency in the best city in the best province in the best country in the world, and I am both proud and humble to stand here today as the recently elected Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, a community that I have raised my family in and that has helped shape the values that I hope to reflect as its representative.

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

Some political philosophers have defined politics as serving the public good. I would like to believe this is true. However, this aspiration does not resolve the question as to why politicians have so many different opinions and policy propositions about the same issues and challenges. Why is this the case?

I recently heard an address by Mary Anne Chambers, a former provincial Member of Parliament and cabinet minister from Ontario and, in fact, in the spirit of nonpartisanship, a Liberal, who perfectly captured my own perception when she said:

There is a tendency to think that because we mean well, we will do well. But how we define 'meaning well' is influenced by what we understand to be true . . . [It is influenced] by our experiences, our social circles, our work and, crucially, whom we listen to. Decision-makers need to appreciate how public policy will affect different communities and individuals. We can do this through a willingness to listen to as many different voices as we can – from the broadest . . . spectrum of society. Only then can we get the full 'truth' of the potential impact of our decisions.

One of the important takeaways from these wise words is that listening reduces the probability of policy initiatives that lead to unanticipated and unintended consequences, that can often outweigh any good intentions of a particular policy component. However, Madam Speaker, we must also acknowledge that genuine listening might sometimes be easier said than done. We are well served by listening to as many voices as possible, and I believe this is most effective if we start from a position of love, empathy, and compassion in our public discussions and make a sincere effort to listen, to understand.

I contrast this ideal to the present state of public discourse, the increased divisiveness of the tone and substance of the public debate, the echo chambers, the social media algorithms, the clear abandonment of even the pretext of objective reporting by conventional news sources, the straw-manning, and the weaponization of so-called moral virtue character assassination and cancel culture. Some people even argue that there's no such thing as truth, a proposition that I strongly reject. Not only are there objective truths, but there are also ideas and opinions that are demonstratively better than others.

As the newly elected MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek, I will strive to listen with respect and the intent to understand, to speak about what is important to my constituents, and to defend the rights of others to speak. As Ms Chambers mentioned, the way we see the world is influenced by our own experiences. In my case, my experiences as a resident of Calgary-Fish Creek form a large part of this. Of course, this does not fully encapsulate who I am or the perspectives, experience, and knowledge that I bring here to the Legislature and the policy-making process.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would like to share some of these experiences over my life that have shaped me into who I am today. I began life in Sudbury, Ontario, the first-born of three children to a hard-rock miner and a Catholic school elementary teacher. My parents separated when I was very young, so I was raised primarily by a loving and supportive single mother. My mother supported our family while working through the challenge of raising a mentally handicapped daughter and upgrading her education and pay scale by completing her university degrees at night after work. As an educator it's not surprising that my mother was passionate about education and literacy. My memories include a home filled with hundreds of books and encyclopedias, and while money was always extremely limited, there always seemed to be enough in the McDougall household for more books. It was here among the limitless treasure trove of reading material and frosty winter nights that my lifelong interest in geography and history was born.

My father was raised in poverty and as a child began to financially support his family at 11 years old, working nights setting bowling pins at a local bowling alley. At 16 he quit school to begin work as an underground hard-rock miner. Despite his own lack of formal education, he was a voracious reader. One of the earliest memories is him pointing to the local university as we drove by and telling me that he did not want me to follow him in his career path but instead be the first person in our extended family to attend university.

4:30

In the early 1970s my father began looking for another career, which eventually led him to Alberta. The early 1970s were an exciting time here in Alberta, and my father believed that it was time to move from Sudbury, which at that time was a depressing place where people seemed to be more interested in getting their 20 weeks of work so they could get unemployment insurance, to a plan

that was full of opportunity, optimism, and where they rewarded hard work and initiative and entrepreneurship. There we started a small business in the construction, the trucking business.

Myself I started earning my own spending money at 11 years old, when I took over a classmate's paper route. While being active and at a competitive level in several sports, I always had a part-time job, selling pop, chips, peanuts at the local hockey arena or a sales clerk, sporting goods department at Eaton's. I learned how to be self-sufficient and to earn my own money and maybe help out my mom a little bit.

In the summer before my last year of high school I went out to Calgary to work for my father, and I was totally impressed. I mean, the difference in tone and attitudes and the environment was totally different, and I decided that I wanted to stay there. So I finished my last year of high school living in a trailer park in Strathmore, where I graduated.

When I was 20 years old, I declined an offer to play hockey in Germany and instead embarked on a life-changing adventure that included backpacking across Canada to New York and then to London, where I found work washing dishes in a restaurant. After being promoted to bartender and then assistant manager, I left to visit India, travelling several months throughout the country and living with different families and other international travellers. On one memorable occasion after falling severely ill in Bombay, now Mumbai, I was taken in and cared for by a group of young Muslim students who had escaped the revolution in Iran. When I asked why they were doing this for me – I mean, they didn't even know me – I was told: because we are Muslims, and this is what Muslims do.

It is during these travels that I learned many important lessons which I hold to me to this very day, including the understanding of our common humanity of peoples from all walks of life and how fortunate I was as a middle-class Canadian and the connection between our good fortune and Canada's prosperity, its democratic institutions and freedoms and opportunities. I often said that me as a middle-class Canadian boy: I was a prince on the planet Earth, and I didn't even know it.

This journey sparked my lifelong interest in trying to understand what were the conditions that promoted or discouraged economic prosperity and overall quality of life among different societies, and that interest manifests itself in enduring interest in economics, political science, and comparative government policy. Upon the time I returned to Canada, I enrolled at the University of Calgary and eventually paid my way working summers and part-time, and with the support of student loans I completed a double major in economics and political science.

It was during that time that I had a professor in my fourth year political science for Canadian federalism, a guy named Peter Lougheed, who had just finished his last term as Premier of Alberta, and where I learned about the Constitution of Canada and what he and other people around the table had done and what they intended to do.

Afterwards, upon graduating, I served as executive assistant to Alberta's Provincial Treasurer, where I received a bird's-eye view of the challenges and considerations involving and managing the province's finances and priorities in the context of the many demands of the limited resources. I'd also mention that the minister at that time was Dick Johnston, who was also the minister of intergovernmental affairs during the whole constitutional battle of law. I spent four years listening to him talk about the conversations that took place around the table and in the backrooms on the forming of our Constitution, and those lessons, with that and Mr. Lougheed, inform me today.

After four years in the minister's office I returned to school to complete a joint MBA program from the University of Western

Ontario and the prestigious Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa in Barcelona, Spain. My passion to experience and learn about the world was further cultivated when I embarked on a 10-year international career as an economist bank executive investment adviser to global institutional investment funds and global oil and gas sector analysts, living in diverse locales, including Argentina, Brazil, New York, and London.

During this period I worked with two European major banks and the energy equity research teams with some of the world's most accomplished economists, political analysts, specialists and access to top government officials, regulators, and C-suite executives at many of the world's largest institutional investment funds. My responsibilities included energy-sector privatizations in Latin America and as senior vice-president and country head of economics and equity research for Brazil and at different times responsibilities in charge of emerging market oil and gas, U.S. oil majors, and European oil majors.

After the birth of my son I decided to return home to Canada because I wanted him to be raised in Canada by a father that could be more present than I was in that career. I expanded my perspective as an angel investor, founder, CEO of a variety of small technology and international-marketed companies in the energy sector, which included ventures focused on innovative technology development, including hydrogen fuel trucking and reducing CO₂ emissions from Alberta SAGD oil sands projects.

My companies have worked with University of Calgary faculty and graduate students on technology developments and received millions of dollars in financial support from a variety of oil and gas sector clients in Canada, the U.S., and other international locations. My experience as an angel investor led to a joint appointment as entrepreneur in residence from a venture capital fund and university acceleration program in Santiago, Chile, mentoring the management teams of early-stage technology companies.

One of my conclusions from that role is that we live in a hypercompetitive world. Every world jurisdiction seeks to diversify their economies and provide the conditions to generate new companies and provide jobs and future government revenues. It is not enough to try; we must be good, and we must be very good. Building new industries and companies is difficult. Global capital markets are selective, and the best ideas will only grow in the best market-friendly environments.

It may be noteworthy to know that I've not only been an immigrant in various countries, but I'm also the husband of a new Canadian from Argentina. My son was born in Brazil. I speak Spanish and Portuguese. We speak Spanish at home and with our broad Latino circle of new Canadians. Certainly, what I've learned is that we need to do a much better job to make sure that our new Canadians are given the full opportunity to exercise their potential and their capabilities and the training that they bring here to our country. We don't do enough.

I've also worked as an advocate on a variety of community and social endeavours and a deep interest in education and other community programs. I'm the son, son-in-law, and husband of elementary schoolteachers, which has given me a unique perspective on the evolution increasing in complexities of contemporary K to 12 classrooms. I've served as president of the University of Calgary Students' Union, on the executive of the Canadian Federation of Students, as a member of the U of C board of governors, and as a business instructor in the ex Soviet Union. My community service includes time as a board member and president of . . .

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne in my maiden speech. “Mohkinstsis”: that’s the Blackfoot name for the confluence of the Elbow and Bow rivers, the place we now call Calgary. For thousands of years the confluence was a place to gather, trade, play, and work, but this isn’t ancient history; it’s where the First People continue to live today. The centre of the most dynamic city in Canada is also “mohkinstsis.” It is the same place shared.

Calgary-Elbow is defined by the Elbow River, from the clear water we wade through in the heat of summer to the appropriately named Sandy Beach, the reservoir we boat on or golf beside, the vast trail network of the Weaselhead and then further upstream up to Elbow Falls in Kananaskis and beyond. The Elbow River provides so much of what we love in Calgary. It gives us the water that we drink, and it’s a vast study in contrasts. Madam Speaker, that same river which children can raft down on a warm summer day is the river which devastates a city by flood. The trickle that can be forded with dry feet forms the largest lake in Calgary, the wealth on the Elbow’s banks side by side with hardship just a few blocks away.

4:40

Calgary-Elbow is home to a wide variety of gathering spaces and blossoming local businesses. Whether you’re taking your children out to Village Ice Cream on a Friday afternoon, grabbing brunch with your family at Our Daily Brett, picking up that book at Owl’s Nest, or meeting up with a long-time friend for a pint at Marda Loop Brewing, these businesses reinforce a sense of connection, community, and belonging. You can feel this passion and spirit from every corner of the constituency.

Calgary-Elbow is split by natural geography in the form of the Elbow River and by human geography as 14 Street SW. Everyone knows the eastern half: Mount Royal, Elbow Park, Erlton, Elboya, Britannia, Stanley Park, Parkhill, Meadowlark Park, Bel-Aire, Mayfair, Rideau Park, Roxboro, Windsor Park. Most of these are amongst the highest income neighborhoods in Calgary, and for the first time in history they’re held by a member of the Alberta NDP.

How did this happen? How did this happen? Again, study in contrasts. Represented by former Premiers Alison Redford and Ralph Klein, PC members late David Russell, Gordon Dirks. In the death throes of the old PC Party, that doesn’t exist anymore, came political diversity: Liberal Craig Cheffins; Greg Clark, the only Alberta Party member to hold a seat in this House; Doug Schweitzer, with the UCP; me, with the Alberta NDP. Five parties represented Calgary-Elbow since 1971. Calgary-Elbow voters look at their options. They’re incredibly politically aware. They vote for candidates, not just party, and they hold their representatives accountable.

On the west side of 14 Street SW middle class, working class, and professionals live side by side in some of my favourite parts of Calgary: Marda Loop, South Calgary, Altadore, Garrison Woods, North Glenmore Park, Lincoln Park, Glamorgan, Garrison Green. Apartment blocks side by side with heritage homes, a wealth of pubs around the corner, the best coffee shops in Calgary, free-range beef, orchard-picked fruit, organic grocery stores, and some very good Indian restaurants.

Madam Speaker, Calgary-Elbow holds some of the best that Calgary has to offer. I’m honoured to have been entrusted to represent and serve the hard-working constituents of these vibrant communities.

I could not have done this alone. I was joined by a committed team of volunteers passionate about bringing fair representation to this remarkable constituency. Many of them such as Frank, Andrea,

Caryn, Leslie, Lise, Kitty, Alexia, and Jerri dedicated many of their evenings, weekends, and holidays to supporting me and the rest of our team. To everyone who took the time to knock on doors, make calls, or put up signs: you helped us bring real change to Calgary-Elbow, and I thank you.

A lot of people in Calgary-Elbow built their businesses and made their fortunes in oil and gas, an industry that’s been so good to our nation, our province, our city, my family, and to me personally. Yes, there’s oil and gas, but there’s also renewable energy, carbon capture, software, gaming, video production, amongst others, including, above all, so, so many health care workers. These sectors, including oil and gas, power our economic growth now and into the future, and you’ll find it in Calgary-Elbow.

My parents arrived in Canada in 1967 and 1969. I’m Hindu. My mother tongue is Marathi. I know the city of Mumbai well. Calgary-Elbow voters chose me to represent them because in a way I also carry a piece of Calgary-Elbow within me. I went to engineering school just across the river here at the University of Alberta, went to the States for my MBA, worked there for a while, and then I came back. I worked at a firm that advised large investors such as large pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, university endowments. I was an expert on energy economics from oil sands to pipelines to nuclear powers to solar farms. I’m an immigrant success story, like so many of those who live in Calgary-Elbow.

I came back with my new American wife because we both believed that Alberta was the best place in the world to raise a family. No matter what happened to us, our kids would get high-quality, first-class education and have great access to good health care.

This is how Calgary-Elbow looks at the world: make some money, build a business, work hard – all that is good – and pay it forward. Help those with less, build a better city, province, and country by building everyone up, work together, solve problems, be practical, don’t take unnecessary risks, stay even keeled, and, above all, celebrate diversity and include LGBTQ citizens fully in our democracy and treat all humans as humans. These attitudes and mindset, the temperament for seeking compromise and win-win solutions, helped me a lot in my business career. Calgary-Elbow voters noticed, and I’m so incredibly grateful that they gave a short, introverted, four-eyed child of immigrants a chance to represent them.

We have a lot of challenges in Calgary-Elbow, Madam Speaker, from a low-quality education curriculum to health care workers burning out. We have a large Jewish population which has contributed immensely to Calgary and Alberta and who are at this moment seeing rising anti-Semitism and feeling deep sorrow from losing their loved ones to an act of terror perpetrated by Hamas. Rising Islamophobia impacts people in Calgary-Elbow. Many people are pained by the death of innocents in the Gaza war. Closer to home, infrastructure has not kept up with population growth, leading to snarled streets and overflowing schools. Children in ever-larger class sizes are unable to achieve their potential.

Throughout my time thus far as the MLA for Calgary-Elbow I’ve seen the impacts of reckless cuts, poor oversight, and the mismanagement of services by the UCP government. I hear from my constituents about the struggles they face with securing and receiving AISH payments. I’ve listened to stories of wait times for life-altering procedures such as hip and knee replacements, keeping formerly healthy, happy people housebound or even bedridden. I’ve heard the concerns from my constituents about the uncertainty of securing their pension, whether they have worked their lives to receive it or find themselves entering the workforce with a sense of unpredictability for their future.

But above all – above all – Calgary-Elbow is the tip of the housing crisis spear. Just last week I spoke to the media with two constituents, senior citizens who have to come up with a 50 per cent higher rent or leave their homes. Forty per cent of Calgary-Elbow households rent their homes in the top five of Calgary ridings. With increased costs and higher interest rates challenging building new supply and an ever-increasing number of new residents fleeing even worse housing challenges across Canada, I've spoken to so many people who feel choiceless, helpless, and alone in their misery.

To those of my constituents who are struggling with housing, I want you to know this: you are my top priority. The scale of the problem is vast: 100,000 people move to Alberta annually right now; 60 per cent of them move to Calgary. That means building 25,000 units of housing annually in Calgary alone. In all of Alberta we only build 33,000 units. We aren't keeping up with the new flow of current residents, let alone the housing backlog.

Doing business in Canada is harder than it needs to be, Madam Speaker, whether it's building pipelines, expanding oil sands production, standing up a solar panel, or even building a basic human need: shelter. We Canadians have failed to build big things. People in Calgary-Elbow understand this. They are pro development, pro business, and pro environment. They want to see practical solutions to our challenges, and they know the importance of good government and sound public policy to solve problems.

There's a lot of work that needs to be done over the next four years. We need to be supporting the needs of everyday Albertans while creating an environment that welcomes investment and promotes economic growth. We need to ensure that our children have the same opportunities that we once did. We need to support the hard-working seniors who spent years of their life building the Alberta we know today.

We're not there right now. It took years to get us to where we are today. It will take years to dig ourselves out of this hole, but, Madam Speaker, the people of Alberta can count on the people of Calgary-Elbow to do the hard work. We will create a better future for this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with a profound sense of honour and gratitude that I stand before you today, reflecting on my journey from Ukraine to Canada and the privilege of speaking on behalf of the wonderful community I represent in this Chamber. Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to every single member in this House who has been elected to represent their respective ridings. The hard work and dedication that they have exhibited is a testament to the fundamental values that make our democratic system so extraordinary.

4:50

Throughout the course of the election my fellow members have worked tirelessly in the pursuit of having the chance to represent their constituents in this prestigious House. To all first-time MLAs, like myself, I would like to congratulate you and commend your bravery in stepping up to serve your community. It's no small feat to enter the world of politics, and your dedication to making a positive impact is truly admirable.

Of course, I would like to also express my deepest gratitude to the constituents of Drayton Valley-Devon. Without your trust and support I would not be standing here today. Your voices, concerns, and aspirations are what guide me in my role as your representative.

I promise to work tirelessly to address your needs and ensure that your voices are heard in this Chamber.

Furthermore, I need to express my thanks to my wife, Tatiana, who is watching online right now, for being there for me every step of the way. Her unwavering support, patience, and understanding have been my rock upon which I built my political journey. She has sacrificed countless hours of our time together so that I could fulfill my responsibilities as your representative. Her love and encouragement sustain me, and I'm truly grateful for the unwavering commitment to our family and our shared vision for our community.

To my children – Andrew Jr., Nathan, and Nataly – I want to express my deepest love and thankfulness. You have shown incredible resilience and understanding as I've embarked on this journey. The help you have given me and the sacrifices you have made have not gone unnoticed. My commitment to making our community a better place is driven in large part by this desire to create a brighter future for you and for all the young people in our community.

Finally, I would like to thank each and every person who has helped me along the way in getting to where I am today: the volunteers who have helped me throughout the campaign, my campaign team, the supporters who have stood by my side, and all the individuals who have offered their guidance, advice, and encouragement. I am profoundly thankful. The road to this esteemed Chamber has been paved with the collective effort of a dedicated community. It is your commitment and belief in our case that has made this moment possible. Together we have shown the power of unity and strength of grassroots democracy.

It is a distinct honour to note that I stand before you as the first Canadian MLA born in Ukraine. This milestone fills me with a profound sense of pride and responsibility. As the first Canadian MLA born in Ukraine, I carry with me a unique perspective, a deep appreciation for values of freedom and democracy, and a commitment to fostering strong ties between our two nations. My journey from Ukraine to Canada is a testament to the opportunities and inclusivity that make this country so exceptional. It is a story of hope, hard work, and the boundless potential of individuals from all corners of the world who come to Canada seeking a better life.

Our constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon is one that embodies the spirit of Alberta. When I first arrived in this community in 1996, having emigrated from Ukraine, I was immediately struck by the warm and welcoming nature of the people here. Their strong sense of community, their resilience in the face of challenges, and their unwavering determination to build a better future resonated with me.

Over the years I have witnessed our constituency's growth and transformation. Spending years in the real estate industry, I have had several personal interactions with individuals from all walks of life in my community. I have seen our farmers and ranchers work in the fields. Our entrepreneurs take bold steps to build their businesses, and our families come together in good times and bad. I have seen our schools nurture the potential of our youth and our health care providers work tirelessly to ensure the well-being of our community.

The hard-working folks in Drayton Valley-Devon understand the importance of economic freedom and individual liberty. They know that small businesses are the backbone of our community, and they value the principles of free enterprise that drive our province's prosperity. For my constituents these are not just abstract ideas; they are experienced every day in the interactions between neighbours, customers, patients, students, and tradespeople. As their elected representative it is my duty and my honour to champion these values in this esteemed Chamber.

To the First Nations and Métis communities that call our riding home: I want to note what a distinct privilege it is to represent you in this House. Moreover, as the parliamentary secretary for Indigenous Relations I will fight tirelessly to ensure that your voices are heard and your needs are met.

Furthermore, I'm committed to representing the interests of all Albertans. Our province stands at the precipice of a new era filled with both challenges and opportunities. It is crucial that we navigate this path with wisdom and deep understanding of the diverse needs and aspirations of our fellow citizens.

Alberta is fundamentally one of the driving forces of the Canadian economy. With our abundant natural resources, including oil, natural gas, minerals, and agricultural products, the province has consistently been a significant contributor to the national economy. Alberta's economic contributions have not only benefited us but have also had a positive impact on the prosperity of the entire country.

I feel immensely blessed to stand in the House before you today. To all the constituents I represent: I give you my word that I will work tirelessly to defend your rights and interests in this Chamber. Your voices, your concerns, and your aspirations will guide my actions and decisions as your representative. I pledge to be a strong advocate for the values and priorities of Drayton Valley-Devon. Together we will address the challenges we face and seize the opportunities that come our way. This is not just my duty; it is my honour and privilege.

Thank you, and God bless Alberta.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in response to the 31st Legislature Speech from the Throne. It is my absolute honour to represent the people of Calgary-Acadia, and I am delighted at the opportunity to be able to share with you a little bit about what makes Calgary-Acadia so great. The riding stretches from the northmost point of Blackfoot Trail, follows the beautiful Bow River valley down south, sweeping down Anderson Road and into Fish Creek park. The riding is situated on the traditional territories of the signatories of Treaty 7 and is home to Métis people, who share a deep connection with this land.

5:00

Calgary-Acadia consists of nine distinct mature communities: Manchester, Fairview, Acadia, Maple Ridge, Willow Park, Kingsland, Southwood, Haysboro, and Canyon Meadows. Each community has its own rich history of malleability and intentional community building. Calgary-Acadia boasts two year-round farmers' markets, the largest off-leash dog park in Calgary, is home to our ever-growing barley belt of microbreweries, and will soon be home to Calgary's only roller-skating rink.

The people of Calgary-Acadia are a beautiful mix of original homeowners, young families just starting out, long-term residents, and new immigrants. They are small-business owners, doctors, lawyers, accountants, parents, friends, and family. Calgary-Acadia is home to dedicated community supports such as the Dream Centre, who offers residential long-term addiction treatment; Ruth's House, who offers a safe haven for African families and individuals experiencing domestic violence; Parachutes for Pets, who recognizes that family isn't just about humans and provides for Calgary's most vulnerable and their cherished pets; and, of course, the Calgary Food Bank, who helps thousands of Calgarians feed their families every day.

The people of Calgary-Acadia are proud of their communities and are excited for what tomorrow may bring, but they need

support. Like many Albertans, Calgary-Acadians are struggling with the cost of living. I hear stories almost daily where folks are making impossible decisions between paying their utilities, keeping a roof over their head, food on the table, all while managing trying to afford life-necessary medications. I've been shown lease renewal increases of over 30 per cent and constituents reporting 90 per cent increases in their electricity bills. Far too many Calgary-Acadians are without a family doctor, and others are worried about losing their family doctor to other provinces where they respect and apply evidence-based research. Calgary-Acadians share stories of neighbours knocking on their doors but not for cups of sugar. Instead, they're asking for things as simple as Tylenol, because they cannot afford to both manage their pain and feed their children.

Calgary-Acadia is a mature riding with aging infrastructure, trying to support both the current and next generation. Our 48 schools are struggling under the weight of record enrolment numbers, transportation challenges, and this government's underfunding and devaluing of the public education system.

Calgary-Acadians are retired persons, people who would hope to someday retire, and these folks are so proud to be part of one of the strongest retirement plans in this world, our Canadian pension plan.

Calgary-Acadians are global citizens making informed decisions and taking actions to support initiatives inside and out of their communities. Calgary-Acadians invest in the future by adding solar panels to their houses and community centres and by being ambassadors for projects like Miyawaki, or tiny forest, which was recently planted in the riding and spearheaded by the Calgary Climate Hub. Calgary-Acadians are aware, and they advocate for what matters for them, including keeping our stunning mountains intact and our waters safe.

Calgary-Acadians are not shy. They will absolutely show up at my office, write me letters, send me messages, call me on the phone, ready to discuss how they feel we can make this world better. And we are happy to receive them, always ready to listen to their concerns and hear their ideas for a better future for Alberta. For far too long Calgary-Acadians were underserved. As long as I have the privilege of representing Calgary-Acadians, I will continue to keep my door open and work hard for each and every constituent.

Public service is a privilege like no other. You play a part in the very fabric of our society and speak as one voice for many, and I take this responsibility very seriously. My first real job was in early middle school, working at my parents' store. Now, for anyone who has had the opportunity to work in a family-owned business, you know it's an experience like no other. You quickly realize that your workday does not end when that sign turns to closed and that conversations over the breakfast, lunch, and dinner table will all circle back to that business. Learning the value of hard work, accountability, and collaboration at such a young age shaped how I approached owning my own business and today how the Calgary-Acadia constituency office is run.

We are all a collection of our experiences. As a research scientist I learned the art of patience and how to ask the right question. As a registered nurse I learned what it was to truly be an advocate and the strengths and vulnerabilities that come with simply being human. As the elected voice for Calgary-Acadia I have deliberately delivered transparent and accountable leadership because that is what I promised, and that is what Albertans deserve.

In addition to serving Calgary-Acadia, my office receives requests for supports from across the province. Many times these folks have reached out to their local member and have heard nothing. We believe that every person deserves to be represented, and we will continue to advocate for the issues that matter most to those we represent. I will stand strong and fight so that their concerns are not shoved under the carpet or forgotten.

I feel incredibly grateful that I am not only part of a great local constituency office – Elladee, Marnie, Tim, and Rogan – but also am part of the largest opposition caucus in Alberta’s history. This Alberta NDP team of eager, motivated advocates is already functioning as a well-oiled machine, and I could not be more proud and excited to continue this amazing work that we will do every day for Albertans and every day that we serve.

Now, of course, I didn’t get here by myself. I want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank my amazing teammates, volunteers, donors, and voters. Each of you played a huge part so that I could stand here and represent you today. Each of you reminds us of the power of a single individual and a single vote, because every vote matters.

I want to take a moment to thank my family. I’m incredibly fortunate to have grown up surrounded by lively discussions that helped shape who I’ve become. I specifically want to thank my siblings David, Danielle, and Dugan for regularly and always holding me to account. To my parents, Dick and Donna, who taught us to see hurdles as opportunities to build character and laid the foundation for navigating complex and vital conversations, and to my partner, Keith: thank you.

I want to end today with a little trivia. The first Ukrainian-Canadian woman to ever be elected into Canadian Parliament was in 1956. She served as Justice critic in the Saskatchewan Legislature for two terms and was known for her advocacy of the rights of women and children. She was said to have a face of an angel and a tongue like a viper. This member was the late Chief Justice Mary John Batten, née Fodchuk, and she was my grandmother. I am humbled by her legacy, and I am so incredibly grateful to continue the tradition of service.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe.

5:10

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are here today on Treaty 6 territory. I grew up in Treaty 8 territory, and I live today on the territory of the people of Treaty 7. We, all of us, across this place that today we call Alberta have a responsibility to pursue a path of reconciliation.

It is my honour to address this House in response to the Speech from the Throne from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Her Honour is a leader in living her life through the values of inclusion, dignity, and respect. We should all follow her example in creating a world that is safe and welcoming for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today as the first NDP MLA for Calgary-Foothills. I have a deep sense of gratitude to the citizens of Calgary-Foothills who place their trust in me and our party to represent them in this Legislature. I promise to stand for the values and people of Calgary-Foothills and to be the voice for their principles and policies that are important to them.

I want to sincerely thank the people that helped us achieve this dream of electoral victory in Calgary-Foothills: Renette, who proved that you could provide an incredible level of support from a distance as my volunteer co-ordinator from here in Edmonton; Maureen, who made on average 700 calls every day during the 28 days of the election campaign – incidentally, she also makes the best kitchen scrubbies; I can hook you up if you’re interested – and Lauren, who knocked on thousands of doors and taught me a great deal about how you balance your personal beliefs with those of others. These are only a few of the many, many volunteers, donors, and supporters who helped get me to this point today. A huge thank you to all of the hundreds of others who supported me and our party. I wouldn’t be here without you.

I am blessed to be from an incredibly loving and supportive family. I am who I am today because of them. My mom, the heart of our family, was a nurse, the nurse all of you wanted if you ever ended up in a hospital. She learned basic communication in Cree so that she could talk to the elders who came into the hospital. She whistled songs everywhere she went. My mom is loving, understanding, and supportive, qualities I hope she passed on to me.

My dad was a radar technician in the navy. When he retired after 25 years, we moved from Victoria, British Columbia, to Valleyview, Alberta. My dad was president of the Co-op, of the golf course; he mentored high school badminton players; and he served as a member of council for the municipal district of Greenview, providing me with a small window into what it means to serve your community as an elected official. My dad is a man of character. For him, everyone deserves respect. He respected his role in the navy. To him, respecting that role meant that you challenged and questioned to make the institution better. I have a great deal of respect for my dad, and I will fulfill my role as he did his, challenging and questioning to make the system better.

My sister is eight years older than me. We might have fought a few times as a child, but she also fought for me. When I was little, my sister was my protector. My sister is strong, she is fierce, and she will protect those that she loves, and I will do the best to channel her strength in standing up for my constituents.

Some of you have met my mom, my dad, and my sister – they were here for my swearing-in – but you haven’t met my brother Tommy. Tommy was born with a rare genetic condition. Most of those with his condition don’t survive to birth. Those that are born with his condition: 5 per cent survive their first year. My brother passed when he was 42. Tommy might not have been able to talk, but he could communicate raw, unfiltered emotion. He could communicate unconditional love like no one else. He might not be here, but he is always with us. Having a disabled brother opened a window for me to see how as a society we treat our most vulnerable. Let me say: we can do better; we must do better.

Did I mention that I grew up in Valleyview, Mr. Speaker? Did you know that Hillside high in Valleyview, Alberta, has produced three members of this 31st Legislature? Valleyview might be a small town, but it is full of heart and hard-working people. Our rural and remote communities provide a great deal to this province. I might represent an urban constituency, but I recognize and value the contributions made by Valleyview and so many other of our rural communities across this province.

I left Valleyview to pursue my bachelor of commerce from the University of Calgary. After six years in the private sector I migrated to the not-for-profit sector and spent my career in community and economic development. This led me to Indonesia, where I served four years as a volunteer and two years as country program manager for KISU international. These opportunities taught me that building trust in a community takes time and effort, but nothing can be accomplished without that trust. It is the same now as an MLA. I know it is our job to know our constituents and for them to know us, allowing us to sit at the table together to collaborate and find solutions to the challenges that we face.

After returning to Calgary, I began working at Calgary Economic Development as vice-president, research and strategy. I was responsible for drafting and reporting on the economic strategy for Calgary. The strategy is purposefully inclusive, understanding that the economy is about people. If we aren’t supporting everyone and enabling them to thrive, we are falling short of our true potential as a community.

I am incredibly proud and grateful for the opportunity to represent the constituency of Calgary-Foothills. It is a rapidly growing part of our city. With a 2021 population of 56,500 people, Calgary-Foothills gained 4,000 eligible voters from 2019 to 2023.

It is incredibly diverse: 60 per cent of the population are people of colour; 44 per cent are immigrants, half of them arriving in Canada in the last 10 years; there are dozens of languages spoken in homes across the constituency. [Remarks in Bahasa Indonesia] There are multiple faith groups in the community, and regardless of language, place of birth, race, or religion, it is my role and responsibility to ensure that Calgary-Foothills constituents are represented here in Alberta's Legislature.

Like others in Alberta, many of our residents are struggling with the escalating cost of living and, notably, the cost of housing. Whether they are homeowners or renters, we need to be doing all we can to ensure affordable housing is available to all Albertans. Many of the residents in my communities live in multigenerational homes, and they've experienced first-hand the wait times for doctors, surgeries, hospital rooms. They're worried about their children having access to local schools and quality public education. With thousands of those children being bused every day well over an hour to all corners of our city, probably to the overcrowded schools in Calgary-Acadia, I will do my utmost to ensure the constituents of Calgary-Foothills get the schools they need. Oh, did I mention 56,000 people and seven schools?

After being elected, I was overjoyed to be named critic for Technology and Innovation. At Calgary Economic Development my team delivered the programs of Startup Calgary, an agency focused on helping entrepreneurs start technology and innovation companies. Following this, I worked as program director for the Calgary Innovation Coalition, a network focused on co-ordinating, enhancing services to technology companies in our innovation ecosystem.

5:20

When I told my family and friends that I was going to throw my hat in the ring and run for office, they were surprised. Some of them were also a little surprised that I was running for the NDP. Did I mention that I grew up in Valleyview? But they asked me an important question: given how challenging public life is, the nastiness that is out there, and the endless scrutiny that elected officials are always under, why would I want to do this? They asked this with a sense of seriousness, knowing that as a gay man I might face some of this nastiness. My response: I'm proud of who I am, and I will not stand on the sidelines as people attempt to silence and marginalize my community.

I believe the key to building stronger and more resilient communities is building a stronger and more resilient economy. I say that knowing the economy is about people. Our economy is key to generating job opportunities for our young people, attracting investment, and growing businesses. But we can't do that without delivering high-quality public education and public health care. These past years have taught me that Alberta's entrepreneurs are resourceful and creative.

Calgary and Alberta's innovation ecosystem is still young but has incredible potential. We have world-leading institutions, research institutions, solving some of our greatest challenges. We have an incredibly talented population. We are globally connected. But there is much to be done for our innovation ecosystem to reach its full potential. We need strong leadership to ensure that our institutions are working effectively to make Alberta the best place to start and grow a business. We need smart leadership to keep our entrepreneurs here rather than moving away. We need strategic leadership that is focused not only on the economy of today but the economy of tomorrow.

I chose to do this to hold this government to account as their decisions will affect our future economic prosperity. I challenge all

members in this House to work together to ensure that Alberta is the best place it can be, a place that is thriving, a place that is inclusive and welcoming, a place where everyone can be their true selves and have access to adequate housing, health care, education, and meaningful work. Along with my colleagues in the Alberta NDP caucus and, I hope, members of the government caucus, I intend to make that Alberta a reality.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, friends, colleagues, guests, if there are any left upstairs in the gallery, and viewers at home, thank you for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address this House and the residents of the constituency of Calgary-Currie. I am a proud mom to two phenomenal kids. When I was their age, I would never have imagined I would end up here. Though I have always called Calgary home, I was always drawn to the Rockies rather than to the capital.

Like a lot of folks in this province, my first job was at the mall, Southcentre Mall to be specific, over in Calgary-Acadia when I was 14, back when the minimum wage for youth was the same as adults. I washed dishes in high school and served coffee while I juggled a full course load in university. Like the member opposite, tree planting every summer covered tuition for the following year. I didn't think mine was the standard work history for someone aspiring to sit in these Chambers, but after hearing so many maiden speeches over the last few days, maybe it is. We have to remind ourselves of what that hustle feels like, because Albertans live it every day.

I hope Albertans see the diversity of the members with whom I have the honour to stand. Our career paths, our cultures and backgrounds, our faiths and interests have all brought us to this place, and they're worth celebrating and sharing in the hopes that it might inspire others to serve. Mr. Speaker, as the daughter of a social studies teacher, it is incumbent on me to briefly share the history of the settler and Indigenous landscape of Calgary-Currie.

In the interwar era Calgary's growth to the southwest of the downtown core picked up significantly. Currie Barracks was constructed in 1933 just beyond the outskirts of the city as part of a federal Depression-relief program, and for decades Currie Barracks was a hub of activity and a permanent fixture of Canada's military in Alberta. This wouldn't have happened had the government chosen austerity measures rather than stimulus spending. The surrounding PMQs that popped up after the war brought families nearby, with schools, businesses, and civil society following suit. In '97 Currie Barracks was decommissioned, and Canada Lands has now been tasked with reinventing the space as the demand for housing and inner-city community grows.

But certainly the history of the area is not just that of the military or the municipality or settlers. Calgary is built on the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Nation. To the north and east lies the confluence of the Bow and Elbow rivers, "mohkinstsis," a major hub and gathering place for First Nations people in southern Alberta for the past 10,000 years. To the south and west of Calgary-Currie is Tsuut'ina Nation and Stoney-Nakoda Nation, whose people have travelled the hills and valleys long before there were roads, houses, and shops. Recognizing the precontact history, colonial genocide, and sustained Indigenous presence in my riding is one small, personal act of truth and reconciliation.

As a member of His Highness's Loyal Opposition it is my duty to uphold the commitments of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 93 calls to action, to be an ally that works on addressing the unconscionable numbers of missing and murdered

Indigenous women and girls, to condemn violence and racism, and to end systemic oppression of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

Today Calgary-Currie is a wonderful example of everything that makes Calgary a really terrific city. It's a mix of urban and suburban living whose communities are a testament to planning and public funding of a bygone era. Communities like Rosscarrock and Killarney developed holistically with schools, places of worship, green spaces, and storefronts. Spruce Cliff and Glenbrook have mixed-density affordable housing and residential long-term care. Parks, community centres, and, my personal favourite, the strip mall dot the riding and are hubs for gatherings, local business, and social enterprise.

If you travel from the southwest corner toward downtown, you'll pass Optimist athletic park and the sight of loaded hockey bags bigger than the kids hauling them. Swing past Sarcee Meadows Housing Co-operative, one of the largest in Canada, right next door to Rutland Park, where the green field is packed with kids playing soccer and men and women practising cricket every weekend, and stop at the outdoor rink, the Richmond Knob Hill, lovingly tended to by community volunteers and adored by kids and adults alike.

Closer to downtown you can't miss the outrageously in-demand pickleball bookings in Bankview nor the swing of rackets on the tennis courts in Sunalta. Calgary-Currie communities are walkable, eclectic, and steeped in history, but it's the 45,000-plus people who live there that make it special, and I am deeply honoured to serve them, people like the woman I met door-knocking who learned her rent was going up by \$500. She moved to Canada years ago and recounted how she had to work three minimum wage jobs to support her kids. Those little ones would join her in the evenings while she cleaned houses because it was often the only time she would have with them. Is hers a story of resilience and commitment? Undoubtedly, but imagine if that spirit could have been applied in a university classroom or at just one secure, reliable, good-paying job.

I recall the dad we met who was concerned about how he would keep his home after quitting his job to care for a son with complex needs. The boy had a birthday coming up, and dad hoped he could afford a little something special. Another story of grit and determination? Indeed, but if we aren't here to ease the burden of families like theirs, why are we here at all? I know that's why I'm here.

What brought me to politics was a lifelong dedication to poverty reduction through policy change. I have always believed – always believed – that in a city as wealthy as Calgary, in a province as fortunate as Alberta, lives did not have to be lived in chronic scarcity. That poverty still exists is a choice, and we can choose better. I run and serve with other New Democrats because we share this core value.

5:30

I would note that in our province the wealth of a few has only translated to the prosperity of many because of progressive social democratic policies. In the past it was the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, succeeded by the NDP, that advocated for public health care, public education, labour rights, public pensions, workers' compensation, child care, and children's benefits, and today we all fight to uphold those institutions with an eye toward ensuring that every Albertan of every age, race, gender, and sexuality can, one, exist as they are freely in our province and, two, thrive. Despite our best efforts there are still far too many who don't get to share in our prosperity.

I want to take a moment to recognize the people across this province who go out every day to alleviate the pain and suffering

of their fellow Albertans, whether it's their paid job or not. I'm especially talking about those who are on the front lines saving people who would otherwise die of a toxic drug poisoning. This year alone, Mr. Speaker, over 1,100 Albertans, many children and young adults, have lost their lives to a toxic drug supply, and I dread to think how much higher that number would be if it weren't for the people who know how to use Narcan to reverse a drug poisoning or opioid overdose. To the people who use drugs, to the volunteer outreach teams, to the front-line workers and first responders: you are all lifesavers. I know this work doesn't come without a tremendous personal toll, and it is my promise to you that I will do all I can to help you help others.

Speaking of the helpers, to my husband Steve and our daughters: I bring you with me to work every day. Thank you for keeping me grounded. [interjections] Let's see if we can get through it here, folks. Lastly, I hoped to have my mom's name read out in the Chamber today. Her name is Barbara Downie, and she came out from Montreal to work at the gift shop in Lake Louise in 1967 and never looked back. She was fiercely independent, stubborn as a mule, and loved – loved – her Rocky Mountains. They were hers. I don't know if anybody else likes the mountains, but she's got them. She was a special education teacher with the Calgary board of education for three decades, and she has late stage Alzheimer's. Travel from Calgary with my dear stepdad, Bryan, isn't really an option, but saying her name aloud is a little like having her here.

I can't possibly thank all the volunteers, supporters, donors, and friends who have contributed to my being here. I am infinitely grateful for your support and for not giving up on this beautiful province we call home.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand today in response to the Speech from the Throne for the 31st Legislature of Alberta delivered here in this Assembly by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and for the opportunity to speak to the experiences and values that brought me to stand for election in the amazing community of Sherwood Park, where all roads lead. I would like to begin by thanking the constituents of Sherwood Park for entrusting me to represent them here and be their voice in the Legislature. I intend to honour your faith in me with hard work and to ensure that the values and policies you supported will be reflected in the work of the New Democrat led Official Opposition.

Sherwood Park is often recognized for being the largest hamlet in the world, which means it is an urban centre that is comfortable being governed within a county. It is the nexus of country and city, agriculture and energy industry. In many ways it is a young place, but it has history, and I am proud of where I am from. Its sacred lands are known as Amiskwacyi, which is Cree for the Beaver Hills. For thousands of years Indigenous people from many nations have lived and thrived on these lands. All inhabitants of Sherwood Park are responsible to each other, to the land, to the resources, and to Treaty 6 as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the mighty North Saskatchewan River flows.

When I was four, my parents, Edwin and Nancy Kasawski, moved us to Sherwood Park from High Prairie after a circuitous motorhome adventure through the sunbelt of the United States during the winter of 1977 and '78. They picked Sherwood Park over a community west of Edmonton because when you commute back and forth to Edmonton, the sun is in your eyes in the morning and in the evening going to and from the hon. Searle Turton's riding of

Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, but the sun is always on your back when you come from Sherwood Park.

What they learned is that Sherwood Park is full of opportunities, activities, organizations, and infrastructure for healthy and creative living. The good people of Sherwood Park are committed to making life better for others and taking care of one another.

The community of Sherwood Park has been built by families near and dear to me, families like the Alampis, Anakas, Becketts, Broks, Brydons, Calders, Carrs, Chabas, Cooks, Dimmers, Gibsons, Gordons, Jamiesons, Johnstons, Kasawskis, Kennedys, Kroestches, Millards, Peddens, Provenchers, Sadoways, Sargents, Srepneks, Shabbits, Sousters, Wodaks, and Zurawells. And the community continues to thrive with families like the Berghofers, Browns, Greidanus, Manchaks, Mills, Moellers, Pysh, Teghtmeyers, Tonitas, Waljis, and so many more that are carrying on the traditions of Sherwood Park and creating new ones as well.

Let me back up, though. I was born in a relatively small town of Bashaw, Alberta, when there was still an operating hospital there that could deliver babies. I'm the last of a line. But I'm grateful for my personal connection to small towns and family farms in Alberta. Nearly every weekend in the summers of my childhood my folks would load us into the car or motorhome and drive us off to visit the Walstons on Lesser Slave Lake, the Kasawskis near Flatbush, the Ewaschuks near Thorhild, or the Stiles family near Ponoka. I was gifted with family time – cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents – playing outside, and doing chores. I've picked rocks, hauled bales, slaughtered chickens, delivered calves, and herded cattle. My grandparents William and Edith Stiles ran a farm veterinarian practice, and my uncle Ernie and aunt Fern Ewaschuk wrote the authoritative book on land stewardship in Alberta.

I come to this seat after a long career working in Alberta's sun patch since 2002. In my work I used to say: I'm changing the world one solar panel at a time. When I ran for public office, I decided I would start trying to change the world one conversation at a time. Conversation, talking about ideas, is still one of the best ways that we come together as Albertans, and sometimes the world does change just from a conversation.

The model of my alma mater, the University of Alberta, is the Latin phrase *quaecumque vera*. It means: whatsoever things are true. For my work in this Assembly I will rely on more than feelings and anecdotes to make decisions; I will rely on data, expertise, facts, wisdom, thoughtful discussion to arrive at decisions. It is the best way to govern our province.

Mr. Speaker, I am no longer a young man and still not yet so old. I do know there are more years behind me than there are ahead of me, so I intend to make the most of my time on this planet to serve others. Right now I feel the best way I can serve is here as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I have reached that stage in my life when I want to plant trees whose shade I know I may never sit under. I want to help continue to improve our great society for my children, yes, but even more so for theirs – God willing – and the generations that will follow them.

5:40

We should strive always to govern well and to develop robust policies that will stand the test of time, changing circumstances, and our changing planet. Alberta is an amazing place. We have clean air and water, productive and beautiful land. We have been blessed with valuable geology, and we have smart people that have benefited from public education. The vision of Alberta as the shining city on the hill is still ahead of us, and it is possible to build with a commitment to the principles of social democracy. We can have society where free enterprise thrives, where excellent health care and social services can be depended upon, where our public

education system is the envy of the world, and where we help the most vulnerable among us, where we protect our environment, where our youth are talking about staying here when they grow up because they can envision an exciting future for themselves in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I have many people to thank for my election to this seat. I appreciate the members present indulging me a little while longer as I express gratitude to a few: Heather, for encouraging me to run; Gail, for helping to make it happen; Matt, Martin, Bernie, and Will for helping me get nominated; Katy for managing an excellent election campaign; Kayden and Nicole, Rebecca, Elias, Kevin, Laura, Patrick, and the Lynns and the hundreds of other volunteers, donors, sign hosts, and supporters that helped elect a New Democrat MLA to Sherwood Park; the 9:30 crew for keeping me healthy; mom, Kari, Kris, Katy, Gord, and my nieces and nephews for the love and support of family.

I also want to share my appreciation for my fellow members in this Assembly, especially the members of the New Democratic caucus. My dad taught me: work is work. It is the people you work with that matter the most, and you are a delightful, spectacular, and wonderful group of people.

Lastly, and most importantly, above everything else, I am the husband of Tami and the father of Neko and Lainey. Their love carries me, and I aim to make them proud. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you, thank you to the members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: I know that the hon. Member for Sherwood Park has great admiration for the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, but it would be wildly inappropriate for the use of his name here in the Assembly. But because the Speaker is a kind and gracious Speaker and in light of it being your maiden speech, I provide this as a learning opportunity to all members of the Assembly. I'll consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Hon. Mr. Speaker, I extend my sincere gratitude for the privilege of addressing this esteemed Assembly for the very first time. Today we are gathered here on the traditional lands of Treaty 6. I also want to recognize that the riding of Calgary-North East, that I have the honour of representing, is located on the traditional lands of Treaty 7, and Métis people of Alberta share a deep connection to that land.

I express profound thanks to the electors of Calgary-North East, whose trust in me is both humbling and an immense responsibility as their representative in this Chamber. The constituency of Calgary-North East – comprising the diverse communities of Skyview, Redstone, Cornerstone, Coventry Hills, Harvest Hills, Livingston, and my residence in Cityscape since 2015 – represents true multiculturalism, with almost 70 per cent visible minority population. The riding predominantly comprises new immigrants, individuals whose remarkable cultures, traditions, and diverse backgrounds contribute not only to the richness of our community but also to the embodiment of ambitious dreams.

My own journey mirrors theirs, having arrived in 2011 as an international student at SAIT and facing the harsh reality of not being able to work legally for the first six months. During these six months decisions as simple as buying a cup of coffee or saving for my monthly phone bill seemed complex as I could choose only one or the other. The absence of access to student loans coupled with tuition fees three times higher than those of local students was not easy to go through.

After six months I started working at a local gas station on minimum wage, and I still cannot forget the joy and happy moment when I got my first paycheque of \$217. I also worked as a security guard at Bow Valley College, where I went to teach later. Today, during the times of high inflation, various Albertans face similar challenges, with students struggling to pay rent and families working hard to put food on their tables. It is with a sense of duty that I stand here as their representative and advocate.

While studying, I joined the Progressive Cultural Association in Calgary and became an actor in their theatre group. Our theatre was based on the issues faced by marginalized communities, seniors, new immigrants, and historical events. Theatre not only polished my acting skills, but it also gave me an opportunity to understand the issues faced by the people. I am a state-level player of field hockey in India, and here in Calgary I joined the United Hawks field hockey club and played with them for several years. In fact, I joined them in their 11th annual field hockey tournament this past weekend.

The year 2015 marked a significant turning point, when a Conservative government increased postsecondary tuition, prompting student protests. I joined those demonstrations and actively participated in the SAIT Students' Association. Later I ran as a board of director at SAIT Students' Association and won by one vote. Yes, Mr. Speaker, every vote matters. I advocated for the freezing of tuition costs and making life more affordable for postsecondary students. After graduating, I found fulfillment in high-paying positions, particularly in your constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills at Olds College. It was an honour to work under the leadership of Dean Barb Mulholland.

The opportunity to teach at Bow Valley College further boosted my professional experience, and it was because of these good-paying jobs that I was able to afford my first home. Unfortunately, that's not the case for many Albertans these days, and there are thousands of Albertans who are not able to afford a home today. I will continue to advocate on their behalf, and I will make sure that Albertans should have a place that they can call home.

I genuinely believe that no one is self-made. There are always a number of individuals who have contributed to the success of any person. There are a number of them in my life, too. I was raised by four amazing women: my mother, Jaspal Kaur Brar, who gave me birth and helped me to pay my tuition and my tickets to India; my grandmother Kartar Kaur Brar, who introduced me to my culture, to my religion, and historical characters like Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh Bahadur, Dulla Bhatti, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, and many more. She taught me the importance of hospitality and taught me that no guest should ever leave our home hungry, and I invite the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for a dinner at my home. My aunt Harjinder Kaur Brar made sure that I never slept hungry when I lived with her. My sister-in-law Hardeep Kaur Brar taught me basic accounting principles – how to submit the assignments online, how to do Google searches, and how to excel in the class – and that really helped me feel comfortable in my school.

The fifth woman in my life is my wife, Parwinder Grewal. Even though she's not happy with the performance of the previous four women, she is working every day to undo their work and redo the things that she feels aren't right. She's a lovely human being who has always stood by me through thick and thin and always believed in me. She not only tells me when there is a stop sign and when the lights have turned green, even though I am driving; she has also knocked on thousands of doors during the campaign. She clearly told me that if I lose the election, I will not be allowed to enter the home. And after the election she always complains that I do not come home on time and do not spend time with her. Parwinder, I thank you for everything that you do every day, and I love you.

5:50

There are some amazing men who have shaped my life a lot. My dad, Gurmeet Singh Brar, who is a pharmacist by profession and a professional marathon runner, has always taught me to stay strong and tough. He has shown what hard work looks like and how important it is to remain healthy in life.

My uncle Gurbachan Singh Brar, who is a retired teacher and a true progressive at heart, gave me progressive books and taught me the history of progressive politics and got me involved in the NDP. I owe every part of my success to him and his hard work. He's an enthusiastic community advocate who continues to raise the issues of seniors in our community. He has led our family like a champion after the murder of my grandfather in 1987.

My brother Ricky Brar, who is the president of Unifor local 4001 and represents the workers of CN and CNL from Alberta and BC, is a true organizer and passionate advocate of working Albertans. I want to thank him and his entire team at Unifor for helping me out. He always kept me on my toes and threatened to not remove my campaign signs if I lost the election. Thankfully, I did not have to remove those signs on my own. Thank you, brother Ricky, for always being there for me.

When I first entered my class at SAIT, I knew no one there. The first person I met there was Harmeet Shergill. We quickly became friends. He's always been on my side since then. Today we are business partners, and he does the difficult job of handling the business, a true friend and a true lover of masala chai, who usually knocks on my door at 10 p.m. and asks for a cup of chai. Thank you, Harmeet, for always being an amazing friend.

I'm also very fortunate to have a neighbour like Sukhi Shergill, who is a local small-business owner and a person with a golden heart. I cannot thank the entire Shergill family enough for supporting me and contributing to the success of my campaign.

I want to thank Uncle Chand Singh and his entire family for always being there with our family for the past 70 years. When my grandfather Mukhtiar Singh Brar ran as a village councillor in the 1980s, Chand Singh and his family stood by our family to make that campaign successful. And today in 2023, 40 years later, he and his family stood by me to make my campaign successful. Uncle-ji, I have no words to thank you for your guidance, passion, compassion, and hard work.

I want to thank my teachers from Dashmesh public school, Fardikot – Mr. Rakesh Dhawan, Mr. Jeevan Rhelia, Ms Pratibha Chaudhary – and my professor from SAIT, Dr. Olayemi Olabiya, for his guidance and mentorship. I want to thank my professors from the University of London for all their hard work and help throughout my master's program in public policy.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for always supporting me. I also want to thank my dear friends Harambir Virk and Jagmeet Mann from New Zealand; Jatinder Bhullar from Vancouver; Lovedeep Sharma, Ashishdeep Ahluwalia, and Vikram Brar from Fardikot.

Education has always played a vital role in shaping me in who I am today. Public education is a true equalizer, and kids in my constituency of Calgary-North East deserve nothing less. Their ask for a new school in Redstone has been ignored under this UCP government, and I will continue to advocate for them and will not rest until the school gets built.

From the depth of my heart I am thankful to my volunteers – Sukhi Dandyan, Pawan Khaira, Manpreet Dhaliwal, Aalam Brar, Erika, Farhan, and Taha – for their countless efforts and hours they have put in to put me in this Chamber. I am extremely thankful to every individual who has contributed to my success, and I want to thank every single elector in Calgary-North East who exercised their right to vote regardless of their party choices.

Thank you for doing your job, and now it is my promise and it is my commitment that I will not let you down. I will work hard to protect your pensions, build more schools, lower cost of living, lower tuition costs, and advocate for small-business owners.

It is my honour to serve as the first NDP MLA for Calgary-North East and first international student to ever be elected in Alberta's Legislature. Thank you.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a wonderful day it's been, listening to throne speeches and everyone's background and why they ran. I appreciate everyone's remarks today, but I would like to now move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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