



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 7, 2023

Day 6

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 7, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my absolute pleasure to introduce to the Assembly an Alberta first, the very first time that we have had the pleasure of being visited by the ambassador of Kosovo. He and the deputy head of mission of Kosovo attended the Speaker's gallery earlier this morning. We spoke about the Alberta-Kosovo relations, our shared values of freedom and democracy, and also look forward to celebrating with Albertans of Kosovo descent the upcoming 15th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Kosovo and Canada. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to introduce a former member who's joining us today in the Speaker's gallery, the 901st member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the Member for Calgary-Elbow, the leader of the fourth party, Mr. Greg Clark.

Hon. members, before we get to guests, I would like to note that there are a significant number of introductions today. I'll remind all members that introductions are to only be 20 seconds or less. I'll also mention, for clarification purposes, that the list is created on a first-come, first-served basis on the morning of the introductions, and our time for introductions will begin immediately following the two introductions for schools that are joining us today.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: It's my great pleasure to introduce representatives of the Council of Alberta University Students. There are 11 students from institutions from across the province joining us in the public gallery today. If you are with CAUS, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Camrose has a school to introduce.

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you Bashaw school and their incredible teacher, Mr. McIntosh. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. I'm sorry. Does Edmonton-Decore have an introduction today of a school group?

Mr. Haji: Yeah.

The Speaker: Okay. Perfect. Please proceed.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly grade 9 students of St. Cecilia junior high school. It's one of the 10 junior high schools in Edmonton-Decore. I ask the students and educators and

support staff to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is Alberta Book Day, and I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly from the Book Publishers Association of Alberta: Matt Bowes, president; Netta Johnson, vice-president; Kieran Leblanc, executive director; and representatives from multiple Alberta book publishing houses. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the MD of Greenview council, just one of the dedicated groups keeping me in line. These elected officials represent my home and the most outstanding constituency in the province. Please rise as I call your name: Reeve Tyler Olsen, Deputy Reeve Bill Smith, councillors Jennifer Scott, Sally Rosson, Christine Schlieff, Tom Burton, Dave Berry, Winston Delorme, and Ryan Ratzlaff. Also joining them is Mayor Sheila Gilmour of Fox Creek.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our firefighters are here, but the very best ones come from the great riding of Airdrie-East. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the Airdrie president, Matt Elgie, and our secretary, Tyrell Sinclair. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Sukhdeep Bhangra and Ramandeep Brar from the United Hawks and Punjabi Sports and Cultural Club of Calgary. I would like to congratulate them for organizing an incredible 11th annual field hockey tournament in Calgary. They contribute not just to the sport of field hockey but to the greater community through their continued selfless service. I ask you to please rise . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four representatives from the Red Deer Firefighters Association local 1190: Stephen Belich, Lyle Wesner, Billy Kamp, Kevin Stelmaschuk. Thank you for your hard work and dedication. Amazing work these guys do each and every day.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you members of the municipal government of Cypress-Medicine Hat. We've got members from Cypress county – Reeve Dan Hamilton, councillors Robin Kurpjuweit, Dustin Vossler, Blaine Brost, Shane Hok, Michelle McKenzie – and from the city of Medicine Hat councillors Shila Sharps and Andy McGrogan and CAO Anne Mitchell. I'd like you all to rise and receive the welcome . . .

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

Dr. Metz: Hello, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you members of the Calgary Firefighters Association. Please rise, Cory McKeen and J.P. LeBlanc, and welcome to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce five of my former co-workers, paramedics and firefighters all: Kelly Townsend, Dave Maki, Evan Crawford, Craig Danforth, and Curtis Robinson. I'd like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: It's my honour to introduce Heather Murray, a registered nurse and the president of UNA local 38. She helped spearhead a petition that we'll be tabling later today with approximately 1,000 signatures. It calls on the government to restore presumptive coverage for nurses suffering from PTSD and other traumatic mental health injuries caused by work. Heather, please rise and join me in receiving the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Elliott Davis, Ryan Woodland, Eric Lowe, Tyler Brady, and Nathan Gauvreau from Strathcona county. They are from the Strathcona professional firefighters association, and they do a great job serving my community.

I'd also like to introduce Les and Lorraine Morris, who were scrutineers in the last election in my riding, and Katie Young and her father, Carl, who are here, who both serve on my constituency board. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House all of the members of the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association, including their president, Codey McIntyre; Dan Henschel, the executive vice-president; and Jamie Blayney, secretary and treasurer. I invite them and all firefighters and paramedics to stand up and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you registered nurse Rachel Scheffelmier and registered nurse and nurse educator Elly O'Greysik. They are here today for the tabling of a petition calling on the government to reinstate presumptive coverage for workplace injuries resulting in PTSD and traumatic mental health injuries for all nurses. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Brian and Brenda Ronneberg, who are constituents from the incredible riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Brian has spent more than 25 years teaching in the Chinook's Edge school division and is the principal for Sylvan Lake summer school. I invite the two guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Warren Nelson, president of the Lethbridge firefighters, who is

accompanied by Brent Nunweiler, Patrick Misura, Brent Shelton, Brendon Pyne, Carl Mix, who are all representatives of the Lethbridge firefighters. Their work ensures that our community remains safe, and for that, we thank them. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you Duane McEwan, a labour relations officer with the United Nurses of Alberta, and Ros Gullickson, a registered nurse and member of UNA local 301. I'll be tabling their petition today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce Natalie Anderson and Christine Moncrieff. Both are registered nurses joining their colleagues and calling on the government to amend the Workers' Compensation Act. Please rise and receive a warm welcome to this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Seniors' Issues

Ms Sigurdson: Seniors have made Alberta the province it is today through a lifetime of hard work and community building. So what kind of thank you have they gotten for these profound efforts? A government that wants to gamble away their retirement security, their pensions. Their hard-earned dollars they have put into the CPP since they started working are at risk because the Premier wants to pursue her reckless passion projects instead of helping the people she was elected to serve.

Seniors are also navigating Alberta's crumbling health care system, a system the Minister of Health wilfully admits is in shambles. But why is it in shambles, Mr. Speaker? The minister seemed confused yesterday. Alberta's health care system is crumbling because of the UCP. Presented with every opportunity to do something to help, they have turned the other way, waging fights with doctors, nurses, and health professionals until many had to flee the province. So where does that leave seniors? Doctorless, sitting on hard plastic chairs in emergency rooms for hours, exhausted, anxious, hopeless.

To add insult to injury, this government has pushed Alberta into the worst affordability crisis in a generation. So how did this government choose to repay seniors for their lifetime of work, Mr. Speaker? They didn't. In fact, this government asked seniors to pay more with skyrocketing rent increases, some 50 per cent or higher, astronomical utility bills, and grocery prices that have left some going hungry because they cannot afford life under the UCP.

So I have a message on behalf of Alberta seniors: fix health care, address affordability, and get your greedy hands off our CPP. Alberta seniors deserve it.

Remembrance Day

Mr. Yao: Never forget, Mr. Speaker: the lesson behind these two words is that we must learn from history or else we're doomed to repeat it. I'm no subject matter expert, but my knowledge of a particular era flagged me when it was announced that a man was being celebrated for fighting the Russians during World War II in our Parliament. Compared to the entire federal Liberal caucus, I'm a bona fide historian.

My interest in World War II stems from the fact that my parents were from both sides of the war. My father, Joseph Perez Yao, used to tell me stories of growing up in the Philippines during the Axis

occupation. He told me of the soldiers rousing up all the boys in the middle of the night and lining them up. Those soldiers would then proceed to beat the heck out of those boys. You see, they wanted to make sure that they never had the desire to rebel or conspire against those occupation forces, and they made sure that they knew the fate that awaited them if they did try. He mentioned that the boys up to age 16 were lined up. When I asked him, “What happened to the boys who were over the age of 16?” I saw it in my dad’s face as he really struggled with the memory that he pulled out, and he simply said: they were shot.

My mother, Keiko Sugata, told me stories of being a child during those days as well, stories of fleeing one part of Japan to another after they lost everything from the war. She was around eight years old as they fled to safety. Ultimately, three of her younger brothers passed away from malnutrition. Evidently, there weren’t such things like amnesty agencies back then.

The question of whether we learn from history is an interesting one. In Germany, leading up to the war, we saw government-funded media protecting and endorsing certain political leaders while vilifying their political opponents and critics. Grade schools and postsecondary institutions were used to indoctrinate kids with certain ideologies and beliefs to the point where children would report their own parents for expressing opinions contrary to what they learned in school. Race was emphasized, people were ostracized, and violence happened in the streets.

Though people today would deny any comparisons to that horrid era, we need to understand that the circumstances under which those things happened should never ever happen again. We must never ever forget.

Agency, Board, and Commission Executive Compensation

Mr. Sabir: Thanksgiving was a month ago, Mr. Speaker, but it appears the UCP and their friends have just hopped on the gravy train. Choo, choo, choo. During our time in government we stopped the gross misuse of public dollars going to cushy salaries of members of agencies, boards, and commissions. We did this with a critical piece of legislation, one that the UCP government has just decided to repeal. It is funny, Mr. Speaker. Members of the UCP railed against these high salaries, golf games, and expensive bottles of wine when we were in government but seem to be just fine with reinstating those practices now that it can benefit their friends. In fact, the minister of energy said back in 2015 that these salaries were wildly out of touch when hard-working, everyday Albertans were struggling to make ends meet. So what has caused the UCP to change their minds?

We are in a cost-of-living crisis driven by the UCP and their bad policy-making. One hundred and fifteen thousand Calgarians are at risk of becoming homeless, families across the province are skipping meals, thousands are sleeping on our streets, and even more can’t afford to keep their lights and heating on. The only difference I see is that the Premier wants to give her friends some pricy perks, but they couldn’t because of the legislation we had in place. The repeal of the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act is a gross misuse of power, but it does do one thing incredibly well. It tells everyday Albertans that the UCP doesn’t care about them. This government wants to open the doors of the gravy train for their closest friends and allies – choo, choo, choo – while the rest of Albertans face the daily stress of trying to live in the UCP’s Alberta. It’s shameful. The Alberta NDP is not going to take this lying down. We intend to stop the UCP gravy train in its tracks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2023 Wildfires

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, over the summer many Albertans saw their lives turned upside down as forest fires ravaged parts of our beautiful province. Many communities were hit hard by these fires, and my heart goes out to all those that were affected. I would like to thank the fearless firefighters and first responders, that selflessly put their own lives at risk to help their fellow Albertans. They are truly heroes.

But, unfortunately, this summer and over the past few days we have heard some people, including some of the members opposite such as the Leader of the Opposition, use these tragic fires to drive a political message. These people often argue that climate change was the cause of these fires. They told us that wildfires were getting worse year after year and that there was no end in sight. We heard that our planet was quite literally burning up because Albertans dared to heat their homes and drive their cars and that this was the cause of all the destruction and loss.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I decided to verify these claims for myself, and I found a few interesting facts worth sharing with the Assembly today. For instance, according to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is jointly owned and operated by Canada’s federal, provincial, and territorial governments, the average number of hectares burned per year in Alberta over the past five years is less than each of the averages for the past 10 years, the past 20 years, and the past 25 years, which is as far back as the data goes. The same is true for individual fires in our province. They have reduced in numbers over the past five years, less than the historical average.

I ask everyone in the Assembly today: does that sound like evidence of a crisis to you? I personally don’t think so, and neither do my constituents. Rather, while we may be coming out of a particularly bad fire season, the overall trend of wildfires is stable, even declining if anything. In fact, in light of this evidence I call on all members of this Assembly to recognize that Alberta’s great energy sector is not causing wildfires.

Thank you.

School Construction in Southwest Edmonton

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton is among the fastest growing cities in North America, experiencing high levels of both interprovincial migration and of newcomers coming to Canada. While it is a positive fact that many families are choosing to move to the beautiful riding of Edmonton-South West, the provincial government is woefully behind in building new schools in my riding and across this province, so much so that we are in a crisis. Children are attending school far from home. Parents are driving sometimes 40 minutes or longer in the winter to take their child to school in another part of the city. In many cases children as young as five are on the bus for over an hour. For homes where both parents work, this puts everyone in a tough spot, with child care being a challenge.

Despite the exponential growth over the last decade, Edmonton-South West does not have a single high school. Not a single one. Many schools in my riding are at over 100 per cent utilization. Mr. Speaker, this is unacceptable. Let me be clear: the lack of new schools isn’t just about the lack of classroom space. It also impacts the quality of learning with rising class sizes, and it impacts community and social cohesion. Schools are the community hub, and the lack of schools can negatively impact the social and emotional development of children. Think about it: longer bus rides, disrupted routines, larger class sizes. Frankly, I worry about the adverse impacts this will have on children over time, and this government simply isn’t doing enough.

Edmonton-South West deserves better; the children of Alberta deserve better. For years the UCP pitted community against

community, neighbourhood against neighbourhood by blaming school boards for not submitting the right list of capital plan priorities. The reality is that Edmonton-South West needs all of the schools on school division capital plans to be funded and built, and we needed them yesterday. Mr. Speaker, this is about priorities, and I call on this government to prioritize Alberta's children. Build these schools now.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Reform

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, earlier today we shared leaked documents that detail the UCP government's radical plan to tear apart public health care in Alberta. It describes this government's plans to concentrate control into the Premier's office through the Minister of Health's office, but in the real world it's a blueprint for catastrophic chaos in our clinics and our hospitals. We have so many questions, but let me start with this one. Is the Premier actually committed to what's outlined in these leaked documents, and if so, why?

Ms Smith: One hundred per cent committed, Mr. Speaker, and the reason for it is very clear. We embarked on a process over the last year to try to work within the existing framework to get performance improvement, and we succeeded to a measure, but we need to do so much more if we're going to be able to make greater progress. That's part of the reason why we're going to be making the announcement tomorrow, and I'm looking forward to it, as I know many of our stakeholders are as well.

Ms Notley: Wow. Okay. Well, you know, I appreciate that what's likely happened is that there is a level of detail that has already been shared with the Alberta public that the folks across there never really wanted them to see. Not surprising. We have multiple instances of the Premier publicly musing about privatizing our health care system and selling it off for parts. When we raised the alarm about this during the election, she claimed these ideas were a thing of the past. To the Premier: why did she hide her plans to take apart our health care system during the election, when Albertans had a chance to do something about it?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the role of Alberta Health Services is going to continue in delivering the very best hospital services that we possibly can, and I think that that focus is going to allow them to continue to improve. We're supportive of all of our service delivery providers, including Covenant Health, including our chartered surgical centres, and we just think that this is going to deliver better health care for patients and give more options for health care workers, which I think is going to improve working conditions.

Ms Notley: You know, for a government that appointed a minister for red tape reduction, they sure have a lot of it weaved throughout this plan to tear apart our public health care. These documents outline the creation of at least 13 new agencies, boards, and councils, all this while failing to provide any more consultation, independence, or agency for rural Albertans. Will the Premier explain why she wants to radically overhaul the health care system only to replace it with a ballooning, politically controlled, centralized bureaucracy?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, all will be made clear tomorrow, because the 13 councils the member of the opposition refers to already exist.

They're going to be playing an enhanced advisory role in ensuring that we're able to refocus each and every facility in each community so that it's delivering the best possible care not only for patients but also the best possible work environment for health care professionals. I'm looking forward to sharing more on it tomorrow.

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

Ms Notley: It doesn't sound like she actually read the document.

You know, the UCP's health care demolition plan has not even one mention of hiring more doctors, more nurses, or, frankly, any more front-line health care professionals. Meanwhile two of our four hospitals in Edmonton are at 150 per cent capacity, yet this Premier thinks the answer is to create 13 new bureaucratic organizations that answer directly to her. They've created this crisis, Mr. Speaker, and now they want to blow up our health care system completely. To the Premier: what is wrong with you people?

The Speaker: I know that the Leader of the Opposition knows that all of her questions should be directed through the Speaker, and I will expect the same from her for the rest of the period.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite had four years to address the problems in health care and did precisely nothing. But what happened was that the waiting lists continued to increase. We've come in, and we're going to fix the problems in health care. [interjections] We actually have – you better listen to this – 6,000 more nurses today than we did in 2019, when we took over from the members opposite. We also now have 11,608 physicians registered in Alberta. That's 348 more in this last quarter alone. People are getting confidence in the system, and we're going to deliver . . .

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

Ms Notley: The Premier is in a dreamland, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the radical overhaul of AHS tears apart health care, moves toward privatization, and even lets them play doctor while they're at it. Their plan complains when treatments run "counter to government direction," which is just another way of saying that the Premier thinks she can do a better job of treating patients than a doctor could. Will the Premier admit that neither she nor her Health minister nor anyone else over there is qualified to protect our public health care or anyone inside of it?

Ms Smith: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the public will see how the members opposite are mischaracterizing our reforms when they see it tomorrow. Our reforms are about getting more dollars down to the front line, down to individual hospitals so that more decision-making can be made in the communities where the care is provided. It's about reducing the layers of management, reducing the layers of bureaucracy, and I'm looking forward. I can't wait to get started.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the last time this government dabbled in decisions related to health care, we saw the UCP government almost break our lab system. Now they want to radically overhaul the whole system in this province. The last page of this document describes, one, the risk of fragmented health care delivery; two, the risk of system disruption; and three, the risk of system failure. Having learned nothing from their previous disasters, why is the Premier willing to run these risks with our public health care system?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the members opposite always run down our health care system. We know that Alberta Health Services in the last number of years has actually done a . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: In the last year Alberta Health Services has done a tremendous job in focusing on its principal service duty, which is delivering hospital services and acute care. That's why we want to make sure that they're focused on being able to deliver that. We want to be able to build out our primary care system so that people don't have to end up going to a hospital for services, and we're going to be building out the other aspects, too.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I was simply stunned to see this government's plans for health care laid bare. I've asked for years in this House for a substantial plan to recruit, retain, and rehire new front-line physicians, support health care workers struggling on the front lines. Instead, we see this government continue to fight doctors instead of fund them, and now they want to seize more control. Why does this Premier seem bent on creating more chaos at a time when Albertans and the health care workers who serve them desperately need stability and to be able to access care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was very clear in my mandate letter that I needed to address the current state of health care across this province. What we are doing – and I look forward. I'm very excited to bring forward the plan tomorrow morning at 9. For everyone who's listening, please tune in. I think you'll be excited to hear what we're bringing forward. We are actually looking to refocus the health care system so that it can provide better outcomes and really empower the workforce. I've been hearing from across the province that this is what they're looking for.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the documents that were released today do not show what the minister claims. What they do show is detailed, shocking plans to privatize continuing care. There are instructions contained in these documents to "review the potential to sell AHS continuing care [facilities]," including CapitalCare Group and Carewest. There is overwhelming evidence that privatized care only drives up costs, reduces the overall quality of care, so why is the Premier risking making a bad situation even worse?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really excited to share the real plan – the real plan – tomorrow morning at 9. I hope everyone tunes in. I want to be really, really clear. There is absolutely no plan to privatize health care. What we are going to do is strengthen health care right across the province. We want to empower our workforce. We value our workforce. We absolutely are looking forward to sharing this plan tomorrow morning.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, what this government has done is weaken health care and undermine front-line health care workers. The chaos has never been this bad, and health care workers say so. Dr. Neeja Bakshi works in internal medicine here in Edmonton. She said last night, "I've seen the day where my colleagues can no

longer safely admit patients from the ER." She said that health care has become "unsafe. Untenable. [And] unsustainable" under this minister, under this government. She is begging this government for help. Why is no one on that side of the House actually listening?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I share with everyone: tomorrow morning please tune in. I think you will be really pleased to see what we have to share with everyone. We have seen some good progress, but we know that more is necessary. That more will be shared with everyone tomorrow. Again, we're looking to strengthen our publicly funded health care system and empower the workforce. I've been meeting with stakeholders and health partners from across the province. They want to hear about this.

Premier's Appearance on *Tucker Carlson Live*

Ms Hoffman: On October 19, 2022, the Premier apologized for her past statements on the invasion of Ukraine. She said, and I quote: I categorically condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the indescribable suffering Russia has and is still inflicting on Ukrainian people. But now on January 24 the Premier will proudly sit down with Tucker Carlson, who has praised Vladimir Putin, he's insulted the President of Ukraine, and he's promoted the debunked conspiracy theory that Ukraine was producing biological weapons. The Premier is lending the credibility of her office to this debunked conspiracy theorist. Why?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I take every opportunity to tell the Alberta story. I speak with members from the media, I speak with podcasts, and I ensure that we're able to tell the world that Alberta is leading the entire world on reducing emissions as well as developing our energy. So I'm going to take those opportunities, unlike the member opposite who kicked people out from the press gallery, out of her press conferences and who refuses to talk to people across the spectrum. I think this is an opportunity for us to make sure people know the story. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 2:03.

Ms Hoffman: Tucker Carlson has called women extremely primitive. He said that we need to be quiet and do what we're told. His extreme views were not fit for prime time. They weren't fit to be on the air at any time. And while Alberta women are leading in business, we're keeping public services like schools and hospitals running, we're engaged in politics, the Premier has decided to give someone who has said that we don't belong in these spaces even more profile. So will the Premier please tell Alberta women that she stands with them instead of sitting down with Tucker Carlson?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about an individual who has the largest podcast audience probably in the world, and that's an opportunity for us to share the Alberta story. I don't agree with every person who interviews me. If I took the approach . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: I don't agree with every person who interviews me. If I took that approach, I'd never do an interview with the CBC, and in fact I've done 15 press conferences and 11 scrums and spoken to

the CBC five times this month. I'm going to continue to get our message out.

Ms Hoffman: Tucker Carlson has said many offensive things about newcomers. He spouted racist tropes. He said, quote: the policy is called the great replacement, the replacement of legacy Americans, with more obedient people from faraway countries. Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs more newcomers, and mainstream Albertans welcome newcomers. Instead, the Premier is welcoming the hateful views of Tucker Carlson, and this sends a very dangerous message to all Albertans. So I'll ask one last time. Will the Premier please reconsider and cancel her conversation with Tucker Carlson?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I intend to tell the Alberta story as far and as wide as possible. As the members opposite know, we've charted a course to be 10 million people by as soon as 2050. We are a welcoming place. We welcome people from around the world. We want to continue to welcome people from around the world, and I'm going to continue to tell that incredible story in as many places as possible.

Disability Benefits

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Albertans with disabilities have learned the hard way to be fearful of this government. After promising not to deindex AISH and income support, they went and froze benefits for four years to try to balance the books on the backs of those who could least afford it. And now there's something new to fear, the uncertain future of CPP disability under this Premier's pension scheme. What demonstrable actions has this minister taken to stand up for the thousands of Albertans receiving CPP disability benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. This government just recently increased the PDD budget by \$120 million in this fiscal year and has been laser focused on making sure that PDD waiting lists have been reduced across the province. I just spoke yesterday with the minister of disabilities federally and made clear that we expect them to meet our ambition and invest in all Canadians with disabilities the same way that Alberta is and the way that Alberta is taking a lead.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, given that I asked for demonstrable actions because Albertans can't pay their bills with unicorn dreams and wishful thinking and given that there are no in-person or virtual pension plan consultations being held with accessibility options like captioning or American sign language and given that the official government survey only mentions disability benefits by asking if they're important – yes, they are – why has this minister failed to ensure that Albertans receiving CPPD have had their voices heard?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm a bit confused. A \$120 million increase to a multibillion-dollar budget is significant action, so let's be clear about that. Our government has also indexed all of our payments to AISH and other components like that. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Again, our government has indexed things like AISH payments, Mr. Speaker. We continue to invest significantly in this area, significantly more than the former NDP government. Let me say that we're proud of that, and we're going to continue to make sure that we have the best disability benefits in all the country.

Ms Renaud: Given that a global ranking of pension funds released in June listed the Canada pension plan as the best performing plan on the planet and given this government's recent musings that Albertans will be asked to vote on high-level feelings and given that Albertans receiving CPPD are essentially being asked to trade the long-term reliability of their current benefits for a questionable sovereignty scheme built by the same people who think a food hamper is a better response to inflation than an AISH increase, what do you have to say about that?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, we have indexed AISH and have the most comprehensive benefits for AISH . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. You might not like the answer, but the minister is entitled to give it, and I should be able to hear it.

Mr. Nixon: We have the most significant benefits when it comes to AISH of any province inside the country, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to, going forward, and that member should stop fearmongering when it comes to that issue.

I was also very, very proud yesterday to stand up on behalf of the government and announce more money for food banks, Mr. Speaker. While we are working on other issues across the province, we can also make sure that, as the Premier says, "We can walk and chew gum at the same time." Again, we're the only government ever to invest in food banks in the history of this province.

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

2:10 Technology Industry Development

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday saw the introduction of Bill 7, which makes changes to the permitted uses of the term "software engineer." This may seem to be a small change to the terminology, but the tech sector is anticipating it making a big impact. Can the Minister of Advanced Education please tell the House why she introduced this legislation?

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question. This is the first significant update to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act in over 30 years. To put that in perspective, 30 years ago Albertans were still watching movies on VHS, cellphones were the size of footballs, and at least one MLA in the Chamber wasn't even born yet. No sector has witnessed more change in that time period than the tech sector, and it's critical that Alberta adapt so our businesses can recruit and retain the best software engineers.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that tech is a global industry and given that tech workers can work anywhere – allowing this term seems to be a positive move – and given that the tech sector can so easily move to other jurisdictions and attract talent, can the Minister of Technology and Innovation please tell the House what this change means for the tech sector?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This change takes Alberta from being the least attractive destination in Canada for tech-sector recruitment to the number one preferred destination in the country. The tech sector told

us that this problem was one of their number one problems that they needed us to address. They called, and we answered. We are taking action to help make sure our tech sector can grow and reach its fullest potential. We listened, we're taking action, and we're really proud of this legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. I've heard the minister say that tech is not just an industry but the future of all sectors in the province. Given that we've all seen it in our lives as technology becomes more advanced and more universal in our daily activities, can the Minister of Technology and Innovation please tell the House how our tech sector intends to keep up with the ever-changing tech landscape?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true. I do say this all the time. Technology is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry. I also say that there has never been a better time to be in tech in Alberta than today. We're on track for another record-breaking year after seeing exponential growth from \$30 million of venture investment in 2017, when the NDP were in power, to more than \$729 million in 2022. In the first half of this year we've already seen more than \$400 million in investment. We are taking action to allow the use of "software engineer" in recruitment so that we can help keep this momentum going.

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

Affordable Housing

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Klein is home to the Centre for Newcomers, which reports that 20 per cent of Albertans are in need of affordable housing. Housing demand has outstripped supply in Calgary by 2 to 1, and the average one-bedroom requires an annual salary of over \$47,000. This is a crisis that has grown much, much worse on this government's watch. They've actually cut the number of affordable housing units in this province in the middle of a housing crisis. Can the minister please explain what my constituents struggling to find housing should do this winter?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member may be confused. This government has not cut affordable housing. In fact, we have increased it, and we are working through our stronger foundation plan to increase it even more. Now, what she may be referring to is that underneath the former NDP government we did see affordable housing wait-lists increase by 76 per cent, because the NDP had no plan to be able to make sure that we could provide housing for all of our province. We have a plan. We're diligently working on it. We're in year 3 of our 10-year plan, and we're going to continue to lead the country when it comes to this issue.

Member Tejada: Given that Calgary Housing currently has a growing waiting list and this government's proposed bills are woefully under what's needed and given that I've spoken to folks like Dina, whose rent is being raised by 40 per cent and is now scrambling to find a place for her family, can the minister please let Calgarians know when they plan to take responsibility for the housing crisis folks are in right now and what measures they will take right now?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we are working right now to be able to make sure that we can help today when it comes to things like rent

increases. This government, the government of Alberta, is investing a quarter billion dollars in rent supplements to help Albertans make ends meet. This is all part of our overall affordability plan led by the minister of affordability, where we are investing an unprecedented \$5.1 billion by the end of this year, making sure that we can help Albertans with the affordability crisis. That's real action. Again, the NDP talks; Conservatives deliver for Alberta.

Member Tejada: Given that rents specifically in Calgary have skyrocketed by at least 35 per cent since 2020, with a three-bedroom now averaging \$2,665, and given that a single-parent family with a minimum wage earner can't afford to pay rent, pay bills, let alone food and utilities at this rate, can the minister please tell Albertans how this government can boast a surplus, spend millions on advertising campaigns taking our CPP, and still fail Albertans on the affordability crisis?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've got some good news again for the House, through you to the entire House. This government has already completed 4,600 new affordable housing units in this province. Right now across this province we are the only place where residential construction is increasing anywhere in Canada. I'm also so excited to report that in Calgary, our largest city, we have the most purpose-built rentals in the history of Confederation being built right now. We're working day and night to be able to make sure we have all the housing we need going forward in the future.

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

Firefighter Training and Funding

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this year Alberta was impacted by severe climate change through drought and wildfire, fires that caused evacuation of communities. On May 6 the province had to declare a state of emergency due to wildfire. I had the minister of forestry in estimates on March 15 and asked the government: was he ready for wildfire season? He quoted that on May 15 there could be about 432 seasonal firefighters, two months after fire season starts. To the minister. Can you tell the House today: did the government actually have 432 wildfire firefighters, and why did it take you so long?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The fire season this year, of course, was worse than we'd seen in decades. We've seen 2.2 million hectares of fires burn across this province. But I'll tell you what: we had the people and resources. I don't want to hear the NDP putting down the fine men and women that work in our forestry industry anymore. They worked hard. They were away from their families, and they've done a great job this year with conditions that were something that we've never seen before, unprecedented. We brought firefighters in from around the world to help, and we went and helped others around the world, too.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that the wildfire response teams are the front-line defence in protecting many of our rural communities and given that the province has not followed their own guidelines of having firefighters hired up for the March 1 seasonal start date and given that recommendations from both the Slave Lake fire and the Fort McMurray fire recommended joint training of municipal, volunteer, and wildfire fighters to ensure consistent response when

fires cross jurisdictions, to the minister: why did the government not ensure firefighters were hired for the first day of the wildfire season on March 1 and follow the recommendations of joint training?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for the question. We started the firefighting season with our Indigenous firefighters trained and ready to go. Again, I hate to see the NDP putting down these fine men and women that work so hard. This fire season was unprecedented. We had millions of acres of forest fires across this province. Again, we did our best, and I think the people that have done the work on the ground should be respected for that work that they did. Again, this government has learned from this, and we'll be doing changes in the future. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. the member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildfires have placed significant strain on municipal firefighting resources and given that this week is RMA and there's a resolution on the floor from Parkland county to support the financial and resource hardships faced by municipalities outside of the white zone, or the forest protection area, for this past summer and given that the motion also speaks to long-term strategies for resourcing and financial supports for areas outside of FPAs, will the minister commit that municipalities will be financially made whole due to the financial impacts of the past summer?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that Alberta communities will share in the improved bustling economy. Now that we have results complete from the '22-23 fiscal year, we know that LGFF funding will increase with an additional \$98 million as a result of the revenue index factor. Southern Alberta municipalities will get their fair share. More details will be announced before the end of the year on exactly how that will be distributed. I can tell you that as Alberta's government pays down the debt, we will consider what our other options are. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

2:20

Municipal Funding

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that the strength of our province rests not only in its urban centres but also in the character and contributions of our rural municipalities. As we transition from the municipal sustainability initiative program to the local government fiscal framework, we are hearing calls from southern Alberta municipalities for enhanced infrastructure funding. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how will the government ensure that rural Alberta will not be overlooked in favour of urban centres during this transition?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, my staff in Municipal Affairs along with me have been working hard with the municipalities and staying in constant touch with them and consulting with them. We know that the revenue index factor will be a helpful thing. Remember, the local government fiscal framework is an example of the Alberta government listening to municipalities and answering: yes. They asked for the 100 per cent revenue index factor, they asked for revenue that will go up and down with the provincial revenue, and once again this government said yes.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for his answer. Given the unique challenges faced by tourism-driven municipalities and those in rural Alberta, can the same minister please explain what plans are in place to balance support and funding allocations so that each municipality, regardless of its size or focus, receives the necessary infrastructure support to thrive?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, while we were talking to the municipalities, we actually challenged them, rural and urban, to come together with a formula, and they weren't able to do that. So we did our best, and you will find that the formula is a balance of the advice that we got for both rural and urban municipalities.

Furthermore, in the first year of the program no municipality will get less than they had last year just to make sure that there's time for all municipalities to transition. The year after, Mr. Speaker, based on previous government revenue, they should get a 14 per cent increase over what they get in the first year. Again, we've said yes, and we're following through.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that the Alberta Is Calling campaign is attracting a significant influx of new residents, placing additional pressures on our municipalities, can the same minister please tell the House how the ministry will ensure a balanced and fair distribution of resources to accommodate this growth while still addressing the unique and diverse infrastructure needed for both urban and rural communities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another example where we tried to listen hard to municipalities, both rural and urban, and they actually agreed on some principles that will help inform how the money – one of them will be population, another one will be kilometres of road, another one will be tangible capital assets so that people with more stuff to fix get more money, and some will be based on need and growth of the municipalities, which we think will be responsive to the growth that's happening under this government in Alberta, and all municipalities are an important part of that. We've tried to create a formula that recognizes that and not leave anybody behind. The other thing we'll do is that we'll just continue listening to municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont is next.

Women's Shelters

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is in a housing and affordability crisis, the results of which have been catastrophic for victims of domestic violence, many of whom have been forced to stay in dangerous situations because they have nowhere to go, yet the UCP has refused to take any actions to help. I'm deeply concerned for the women who feel that they have no options but to stay in violent situations, so to the minister: will you stand here today and apologize to these women and the staff at these shelters for the government's inactions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The safety of women that attend or visit sexual abuse centres here in the province of Alberta is my highest concern. We want to make sure that those

women are protected and looked after. That's why our government is making significant investments into the sector, to make sure that the system can be improved and that these facilities remain a safe place for women right across the entire province of Alberta.

Ms Hayter: Given that emergency shelters saw an unprecedented 5,000 calls between July and September of this year, a 13 per cent increase from the same period last year, and given that the monthly average of calls this year is more than 1,300, a 58 per cent increase from the pre-COVID average in 2019, can the minister please explain why this government is comfortable ignoring this serious problem that is leaving women in a dangerous situation and putting their lives at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. A key part of my mandate is making sure that there are key investments into sexual assault centres and women's shelters. For many of these women that enter these facilities, there's nowhere else for them to go, and we want to make sure as a government that these women are supported, protected. That's why over the last four or five months I've been visiting women's shelters right across the entire province to look for ways that we can continue to invest in these sectors, continue to invest into these incredible women, and make sure that they're looked after.

Ms Hayter: Given that the average stay in a shelter ranges between 21 to 30 days but recently has increased to 36 days because affordable housing is inaccessible and given that shelters cannot support the high number of people who require their services – we are now in a dire situation – and given that women are escaping domestic violence and are at increased risk of returning to a violent living situation when it's hard to find a safe shelter, why doesn't the minister have a plan to make housing more accessible so that women escaping domestic violence have somewhere safe to go?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. In Budget 2023 we invested over \$54 million into women's shelters, and I regularly meet with ACWS and just had a meeting with Jan Reimer as of last week to look at proactive ways we can continue to invest in the system. We're continuing to have those conversations with women's shelters right across the entire province and look forward to ongoing investments into this sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a question.

Irrigation Infrastructure Water Management

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture plays an important role in each and every one of our lives. Many of my constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat rely on agriculture for their employment, but beyond that we all rely on farmers and ranchers for the food they bring to our tables. Here in Alberta we have prime farmland and many new technologies that are helping us increase our efficiency in agriculture. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation share the government's plan on how he intends to increase agricultural production?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's irrigation network is essential to increasing our ag production. Over 1.8 million arable acres are irrigated in Alberta, producing more than 28 per cent of the provincial agricultural GDP. Our government is currently investing in irrigation modernization and expansion with over 338 million additional irrigated acres in the works. Adding more irrigated acres not only increases crop yields but brings security of production, attracting more investment and increasing overall ag production.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that agriculture relies on irrigation technology in order to be as efficient as possible and given that technology has a huge potential for innovation in this sector, can the same minister tell this House what's being done to improve the irrigation technology right here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that great question. Expanding and modernizing our irrigation network will position the ag sector to lead Alberta's economic growth, which is why we're investing in irrigation projects across our province. Budget 2023 provided \$49.9 million, an increase of \$6.7 million since 2022, to continue this important work. Additionally, Alberta has partnered with the CIB and nine irrigation districts to invest \$933 million towards irrigation expansion and modernization, the largest one-time investment in irrigation in the province's history.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Alberta is blessed with countless bodies of water and given the essential nature of water in our lives and that water will need to be protected in the future, can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas share what is being done to protect Alberta's pristine lakes and watersheds while balancing the needs of municipalities and agricultural producers? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister has the call.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a great question, especially given the dry conditions that we saw this year. Our water resources are critical to Albertans, and my ministry is working to ensure our water is protected and effectively managed. We're working with farmers, municipalities, industry, and others to manage water supplies and plan for our future. In August we did announce \$3.5 million to fund 22 projects in rural and urban communities through the watershed resiliency and restoration program. We also recently announced \$165 million in funding to support livestock producers affected by drought and extreme conditions.

2:30

Funding for Policing

Mr. Sabir: The UCP government repeatedly told Albertans that they take public safety seriously. In the campaign they pledged to hire 100 new police officers in Calgary and Edmonton. After they were elected, they reannounced the same 100 police officers. Can

the minister inform the House how many new police officers have actually been hired as of today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for recognizing that public safety actually is an issue, not just in Alberta but actually right throughout Canada. We all know that Bill C-75, which is part of the Liberal-NDP alliance, has made Canada less safe. But I can tell you right now that we have two grants that have been issued out to both Calgary Police Service and the Edmonton Police Service, and they are currently under recruitment to get those officers on the streets.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the public expects that after seven months they would see real progress on fulfilling this important commitment and given that I didn't hear an answer to how many police officers have been hired to date, I will ask the minister again: how many police officers have been hired as of today, and are you planning to do nothing to address rural crime since these officers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety and the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: I'm not sure if the member opposite is suggesting that I influence the Calgary and Edmonton police services in their hiring process or do any form of political interference, which I am not going to do, despite what his suggestions are, but I can tell you that we have provided the necessary funds to both the Calgary Police Service and the Edmonton Police Service. I have full confidence in them. Despite the members opposite wanting to defund the police, we're going to make sure we provide the money to them so they can hire police officers and protect our communities. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that they have interfered inappropriately before and this time what we are asking is that they hire 100 new police officers, that during the campaign we also said that we will hire 150 social workers with them, too, does the minister agree that with the police officers we need more support workers as well, and will he commit to hiring 150 additional support workers to help public safety and getting people . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety and the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we have committed to both the Calgary and Edmonton police services as well as the folks in rural Alberta with our provincial police service, which is the RCMP, to make sure we have PACT teams, to make sure we have help teams, because we understand the importance when you engage with somebody who's vulnerable. We want to help them so that they can get recovery. What we're not going to do is hand out free, taxpayer-funded drugs to people who are vulnerable, which is the policy of the NDP and what they want to do in this province and what we are not going to allow.

Affordable Child Care

Member Batten: Mr. Speaker, this government and the Ministry of Children and Family Services has boasted about their success regarding our child care fees, but the facts are very different. A report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has found that while fees have fallen, Calgarians now pay the second-highest

median fee for toddlers and preschoolers in Canada, higher than Toronto, higher than Vancouver. Albertan families deserve a break. Is the minister proud that Calgarians are paying the second-highest child care fees in Canada, and will he take action?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed and remains committed to providing safe, inclusive, and affordable child care options for kids. I'm very excited about the fact that we're moving towards \$10-a-day daycare. Over the last year we've opened up over 22,000 affordable child care spaces, and we have actually cut down child care fees for parents right across the province by over 50 per cent. This is a massive change to families right across the entire province. Why can't the members opposite just celebrate this success?

Member Batten: Given that the federal-provincial child care deal promises Albertans \$10 a day of high-quality, affordable child care but what Albertans are receiving is really quite different, given that I've heard stories of new fees for basics like fruit at snack time or participation in play with Albertan families and given that Albertan parents are worried that the promise of high-quality and affordable child care is only for some and not for all, given that the creation of a two-tiered \$10-per-day child care system does not capture the spirit nor the actual agreement, can the minister please explain to Albertan families why only some Albertan children will see these benefits?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Every day over 150,000 kids attend an early child care facility. Those parents are benefiting, like I said in my previous answer, by over 50 per cent reductions. We're an average of over \$20-a-day daycare right now, moving to \$15 a day in 2024, and moving to \$10-a-day daycare. This is making tangible differences to families right across the province, and I'm excited about our government's track record in this regard.

Member Batten: Given that early childhood development research indicates that children thrive when they have the social, physical, and temporal environments that are nurturing and supportive and given that every single childhood development expert I have spoken to is advocating for the resources to supply these incredibly important resources, Mr. Speaker, why has this government eliminated the necessary skill, experience, and education requirements for the program? Does the minister not want what's best for Albertan children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our early childhood educators are such an integral part to ensuring a positive child care experience for so many children right across the entire province. That's why we're working with postsecondary institutions and other nonprofits to look at ways that we can continue to train these valuable, incredible workers that are looking after our children. We're going to be continuing to work with stakeholders and families through our cost-control framework discussions over the next six, seven months, and I'm excited about the amazing work that we're going to be doing in this regard.

Addiction Treatment Drug Use and Crime Prevention

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, crime, gangs, homelessness: drug abuse is quickly becoming a major cause for concern within my constituency. What was once isolated to Alberta's largest cities has now spread to the small communities across the province, including Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and St. Paul. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: what is our government doing to ensure that those suffering from the disease of addiction are safe and receive the help that they need so desperately, both within my constituency and the province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Through the Alberta recovery model our government has a firm commitment to support Albertans suffering from the deadly disease of addiction in their pursuit of recovery. We've done this by funding more than 10,000 additional annual treatment spaces province-wide, including 89 treatment spaces in the hon. member's constituency. As well, through the virtual opioid dependency program Albertans can access same-day, no wait-list, life-saving treatment. This is a program that's very important to our province.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that open-air drug use is becoming a normal occurrence in small towns and cities across Alberta, including within my constituency, and even further given that many of my constituents are concerned with encountering used needles or inhaling second-hand smoke from extremely harmful narcotics, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services please elaborate on the specific measures that our government is bringing forward to protect Albertans from the harms of open-air drug use?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety and the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Our government is taking a very firm stance on this, a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to open-air drug use. We want to protect not only the streets, but we want to protect all communities. You know why? Because people have rights. Children have rights. Despite what the members opposite think, children have a right to play in a playground without stepping on needles. Children have a right not to inhale second-hand crystal meth smoke. What we are going to do is make sure we provide a world-class recovery-oriented system of care to get people the help that they need.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that along with the drug abuse often comes great threat of crime and random acts of violence and further given that this violence has increased in the wake of the Liberal-NDP coalition's various soft-on-crime policies, can the same minister please elaborate on the actions that this government is taking to ensure that residents feel safe from violence within their communities?

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. We do take crime seriously. Obviously, that's something that is very, very important to the folks here on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. The Liberal-NDP alliance has made Canada less safe, but I can tell you that we are taking action. That is why we put sheriffs on the streets of both Calgary and Edmonton. That is why we have made sure that we've extended the powers of those sheriffs under section 495 of the Criminal Code, to make sure that they can augment and support our provincial police service, because – you know what? – responding to 911 calls matters.

School Construction in Calgary-Foothills

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, every day thousands of children in Calgary-Foothills are bused long distances to schools. This government claims they are committed to investing in education. Make no mistake; that investment must include accessible public schools for all children. The families and kids in my riding shouldn't be forced to travel over an hour one way to get the education they deserve. This is unacceptable. How many years is this government planning to force these children to lose two hours of their day to a daily commute?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An odd question from the member. I'll try to give him an answer as best I can. I agree with the member, of course, that it's important for us to continue to build schools in our growing communities, which Alberta's government is absolutely committed to doing. Just to highlight our record, over the past four years we have moved forward on 98 school projects across the province. I know that when the NDP was in power, they only moved ahead with 46 school projects. We're absolutely committed to getting the job done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the residents of Calgary-Foothills purchased homes on the expectation that a school would be built in their neighbourhood, given that in the 2021 census there were 10,500 school-aged children in Calgary-Foothills with only seven public schools to serve them, given that Calgary-Foothills is a vibrant and growing community with considerable population growth, given that we know residents are asking for a nondenominational school and requests to this government have been ignored, what is the rationale of denying these communities . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to educate the member about how schools move forward in the province. The government of Alberta listens very carefully to our school divisions, and we . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: The government of Alberta listens to our school divisions, who are in the best possible place to tell us where projects need to be prioritized. I don't believe offhand that the Calgary board of education has prioritized any schools in the member's riding, but I'd be happy to take a closer look at the school plan and take direction from our school divisions about where schools need to be built.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the Calgary board of education has included a Kincora-Sage Hill school in their capital plan and given that this government has completely ignored the request for a school in this area despite knowing the considerable need, given that it takes years to plan and build a school, meaning these kids will be stuck in buses for the foreseeable future while families in Calgary-Foothills continue to get a cold shoulder from this government, will the minister commit to building a Calgary board of education school today in Calgary-Foothills? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: The government will commit to taking the priority projects that the school division has outlined. Just offhand, I believe the top three projects that the school division has are in northeast Calgary and in other communities. Those are the priority projects that they've outlined. I know that for Calgary Catholic school division their priority projects are in Chestermere, Airdrie, and in other areas as well. We'll continue to work with the school divisions and fund the most urgent priority projects that they've identified, be they modernization, replacements, or new school constructions. We believe in taking direction from our school divisions about which projects are the number one priorities to move forward on.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

Community Initiatives in Calgary-Falconridge

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Calgary-Falconridge our community and sports initiatives aren't merely recreational pastimes; they represent the foundation of our collective identity. These endeavours are platforms for unity, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together as one. In these initiatives valuable life lessons about teamwork, determination, and resilience are not limited to our youth alone. They reach out to everyone, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, creating spaces where the wisdom of our seniors mingles with the excitement of our newcomers. Observing individuals of all ages take part, we witness not just physical development but also the cultivation of vital values like empathy, compassion, and integrity, which lie at the heart of what defines Calgary-Falconridge.

However, what we have witnessed from the UCP government has shown only indifference and broken promises when it comes to funding these crucial endeavours. Our community has rallied, and it's not because of the government's support but despite the lack of it that extraordinary individuals like my friends joining us today have emerged as shining examples of dedication and resilience. They have tirelessly worked to better our community through sports and community engagement. While the government seems content to twiddle its thumbs, the people of Calgary-Falconridge have invested their blood, sweat, and tears into these local sports and community initiatives, and they have done so without the government's much-needed assistance.

It's time for the government to wake up, recognize the exceptional work and sacrifices of these individuals, and provide them with funding not just for sports but also for the broader range of vital community initiatives. Our youth, our community, and our future are all at stake. It's high time the government got off its bureaucratic throne and started

actively supporting and nurturing our sports and community initiatives. They deserve nothing less.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition containing 858 signatures, calling on the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to introduce legislation to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to extend presumptive coverage for workplace injuries related to posttraumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and other traumatic mental health injuries to all nurses who hold a practice permit or who are registered with a college of a regulated profession under the Health Professions Act.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Phillips: I've got several, Mr. Speaker; I'll try to make it brief. Okay. First, I have an e-mail from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who wrote to my constituency office, thanking him for the sponsorship of his riding association's AGM activities, which is, of course, not the appropriate use of Assembly e-mail. That's the requisite number of copies.

I have five copies of a letter from Peter in Lethbridge, who opposes the Alberta pension plan and says, "Stop spending our money trying to whitewash this," well, we'll put it at "project" because that would be unparliamentary.

We have a piece of correspondence from Lucelle and Lee in Lethbridge: we wish that they would focus on the wait times at the ER in Lethbridge instead of the Alberta pension plan.

An e-mail from Cheryl in Lethbridge; she does not want to leave the CPP, and neither does her husband.

Another e-mail from Sylvia says, "Spend the money on housing." Don't want the APP or the advertisements.

Barbara says: that would be a no to the APP.

William says: "Do not touch our pension leave it in the CPP."

Those are the tablings and the correspondence for today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon Member for St. Albert.

2:50

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made reference to an article yesterday, which I'll be tabling – it's at albertapolitics.ca – by David Climenhaga, and the title is: You Can Never Believe Anything until It's Been Officially Denied: The UCP Just Denied It Wants to Privatize Health Care, dated March 24, 2023.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table three documents today which relate to very productive and friendly conversations I've had with Rural Municipalities of Alberta delegates at their 2023 fall convention, an article referring to the battle that Thorhild residents are losing with Waste Management, a company that wants to relax environmental regulations on their landfill.

Secondly, an article that highlights that Athabasca county is being forced to pay over \$500,000 a year for emergency response services on highway 63, a major economic corridor that the province should be responsible for.

And, thirdly, an article referencing that five years after Greyhound pulled out of western Canada, Camrose is advocating with the provincial government to revive the Camrose connector bus, which was originally funded as a pilot project by the former NDP government.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowsell: Yes. I'd like to table five copies of the report I referred to in my member's statement from the national fire situation report.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies of an article, with the current Energy minister's photo on it, decrying executive salaries of \$670,000 at the agriculture finance corporation, where he reveals a total disconnect with the realities of Alberta taxpayers.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader has a tabling.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of documents anonymously sent to the Official Opposition that appear to be cabinet materials related to the UCP's plan to fracture Alberta Health Services into many pieces and to eventually privatize wide swaths of Albertans' health care system, including hospitals and seniors' care facilities. This plan breaks the UCP election promises to Albertans and is shameful.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this brings us to points of order, and at 2:03 there was a point of order called, which has been withdrawn. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, members. We will call the committee to order.

Bill 1

Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Do we have any members wishing to speak to Bill 1 at committee? The Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first time speaking in front of Committee of the Whole; it's different. This bill, Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, is all about posturing. It will not do anything to fix the problems facing Albertans today, like the staggering cost of living or the worsening health care system, which they are just today promising to make worse.

Under the worst affordability crisis in 40 years, working Albertans are facing higher housing costs, power bills, insurance, tuition, and property taxes under the UCP. The UCP is chaining Albertans to the revenue royalty roller coaster because it makes it impossible to confront and adapt to changing economic conditions. The UCP has already increased the cost of living for all Albertans while we get less under the UCP. Utility bills have doubled in the last year. Auto insurance is up 30 per cent. Tuition is up almost 30 per cent. Municipal taxes have increased due to funding cuts and downloaded costs to the municipalities. The number of doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent over the past four years. School and bus fees are up. Alberta students get less funding than anywhere else in the country. We're still short many thousands of educational assistants after the UCP dismissed 20,000 of them. All of these higher costs are tax increases by another name.

They simply download services that government used to provide to people who are least able to afford them.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

This bill doesn't improve affordability in any way, nor does it cut taxes. It's purely performative. How does a government justify all of the increasing costs of living? It's the increasing cost of living that this bill proposes to address without actually changing anyone's household budget by even a single dollar. Under the UCP the cost of living has increased exponentially. Why is the government dragging its feet on addressing the root cause of this crisis, that they have created? Bill 1 could be so many things to address affordability, like what, frankly, our side of the House promised in the election campaign, what the other side of the House promised in the election campaign. Those could all be Bill 1. Those could actually be promises that support Alberta families and cut their cost of living. Instead, we got this.

Instead, what we have is a law promising extremely expensive referendums in order to propose a tax increase. So let's talk about the costs of some of these referendums. The last B.C. referendum cost Elections BC over \$12 million. The other costs associated with referendums included – in Ontario, for example, there was a 2007 referendum that cost \$7.9 million, and that was many, many years ago. The daylight saving time and equalization referendums were substantially cheaper. They were nonbinding and proposed in accordance with provincial elections that were going at the same time, and they cost about \$1.1 million. The Department of Municipal Affairs' annual report indicates that the department provided \$10 million in funding to cover the costs incurred by municipalities and elected authorities to conduct the Senate elections and referendum. These are expensive.

All of these costs could be, instead, spent on making housing more affordable, on making life more affordable, on making energy more affordable, on making groceries more affordable. Instead, what we have is a commitment to spend millions upon millions of dollars on things that the government simply could do by just not raising taxes on its own if it chose to do that.

This bill also does not prevent the government from creating new targeted taxes or fees, which have happened for things like cigarettes, vaping products, short-term rentals, and parks. We've seen them increase their share of municipal fine revenue. Municipally, they have a history of downloading their costs to municipalities, and the Premier has already talked about making Albertans pay for their health care. In fact, we just saw a tabling in which AHS is effectively going to be blown up; multiple systems are privatized. These are all tax increases by another name.

Madam Chair, it's just very unfortunate that the highest priority that the government has today, its key legislative priority, doesn't address affordability in any way, doesn't make life more affordable for a single person in this province, does not cut taxes by a single dollar. It's all about posturing. It will not do anything to fix the problems of Albertans today and in the worst affordability crisis of the last 40 years. I honestly believe that this government should be doing more about that.

Thank you very much.

3:00

The Chair: Are there are others to join the debate on Bill 1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my honour to rise and speak to the government's Bill 1, and I'm honoured and thankful to the people of Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, who have given me this

opportunity again to stand up here and talk about things that matter to them, talk about their concerns, their issues, their priorities.

Bill 1 of a government is supposed to reflect the priority of a government, to voice the issue that government puts the most focus on. What this bill does: the government already has the ability. The government controls the legislation. They have the numbers. If they don't want to raise taxes, they can choose not to raise taxes. They can say that. They don't need legislation to restrict themselves from raising taxes, so this bill is more about posturing than anything else.

During the election campaign, during the summer months I have had the opportunity to talk to many of my constituents. I have had the opportunity to talk to many organizations, service providers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals – I'm sure that other members of this House also have that opportunity – and not once in the last seven months had I heard from any constituent what the government is trying to do with this bill.

What they do talk about is cost of living. They talk about how the grocery prices have gone up substantially in the last year or so. They're finding it difficult to put food on the table. They have seen their utility bills going up because of this government's policies. There used to be a cap on utilities. The first thing when the UCP became government, what they did: they removed the cap. Now utility prices are through the roof, and they have not done a single thing. They could have prioritized that. That would have certainly helped Albertans, helped my constituents and people across this province.

They do talk about insurance costs. Again, the UCP became government. There was a cap on insurance companies, that they could only raise premiums by a certain percentage, and what they did, the first thing: they stood up for their insiders within the industry and removed the cap and handed the pen to them. Insurance costs have gone through the roof, and they still have not done anything about it.

Then municipalities. This week we also heard from many municipal leaders from across the province. Municipalities are struggling, too, and they have had to increase taxes or cut services because the government didn't keep up with the municipal funding.

Then we have a huge crisis in health care. Yes, the pandemic did put pressure on our health care system, but much of that crisis is because of this government's policies. When they became government in 2019, they tore up the doctors' contract. Then they were trying to experiment with Alberta's lab services. Still nobody knows how much that boondoggle will cost Albertans. People are waiting in emergency rooms for 10 to 12 hours. There are many emergency rooms in rural Alberta that are closed as we speak. All you need to do is google it on Alberta Health Services' website. Those are the kinds of things that my constituents and Albertans share with us. These are their priorities.

Northeast Calgary, Madam Chair, as you know, is one of the fastest growing quadrants in the city of Calgary. It's home to many newcomers, many young families who have young kids, who have moved to Canada, to Calgary for a better future for their children, for a better school for their children. Under the UCP we didn't see a single school built in that part of the town. Our kids are being bused to different quadrants for hours every single day. That is fundamentally unfair to them. That compromises their learning outcomes. And we still have not seen any commitment whatsoever from this government that we will see those schools any time soon. Under this UCP government, per-student funding is now the lowest in the entire country. Those are the facts. Those are the kinds of things that my constituents in Alberta want their government to focus on.

Speaking of this bill, the government is still able to find – and they have done it – ways to impose fees and taxes on Albertans.

Every single Albertan going through Kananaskis now has to pay \$15 for a trip. This bill doesn't apply to that. Every parent in my riding is facing school bus fees. This bill doesn't do anything to help those parents. Every Albertan is forced to pay higher utilities, higher insurance costs. This bill doesn't stop that. Again, it would have been nice had the government focused on the priorities of Albertans, on the cost of living, on the housing crisis that we are facing in Calgary; 115,000 Calgarians are at risk of homelessness.

There was a report from the Food Bank. Alberta got a D minus, I believe, and the reason for that was that year over year food bank usage has gone up by 73 per cent. And, yes, government can say that we have funded them and the previous government didn't, but previously we didn't see that kind of insecurity in this province.

3:10

Those are the kinds of things that government should be focusing on instead of imposing new costs on to Albertans such as what they are doing with their CPP. Many of their MLAs are on record that during the election campaign they promised that nobody is touching your pensions. We could have easily avoided a referendum had they told Albertans their real plans and saved \$12 million, \$13 million on that referendum, but they had their plans. Now they are spending \$7.5 million to promote what they want to do with people's retirement security and refusing to listen to Albertans who don't want the UCP anywhere near their CPP.

This government is completely out of touch with issues facing Albertans. They could have put their Bill 1 as something that could focus on Albertans' priorities, that could stop the cost-of-living crisis, that could stop hikes to their insurance and utility costs, that could stop the hikes to their tuition costs, that could stop the hikes to their school bus fees, that could stop the fees to go to their own parks such as Kananaskis. But this bill doesn't do any of that. It's just about posturing.

I will ask all members of this House to think about the priorities of your constituents. This bill doesn't address that. Vote against this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 1 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none.

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: I will decide when the question is called. Unreal.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee

reports the following bill: Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly agree to the motion? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1

Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I'm pleased to move third reading of the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.

I was happy to hear the debate on this important piece of legislation. As discussed during second reading, what we're aiming to do with this legislation is to protect Alberta's tax advantage. If passed, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, will prevent the government, now and in the future, from increasing personal and corporate income taxes without first consulting Albertans through a referendum.

This bill would protect Albertans and Alberta businesses against future income tax hikes and help retain our province's status as one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in all of North America. Right now Alberta has the lowest overall taxes in the country, and currently we have lower taxes than 44 U.S. states. Alberta's low-tax environment is a major reason why we're seeing record numbers of people from other provinces and countries from around the world choosing to make Alberta their home and we're seeing more job creators and innovators choosing to invest in our province.

Did you know, Madam Speaker, that in the month of October Alberta gained 38,000 jobs? Absolutely incredible. Bill 1, the Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, would ensure that before a government could reduce personal income tax bracket thresholds or the value of certain nonrefundable personal tax credits, they would have to put the question to Albertans and get their support.

Madam Speaker, I've heard concerns during the debate that these amendments would not directly address the current challenges of high inflation and the high cost of living. I have to say that paying lower taxes means Albertans keep more of the money that they make, a fact all the more important given today's affordability issues. This fiscal year Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay at least \$20 billion more in taxes if we had the same tax system as any other province. A family with two kids earning \$75,000 would pay over \$1,700 more in taxes in B.C. and \$4,200 more in Ontario. These are big numbers, and they underscore the importance to every single Albertan of maintaining the province's low-tax policy.

I've also heard, Madam Speaker, that these changes aren't actually needed, that if a government wants to keep taxes low, they can just choose not to raise taxes. The problem there is that we don't have a crystal ball; we don't know what the future holds. What we do know is that Alberta is bringing in more money now with a lower corporate income tax rate than the previous government brought in with higher income taxes. Committing to keep taxes low matters. It matters to the investment community; it matters to small businesses; it matters to families.

Our low-tax environment is a major reason we're seeing more people choose to make Alberta home and more job creators and innovators setting up shop here. It matters now, and it will matter in the future, so we're locking in this guarantee. Currently the Taxpayer Protection Act only states that a referendum is needed to impose a provincial sales tax. The legislation we put forward would add that any increases to income taxes, personal and corporate, would be required to go through a referendum as well. This will provide certainty and sustainability to businesses and families.

I've also heard concerns that this would tie the province's revenues, but the fact is that low taxes mean more investment, more jobs, and more certainty in Alberta's economy. Diversification is a major spinoff of that. We're already seeing the effects with nonenergy investment rising 14 per cent last year to \$4.4 billion. Bill 1 would advance our competitiveness as one of the most business-friendly jurisdictions on the continent.

Madam Speaker, Bill 1 would allow Albertans and Alberta business owners to spend more of their hard-earned dollars on things that really matter. It would assure Albertans that their government is looking out for their financial future. Paying lower taxes means Albertans keep more of their earnings, all the more important given today's affordability challenges. By enshrining our commitment to low taxes through this legislation, we will protect Alberta's economic advantages well into the future.

We have debated this important piece of legislation. I believe most members in this Chamber understand and support the intention of this legislation. I encourage every member to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise for the first time in bill debate in the 31st Legislature. As a result, the first thing that I want to say is to thank the good people of Lethbridge-West very much for returning me to this Legislature for a third time and all of the wonderful folks that made that happen.

There is no question that during the last few months, since I last rose in this House during the 30th Legislature, I heard a great deal from my constituents, folks who cannot get a family physician, cannot get child psychiatric services at all in the city of Lethbridge anymore – if one requires those services, you literally have to move your family to Calgary to access those services right now – folks who cannot get appropriate cardiac care, folks who could not get, for months on end, an appointment for routine or otherwise lab work, who could not access an emergency room department without a massive wait, whose relatives in the surrounding communities faced ER closures in Milk River and elsewhere.

3:20

Those are the types of concerns that I have heard since we last met, Madam Speaker, and that is what informs my reaction to Bill 1. The first comment I want to make just briefly is to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for leading the newly formed NDP opposition's response to Bill 1. It has been a pleasure so far watching him come up to speed very, very quickly on the Finance file, and I look forward to three-legged racing more bills with the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. It is so much fun to say that there's an NDP MLA for Calgary-Elbow. I'm just going to put that aside as well, put a pin in that.

Regardless, Madam Speaker, of all of that, referenda, as this bill proposes, should be about serious matters. Generally speaking, especially on a stand-alone basis, they are quite costly. As an

example, the last B.C. referendum cost Elections BC over \$12 million to do such an exercise on a free-standing basis, which should also give us pause on the as yet notional referendum on exiting the CPP, which the government has sort of committed to but then not committed to and then committed to and then not committed to. But referenda should not, in our system, anyway, in this Westminster system, be about, you know, frivolous matters, gimmicky matters. I think we saw this crash on the rocks during the 30th Legislature on that so-called equalization referendum, which amounted to nothing, a lot of sound and fury, and really meant nothing because people had other things on their mind during that time.

Fundamentally, what we have in front of us is a nothing-burger piece of legislation that proposes a sort of gimmicky referendum. You cannot bind future Legislatures in this way, anyway. I suppose it comes out of the Premier's campaign-time announcement, the one that I think was sort of in someone's driveway. It looked like people having a wake in a driveway. It was one of the Premier's rare appearances. I think she went something like nine days during the campaign without making an appearance, but that was one of them. So, I guess, fair enough that we now stand here for this piece of legislation, but it is a nothing-burger piece of legislation. I cannot table a hamburger – that has already been done in this House – but I would if I could. Referenda should not be for specious matters, but that's exactly what this bill is. It is superficially plausible that one might want to do this in a Westminster system, but actually it is wrong. It is misleading in its appearance.

Now, there's no question that a referendum also allows a government to advertise its position on the particular referendum, and that's great. But they can also just not pause indexation on various statutory programs. They could advertise about that, even. They could also not pause indexation of the personal income tax brackets, costing Albertans more than \$600 million at the end of the four years in additional income taxes. They could even advertise about that. Go ahead. They could, for example, reverse the absolutely devastating decisions to pause indexation of the Alberta seniors' benefit, which they did. Of course, now they've reindexed but not going back, so Alberta seniors are further behind than they once were. They could do that, and they could advertise about it, too. All of those things would be better uses of the advertising budget, frankly, than what we are seeing the Finance minister waste his time and money on now with the advertising of the Alberta pension plan.

Other ideas that the government could advertise on, for example, and actually do something about affordability: the Utilities Consumer Advocate actually does pretty decent work within the confines of what they've got, but the government could overhaul the so-called regulated rate option, which is certainly a rate, but it is not regulated. That has been the author of people's bills quadrupling after the lifting of the cap that we put on it. They could advertise those resources after they, of course, do something about utility bills, which they have not done.

They could also invest in affordable housing: social, supportive, mixed market. Every form of housing requires investment, certainly. They could invest in and take seriously economic diversification and attracting new investment. Things like gimmicky referenda sort of in the style of our friends south of the border: it doesn't really do it. It doesn't inspire confidence. In fact, importing ideas and hanging around with either ideas or people, if you will, from south of the border like Tucker Carlson: not great. I wouldn't recommend advertising that, Madam Speaker. But, you know, that's where you get this bill. This is animated by this sort of very American idea of putting these sorts of things to a very expensive referendum.

My comments are necessarily brief, Madam Speaker, because the bill is quite brief. It is not a serious bill. It is fundamentally unserious

and reflects the fundamentally unserious nature of the Premier's campaign and her commitments during that campaign. It's remarkable, in fact, that any of the things she talked about during the campaign have manifested themselves in a piece of legislation because she hid so very much, whether it was the privatization of the health care system, whether it was the plan to take us out of the Canada pension plan. I suppose that on that basis alone one has to find at least a sliver of daylight and of merit in this piece of legislation, but beyond that, there is, in fact, very little. It does actually show because Bill 1 should have been a commitment to restoring affordability in this province, because that is what we heard on the doorstep over and over again, and making a good-faith restoration of the health care system in this province and actually turning the page on the old days and the old comments around privatization. That's exactly – that was the kind of thing that Bill 1 should have contained. It does not.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my comments and wrap up my opposition to this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 1. I would like to talk about the substance of the bill a little bit, but before I do that, I'd like to be able to address some of the comments that were just presented to Albertans by the Member for Lethbridge-West. One of the things that I found interesting about her comments was what she said in terms of – she used the word “unserious,” an unserious bill. In fact, she said that giving Albertans the right through referenda to decide if taxes should be raised on them is a frivolous matter.

Now, I find it interesting that that member would say that raising taxes on Albertans is a frivolous matter. The reality is that for taxes that are increased on Albertans, whether they're a single mom with three young children, a person who's on fixed income, a senior citizen on fixed income, or someone who is wealthy, it is still an increase, and it's an affordability issue. Madam Speaker, I find that completely obtuse, to talk about that sort of thing to Albertans, that they should not worry about taxes being raised.

Now, it's interesting. When the NDP got in – and I happen to know about this because I was actually elected that year. In 2015, when they got in, they decided that they could not figure out how to be able to tax Albertans because of past legislation that was passed by a past Conservative government. That past Conservative government said that if you're going to put in a PST, you have to go to a referendum, to the people, to decide whether or not you can raise taxes on them. They knew that there was no possible way that they could bring in a PST, a provincial sales tax. So what did they do, Madam Speaker? They brought in the next best thing, which is a carbon tax. A carbon tax is a tax on everything. In Alberta, in Canada here, we ship everything by truck, so if you're going to increase prices, the best way to be able to do it is to add a carbon tax to them, and that's exactly what the NDP did.

3:30

Now, I've heard the NDP say lots of things in this Chamber, and one of the things that they have talked about is the idea that you can tax people just a little bit more and we'll make more. But the truth, Madam Speaker, is that history is replete with the example that that's not true. When you tax people more – they always said: we'll just take a little bit more of the pie. That actually decreases the size of the pie. In fact, that's exactly what we saw when the NDP got in, and that's the reality of what happened.

However, when we received the mandate by Albertans in 2019 to form the government after four years of devastation of the NDP government at the time, we had the ability to be able to show what we had done before, which is that Alberta advantage: lower tax

rates, lower regulatory burden, and just thinking about what actually would help build or grow the pie. We did that. We got that back in four years, in less than four years, actually. We were able to balance the budget. These things that we did actually grew the pie even though we took less of that pie by decreasing the corporate tax or business taxes from 12 per cent down to 8 per cent. We took less, yet we still were able to grow the pie.

Now, we grew the pie, and because we grew the pie, we actually made more in terms of corporate tax than we ever had before or any time that the NDP were in. Madam Speaker, that's the reality of a historical lesson about what's happened. Two different, competing arguments, two different, competing philosophies that have been presented to Albertans, and unless Conservatives split the vote, Albertans, generally speaking, say: we do not want to have the NDP in. And the only time that they actually had the chance to be able to get in was when we were split.

Well, Albertans will not make that mistake again, and we will make sure that we continue to form governments, strong, stable governments that will allow for people to come to this province in mass numbers. A hundred thousand people coming in each year: the size of Lethbridge, which that member that just spoke is supposedly representing. A hundred thousand people come into this province, Madam Speaker, and come here because of what? Because we're doing something wrong? No. Because we're doing something right. We're actually providing opportunities for them to be able to build that business that they've always wanted to build, to be able to have opportunities, to be able to get a good education, to be able to get into something that they're passionate about, to make something of their lives, to be able to provide for their families. This is really what a government should be doing. Getting out of the way is the best approach.

I was privileged to have the ability in 2019 to start the red tape reduction initiative in this province. We reduced regulatory burden in a four-year period by almost 33 per cent, Madam Speaker. A third of those regulatory hoops that Albertans had to jump through: we got rid of them. We said: "You know what? We think you can actually do better than government." And you know what? When the NDP were in for four years, I was actually the shadow minister, and we said: well, we'd like to be the shadow minister for red tape reduction. Of course they didn't have a red tape reduction initiative, so they kind of brought in the next best thing: Member Bilous. I remember talking to him about that. He said: "You know what? The reality is that we're actually quite happy with the regulatory burden that's there." Just like – and we've got a member that was actually in the Chamber at the time, too, and she says: that's not true; that's absolutely not true.

But if you could show me one thing that they actually reduced in terms of a regulatory burden, I would love to see it. Great to table that. That would be fantastic. But not one thing did we see in that time. That is one of the reasons why that regulatory burden continued to grow. That is why the size of that pie in Alberta continued to decrease, because businesses have the ability to go anywhere in the world. They're very fluid. What the NDP didn't seem to understand is that there is a symbiotic relationship between businesses and employees and government. When they work together, it's fantastic, and lots of things can happen. Businesses can come in, which is exactly what we've seen in the last four years: record growth in tech, record growth in our agrifood development. We have the opportunity to be able to continue what so many of us here have benefited from.

I can say that's the reason why I ran, Madam Speaker, in Alberta, because Alberta has been good to my family. We've done well here, but I was worried and concerned about what my children and grandchildren would have. I wanted to make sure that they had that same Alberta advantage, that same opportunity to be able to grow a

business, build a business, start from scratch, do something new, and be able to make something for their families. You know, that's what I'm proud of.

This is the nice thing about this bill, Bill 1. It's an indicator to our job creators and our innovators, that are so passionate – and I love what I see in Alberta because there are so many of these job creators and innovators here – that when you come here, we're going to provide you with certainty that your taxes aren't going to go up and push you out of business. Because that's what happened, Madam Speaker; this is what happened when the NDP were in for four years. They drove away billions of dollars of – of course they're chirping because, again, they still don't know, after another four years of us being in business, that they did it wrong. They still don't understand that. I'm not exactly sure why they don't understand that, but they don't understand that.

Madam Speaker, what we do know is that the numbers – when the NDP were in, they drove the businesses away. When we got back in – the Conservatives got back in – we provided that certainty to the businesses so that they were able to flourish. The symbiotic relationship that we saw there allowed them to be able to hire more people in Alberta than we've ever seen before. We're seeing growth in so many areas. This is a good thing, yet they're chirping. The opposite side is chirping because they don't seem to think that's a good thing. People having jobs, good-paying jobs, is good for families. It's good for mental health. It provides that help for people. There's nothing wrong with that. I don't know why they keep on chirping about that.

Madam Speaker, I am so happy that we have brought forward certainty in a time when we have lots of uncertainty from a federal government that continues to go after Alberta in so many ways to try to be able to create that uncertainty. We're providing certainty within the context of what we can do provincially, and that is something that I think will provide a good indication to Albertans, to people who want to come here and start a business, that if you come here, if you put your hard-earned money, your hard-earned investment here in Alberta, you will have that certainty that we will not raise your taxes. I can guarantee you that a PST, a provincial sales tax – we used to call it a political suicide tax, and that's exactly what it would be in Alberta. It's not popular at all, and no matter how many times you poll it, Albertans don't want it. They don't like the carbon tax either because it's basically the same thing. One thing that we can do is provide the certainty in this. We'll say that your corporate and your income taxes will not go up in Alberta unless Albertans say it should.

For that, Madam Speaker, I am one hundred per cent in support of this. I think that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has done a fantastic job in leading the way, in providing us with that certainty and that help. That is exactly what we need at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Member Kayande: Thank you. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Taber-Warner for that stirring defence and educating me on what's good for business. Let's talk about business, because business does require certainty. It does require stability. It does require a consistent regulatory environment, and in fact it is the government across the aisle, the members across the aisle, who banned renewable investment for a seven-month period, threatening the jobs of thousands of Albertans and billions of dollars in capital investment.

Very unfortunate because, you know, if the Hon. Peter Lougheed had taken the same approach, we would not have an oil sands industry. Instead, what he promoted was energy investment in a new form of energy that made us rich, and we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Lougheed and the Lougheed government for doing that.

3:40

We are in a similar place right now, you know, with where Alberta is and where the rise of technology is and the change in technology that, unfortunately, this Bill 1 does absolutely nothing to address, which is the changing energy mix and the lowering of renewables costs that make this an extremely exciting time to be in energy investment in Alberta. You talk about red tape reduction. There's no worse form of red tape than: you can't do that business in Alberta.

Let's talk about gimmicks. This bill is a gimmick. Parliament, the members across the aisle, knows that: look, if they don't want a PST – and, boy, have I talked to a lot of Conservatives who want a PST, including my opponent in the last election. You get them quiet, and it's, like: yeah; maybe we need to do that. And I'll tell you that on this side of the aisle we will never ever – ever – have a PST, not while I'm here. Now, the gimmick is that the Legislature can choose whether to institute any particular tax or not. They can just simply not institute a tax.

In many ways, when we talk about what's good for business, you know, I have some background on that. Of course, I have been an energy analyst for the vast majority of my life. I was an expert on oil sands. I was an expert on pipelines. I was responsible for investment calls that made my clients billions of dollars, and I'm very pleased and proud of that reputation that I have. There are large investors in Toronto who will pick up my call on the first ring because they're still so grateful for my call on natural gas in 2012. I have advised large investors such as large pipeline companies on mergers and acquisitions. Yeah, I was good at making money for my clients. I'm very proud of that.

I'm here now on this side of the aisle. Why is that? What puts me here? It's the wonderful thing about Alberta, where I could move here and know that my kids would get a first-class and world-class education, and that was taken away by the folks on the other side of the aisle. When the curriculum review was made by the folks on the other side of the aisle and when they decided to take away my children's education from me, that's when I decided to get politically involved. Before that, I was just content to run a business.

Business and society are about more than gimmicky referendums. This is a government that has proven that it is bad for business by banning renewable energy. It's a government that has proven that it is bad for business by cutting education funding and cutting postsecondary education funding. It is a government that has proven that it is bad for business, and they're backfilling with a bunch of gimmicks that aren't actually going to change anything and aren't going to address affordability at all for a single person in this province, and I think that's a tragedy and that's a shame.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been listening to the members opposite, and I find some of their comments confusing and contradictory. I'd like to speak in favour of the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023. I really like this bill. I just want to talk a little bit about tax competitiveness. It's something I'm really interested in. I had the opportunity to serve Albertans as a tax lawyer.

Before the NDP occupation, before that horrible government came in with the first NDP Premier ever ... [interjections]

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on a point of order.

An Hon. Member: Disrespectful. Read the room. Unbelievable.

The Deputy Speaker: Hey. Not necessary. Thank you.
Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) and also the practices and standings here in this House because the member has referred to an NDP occupation, something that he was known for doing repeatedly in the 30th Legislature and which he was cautioned against doing a number of times. Referring to the democratically elected NDP government as an NDP occupation is unparliamentary and extremely disrespectful to those who have experienced an occupation. As we have seen over and over, it creates disorder in this House and should be ruled completely out of order and not used in this Assembly at any time. This member has been cautioned repeatedly about this inflammatory and unparliamentary use of language, and it is an offence to this Assembly that he continues to come into this House, disregarding previous Speakers' cautions, and use this language. I encourage him to reflect on the impact this language has on Albertans, and I hope that you will rule this a point of order and put a stop to this member continuing to use this language.

Mr. Schow: I tend to agree with the member opposite that the language is unparliamentary. I expect the member to apologize.

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

Debate Continued

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I apologize. I think I've got it in one speech. I won't need to use it again.

It did feel very oppressive, I will say, to many Albertans when the NDP was elected. You see, prior to that time we had the Alberta advantage, and I loved talking to many businesses and Albertans about how we were the best. We had a 10 per cent flat tax rate. We had a 10 per cent corporate tax rate. Alberta was the most competitive jurisdiction to start and grow business. We were a land of freedom and prosperity. Then the NDP came, and they, Madam Speaker, were very, very, very bad. Very bad. They jacked up the top marginal rate by 50 per cent and the corporate tax rate by 20 per cent. That was very bad in and of itself, but then they brought in a sneaky carbon tax, which they never campaigned on at all. They didn't talk about it at all, and they brought in that sneaky carbon tax; very deceitful. Then the leader of the NDP described Alberta as an embarrassing cousin.

Now, really, the cumulative impact of this NDP government, this progressive woke culture, was to move Alberta towards being mediocre. They did not like Alberta being excellent. You know, the NDP, Madam Speaker: they were an economic failure, and not a single business that I was able to serve in central Alberta thought that the NDP was doing a good job. That's just the truth. I didn't meet a single business that thought the NDP was doing a good job. They were very demoralizing. They were a horrible government.

I could cite a number of statistics – I think we've cited many in the Legislature – but I'm going to cite one, and that is that when the NDP

came into government, even though our population grew, there were fewer private-sector jobs when they got fired than when they came in. Madam Speaker, the reason why that is such a devastating statistic . . .

3:50

Ms Hoffman: It's not true.

Mr. Stephan: It absolutely is true.

They tried to artificially inflate jobs by creating government jobs, but as it relates to private-sector jobs, Madam Speaker, they were an absolute failure. You know, there is a great human cost to that. There was a great family cost to that, and I have never heard . . . [interjections] The arrogance of the members opposite, the arrogance and unrepentant attitude. They've never once apologized for the human loss that their incompetence caused to Alberta families. [interjections]

Madam Speaker, they can't handle the truth. You can hear that the truth hurts. They cannot handle the truth. It gets them upset. They can't handle the truth, but it's important that I provide a context as to this Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, because we don't want anything like that ever to happen again. We must protect and have checks and balances against fiscal incompetence.

Of course, we know that in 2019 the NDP was fired. One of the first things we did was to restore the Alberta advantage and lower the general corporate tax rate to 8 per cent. Now, why did we cut corporate taxes? We wanted to leave more money, Madam Speaker, in corporations to reinvest, to pay down debt, to grow their businesses and hire individuals. One thing that the tax cut did not help with is to make corporate property available for personal benefits. There are long-standing tax rules that prevent that.

Now, the NDP naively, because they don't know what they're talking about, called this tax reduction a giveaway. Madam Speaker, the NDP socialists view the income of corporations as belonging to them. Think about that. They view a tax cut as a giveaway, as if they in the first instance were entitled to it and it belonged to them. These socialists across the way suffer from a sense of entitlement. They think that they are more entitled to income than those who earned it.

Now, Madam Speaker, do you know what happened when we reduced the corporate tax rate? Corporate tax revenue increased, and I want to talk about why because I know that the NDP, unfortunately, is somewhat unlearned in private-sector ways. Their leader is a career politician that I don't think has worked in the private sector a day in her life and probably most of the people, frankly, that are on those benches. They are socialists. They are socialists.

But how the income tax act works . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Is that a point of order?

Ms Gray: Yep.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member Relevance

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, I rise pursuant to section 23(h), and I will also touch a little bit on 23(b). The member just referred specifically to the Leader of the Official Opposition, the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, and made allegations about her work experience that are not true at all. In any event, a member should not be making such allegations, what some member has done or not done. The second thing is that I've been sitting here listening and haven't been able to figure out which piece of legislation this member is talking about. He's not talking about anything that's

under discussion, or at least I have not been able to figure that out. That's clearly a point of order, that he makes allegations against the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are two points of order there, or at least two points the members opposite raised. I will deal with the second one first. There is a long-standing tradition in this House – especially with members opposite, as I've noticed, they will speak to matters that are not germane to the bill for quite some time and then relate back to the content of the bill to keep it generally on topic. I believe the member here from Red Deer-South was doing an excellent job educating the members opposite on financial policy and literacy, something that he has done on a number of occasions. Though they may not agree with the lesson that he has given the members opposite, if I were them, I would take heed. I do believe it was certainly relevant to the topic of the bill.

With regard to the comments about socialism I believe that's a matter of debate. Respectfully, Madam Speaker, this is a matter of debate that the members opposite may disagree with us on, that we feel that they espouse certain characteristics of socialism, but I don't believe that this is a point of order, and the louder they scream or the louder they heckle doesn't it make it any more egregious.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I too will deal with the two different points of order on 23(b) and 23(h), which I believe was the point of order. On 23(h) I find this is a matter of debate. In fact, I've heard very similar debate from both sides of this House in that regard. While it's not often helpful to continue at some great length on what members may have done in their past, it is not a point of order.

On 23(b) I must admit I was finding it – we may have been slightly off topic for quite some time without it coming back to the point which I'm sure the member was making in regard to the bill, so I will now give him that opportunity to make his remarks relevant to the debate at hand, which is Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.

With that, I'll ask the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, Madam Speaker. The amendment protection act says that we can't increase corporate taxes. I was in the process of sharing why a low corporate tax rate is actually beneficial to Albertans before, unfortunately, I was interrupted by the members opposite, who can't handle the truth very well.

Under our income tax laws, Madam Speaker, when provinces are looking at which, you know, corporations they get to tax, the corporate income tax act allocates that taxing right based on where the salaries are situated for a corporation and where their revenue is earned. Now, of course, if we have a business that provides businesses throughout Canada, where that revenue is earned: a tax reduction here in Alberta doesn't have that much control over that. But as it relates to salaries, there is a very big impact. When we have an 8 per cent tax rate, when we are far and above better than any of the other provinces, corporations will seek to grow their employment, their back office, their head office employment, in the jurisdiction where their salaries are earned and subject to that lower tax rate.

Madam Speaker, I remember, certainly, as a tax lawyer before the NDP came in, when we, again, had that low tax rate, we would have corporations and individuals looking to situate themselves so they were subject to tax in Alberta. They wanted to be taxed in Alberta because we had that lowest tax rate. We saw that, and we

are seeing that now with the lowest corporate tax rate in all of Canada, that 8 per cent rate, where corporations and businesses are actually looking to be subject to tax in Alberta, and as a result we are seeing record corporate tax revenues. And contrast that, of course, to when the NDP were in. Madam Speaker, they increased corporate tax rates by 20 per cent. And guess what happened to corporate tax revenues. They fell. We've reduced them. We're the lowest in Canada. I guess, from the perspective of the Leader of the Opposition, we're an embarrassing cousin again. But we are the best. We are a land of prosperity and freedom, and we have record corporate tax revenue. Who would have thought it?

4:00

Madam Speaker, let's talk in terms of personal taxes. I am very excited about our campaign commitment to reduce the bottom tax rate on the first \$60,000 of income by 20 per cent to 8 percent. This will save Albertans earning \$60,000 about \$760 a year every year. That's the context of Bill 1.

Right now we have a Premier who is not a socialist, like the members opposite had. It would not be good to depend on the virtue of whoever is a Premier to not increase tax rates. This is a growing issue in our country. I don't know if the members opposite or perhaps those who are listening – but in every other province other than Alberta and Saskatchewan the top marginal tax rate is over 50 per cent, you know. We should think about that. That is a very troubling trend in our country. Thankfully, Alberta and Saskatchewan are the only jurisdictions in Canada now that have a top marginal rate of 50 per cent. So in every other province the government, whoever it is in those other provinces, think that they are more entitled to the money that you earn than the person who earned it.

You see, this culture, this progressive woke culture is very destructive, and we see per capita income in Canada dropping like a rock. Madam Speaker, in 2014, prior to Trudeau and this awful NDP government, Canada's per capita GDP was 92 per cent of the US. In 2022 it's 72 per cent, a 20 per cent drop in per capita GDP in less than 10 years.

Member Ceci: Not true.

Mr. Stephan: It's absolutely true. I know the members opposite – again, they just can't handle the truth.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has the highest per capita GDP in Canada because our culture rejects the NDP progressive woke cult of mediocrity, virtue signalling, producing nothing. Thank goodness that we have oil in Canada because our exchange rate right now would be under 70 cents. Our exchange rate would be under 70 cents if it wasn't for Alberta oil, and that blesses all of Canada. Unfortunately, we've got Canada's first NDP Prime Minister, aided and abetted by NDP puppets in Ottawa. Probably the greatest threat to our freedom and prosperity is this woke NDP incompetent axis. Albertans need to prepare, to insulate and protect ourselves from this accelerating train wreck which, unabated, will crash surely as the night follows day.

Madam Speaker, the referendum requirement in Bill 1 is a check and balance against any governments who seek to increase taxes, including surprise carbon taxes. Bill 1 provides certainty to investors against any government, even a socialist government that can't compete and succeed in the real world and will seek to fund their ideologies on the backs of hard-working Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I invite all members of this Legislature to stand for Alberta freedom and prosperity and support this very excellent bill, Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about Standing Order 13(4). "When a Member

is speaking, no person shall (a) pass between that Member and the chair, or (b) interrupt that Member, except to raise a point of order." I'll just leave it there.

Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to Bill 1 in third reading? Oh, I was going to do this without my thing. The hon. Member for Brooks – Cypress-Medicine Hat. Sorry to the great people of Cypress.

Mr. Wright: Ouch. That was hurtful. [interjection] I know. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, introduced by our government. This legislation will enshrine into law: any future government wanting to raise income taxes on Albertans and job-creating businesses would first need approval through a referendum of the people of Alberta.

Let us be clear. Our Conservative government has no intention whatsoever of raising taxes. We were elected on a promise to get Albertans back to work, and we recognize that high taxes are a barrier to creating jobs and economic growth, as seen between 2015 and 2019. Hard-working Albertans should be able to have their say on how much of their hard-earned money is taken away. A referendum on taxes encourages open debates on the topic and gives Albertans a direct voice on how much of their hard-earned money is taken out of their pockets in taxes. We want to ensure that no future governments can easily raise taxes without consent. Albertans work too hard for their money to see it taken away through increased taxes without any say.

This bill is about more than just protecting taxpayers; it's about attracting investment and securing our economic future. Alberta has come a long way since the dark days of the NDP. Our government hasn't only cleaned up the economic mess of the NDP, but we've also put Alberta back to work and on the path to success and prosperity. Canada already has one of the highest overall tax burdens amongst the industrial countries. The passage of this legislation would provide certainty to potential investors both in Alberta and around the world that income taxes will remain competitive, and that's exactly what we will continue to do.

We've seen record-high inflation, caused in part by reckless spending by our federal Liberal-NDP coalition, and the trickle-down effects of the past NDP policies like the carbon tax, that drove away investment from this province. During recent years when the opposition was in government and when Alberta had tax rates much higher than they currently are, we've seen investment go elsewhere. Jobs and opportunities left. Albertans need to be assured that job creators will not see this happen, that they will not see this happen again. The carbon tax brought in by the NDP was the single largest tax increase on our people, a tax that was never campaigned on and there was no referendum held on. This is why this bill is important.

The opposition claims that Bill 1 would restrict the abilities of the government to generate revenue, not surprising given the left has only ever been known for how they increase taxes or how they run over project overruns. Again, the NDP formed government. They brought in the largest tax in Alberta's history, which they never campaigned on. They raised taxes 97 times over their term and became the architects for unaffordability in our province. The NDP drove families and businesses out of Alberta. I never want to see this happen again, and I never want to see this happen to hard-working Albertans. We are seeking to protect personal and corporate taxes to give Albertans the right to have their say on whether their taxes are increased or not. I don't understand or see how any members of this Assembly who are seeking to help Albertans could disagree with Bill 1.

4:10

We are looking to install safeguards to assure Albertans that they have protections against the failures made by members across the

aisle. Now is the time to put up the stop sign against uncontrolled government growth and spending. It's time to give control back to the taxpayers, where it belongs. No more blank cheques. The people must have their say.

Lower taxes help create jobs. They attract investment, expand business, and put more money into the pockets of Albertans to stimulate economic growth. In fact, we currently have lower taxes than all provinces and 44 U.S. states. This gives us a clear advantage, a new Alberta advantage, if you will, and this bill will help protect those principles. We can see the results of this lower tax approach working. The number of businesses incorporated in Alberta is at its highest rate in over a decade, the second-highest in this century. This is why we're seeing more job creators and innovators bringing their cash here and hiring Albertans. It's the best place to do business, and our economy has never been doing better.

The Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act is straightforward, reasonable legislation that protects Albertans while promoting a business environment where entrepreneurs can thrive and create opportunity for our people. I urge all members to join me in voting in favour of this important bill that puts the power back in the hands of the people. I want families, business owners, my constituents, and all Albertans across this province to know the best days are ahead. The right thing to do for Albertans, for investment, and for the future of this province is to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to Bill 1 in third reading?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, a bill that I believe would be a huge benefit for Albertans and Alberta businesses.

This bill will safeguard the rights of every taxpayer in Alberta, as the UCP government strongly believes that it's our duty to listen to the voices of our citizens when it comes to what we do with their hard-earned money. Our UCP government is committed to maintaining the Alberta advantage. We are the only province in Canada that does not have a general provincial sales tax, and we know it is not something that Albertans want. This bill reaffirms our dedication on continuing a sustainable tax environment, where Albertans can thrive economically, as we plan on keeping the burden of taxes as low as possible for our citizens. We are actively working to protect the interests and well-being of every citizen, and we will ensure that the decisions we make as a government are made with care and consideration from Albertans.

Unlike the members opposite, who implemented a carbon tax when they were elected, a carbon tax that they did not campaign on – it made life unreasonably expensive and hard for Albertans – we as the UCP government will ensure low personal and corporate income taxes. We know that overtaxation in any form will only add to the financial stressors that the federal government has already left Albertan residents to deal with. Therefore, we have been actively working to fix the problem.

"How does this bill help address the affordability crisis that the federal government has left us with?" you may ask. Well, to start, we're committed to listening to the direct opinions of taxpayers in Alberta. That means that if any legislation proposes an increase on personal income taxes or if there are suggestions for a provincial sales tax, which we know is not in the interest of Albertans, we will not impose said legislation without your say in a referendum. This will ensure that taxes are kept low, which is an integral step to make

life more affordable for Albertans, and this will ensure that our residents are aware of these fiscal decisions based on their contributions.

This will also ensure that Albertans will not have to deal with major tax hikes like the ones we saw under the unfortunate NDP government, which had a significant impact on the livelihoods of our citizens. This bill will ensure the protection of taxpayers, a demonstration on our commitment to ensure that financial stressors such as overtaxation will not be taken lightly and will simply not happen without the voices of Albertans being heard.

Bill 1 is an acknowledgement that the well-being and prosperity of our citizens is of utmost importance to us. The UCP government continues to work on stimulating the economy by encouraging job growth and investments for major companies, and we are looking at our hard-working citizens who want to succeed in this province. This bill is a testament to the fact that we are representing the interests of the public and we are continuing to work towards the benefits of our citizens across the province.

As a former small-business owner and the MLA for Calgary-Lougheed I made a commitment to my constituents, families, and small-business owners to actively work towards economic resilience for all Albertans. Many of us were victims of the NDP's reign of terror, which encouraged financial instability, and due to this many of my constituents and other Alberta residents still feel the effects of that dark period. With Bill 1 I'm excited to have actual incentives to bring back to my constituents to assure them that . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, I rise pursuant to 23(j). The Member for Calgary-Lougheed just referred to that he was a victim of a reign of terror of the NDP. This comment is not any different than what the Member for Red Deer-South made earlier, and I think it's equally disrespectful. If they really want to see a reign of terror, they should talk to somebody from the Alberta Ukrainian community so they can tell them what a reign of terror means, what occupation means. They should talk to somebody from the Middle East so they can educate them on what these words mean, how they impact different people in different communities.

I think using that kind of insulting and inappropriate language should be beneath members of this House. I expect that the member will do the right thing and withdraw and apologize.

Thank you.

Mr. Bouchard: My apologies, Madam Speaker. My words were inappropriate. I did, however, run a business from 2005 until 2020. The four years perhaps were not – it was in your reign. That wasn't the correct word, but it was just awful.

Mr. Stephan: Very bad.

Mr. Bouchard: Yeah. Very, very bad.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed with debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Bouchard: I will continue, Madam Speaker. With Bill 1 I'm excited to have actual incentives to bring back to my constituents to

assure them that this will never happen again. We as a government were elected on a platform that guaranteed that taxpayer dollars are managed effectively and efficiently. The UCP platform actively addresses the concerns of Albertan residents, and through Bill 1 we're taking another step to help alleviate the concerns of affordability by protecting our taxpayers and small businesses.

Unfortunately, the opposition has attempted to assert that this bill does not address affordability in the province and said that, I quote: if they simply wish to not raise taxes, they can simply choose to not raise taxes. This laissez-faire attitude towards the protection of taxpayers in Alberta is how the NDP government contributed to a major recession, and many Albertans lost their only source of income. The UCP government witnessed the upsetting effects, and once we regained power, we immediately began to work on reducing taxes for our local businesses, and we were able to bring back the Alberta advantage.

This bill, without a doubt, addresses affordability as low taxes make life more affordable for Albertans. It encourages economic growth, allowing for job creation and more avenues for sources of income for the working Albertan. As government representatives it's our job to implement initiatives that reflect the values of our constituents and our future generations to come. This bill will not only serve as a commitment to taxpayers in our province, but it will also preserve the Alberta advantage, ensuring economic prosperity for the future of Albertans and keeping Alberta as the heartland for economic prosperity.

Therefore, I'm urging the members opposite to do what is best for Albertans. Why would anyone disagree on the freedom of choice for Alberta's residents when it comes to taxation and affordability? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there are others to join the debate on Bill 1, third reading?

Would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Mr. Horner: I move to close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: That'll work.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:20 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sinclair
Cyr	Long	Singh
de Jonge	Lovely	Smith
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen
Jean	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Elmeligi	Loyola
Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Ganley	Pancholi
Boparai	Goehring	Phillips
Brar	Gray	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Haji	Schmidt
Ceci	Hayter	Shepherd
Chapman	Hoffman	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Ip	Sweet
Deol	Irwin	Tejada
Eggen	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kayande	
Totals:	For – 47	Against – 35

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Alberta Pension Protection Act

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act.

Bill 2 is a priority for Alberta's government because it provides assurance to Albertans that we are protecting their pensions and benefits even as Albertans from every corner of the province are having fierce debates and conversations about a potential Alberta pension plan. We have already heard from tens of thousands of Albertans on both sides of the debate. Some suggest that we've already made up our mind about launching a provincial pension plan. That is not the case, and I want to be clear about the government's intentions. We will not move forward with an Alberta pension plan without Albertans' permission to do so.

4:40

First off, we remain confident in the methodology and interpretations of the CPP act that LifeWorks used to prepare the report. LifeWorks' expert actuarial analysis looked at the full picture of Albertans' contributions to the CPP. The LifeWorks report confirmed that Albertans have been substantial net contributors to the CPP, and these contributions have grown from the decades of compounded net investment returns.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

No decisions have been made about an Alberta pension plan, and none will be made without the clear go-ahead from Albertans. In fact, we're pleased that so many Albertans have participated in conversations about what an Alberta pension plan could mean for our province, our future, and our retirements. If a provincial pension plan could mean bigger paycheques to workers, savings for businesses, and also improve the pensions seniors rely on upon retiring, then, Madam Speaker, it warrants consideration.

Our number one job is to protect the rights of Albertans and do everything we can to ensure everyone can participate in Alberta's economy and reap the rewards they deserve. That's why we publicly released the independent LifeWorks report, and that's why I'm making this motion to move the Alberta Pension Protection Act to second reading.

The Alberta Pension Protection Act, an important and necessary piece of legislation, is about four key things and, if passed, will protect pensions, benefits, and financial security. First, it guarantees

that our government won't move forward with an Alberta pension plan unless Albertans say so. From the very beginning of this journey we've always said that it will be up to Albertans to decide if an Alberta pension plan is right for them. No referendum decision has been made, but we are locking in our promise to Albertans that they will decide whether or not we launch an Alberta pension plan.

Second, Bill 2 would guarantee that a provincial pension plan provides Albertans with the same or better benefits that they rely on from CPP. The Canada Pension Plan act states that for a province to withdraw from the CPP, they must show that a provincial pension plan would offer a comparable level of benefits. We're going even further, guaranteeing that an APP would provide Albertans the same or even better benefits.

Third, it guarantees that Albertans would pay the same or lower contribution rates than what they currently pay into the CPP. If Albertans decide to move forward with an Alberta pension plan, we promise they won't pay more and would likely pay less to earn the same or better benefits they need in retirement.

Finally, a fourth guarantee: if passed, the Alberta Pension Protection Act would legislate that any assets transferred from the CPP to start an APP would only be used to set up and operate a provincial pension plan. Albertans have worked hard to build up their pensions. Those earnings and those benefits belong to them. With this legislation they can rest assured that their pensions would be kept safe even if they would be transferred to an Alberta pension plan. It could not be used for pet projects but would be invested wisely to grow the plan and to keep it sustainable and secure for generations to come, free from political interference.

If passed, the legislation safeguards pensions and benefits under a potential Alberta pension plan. It takes fears off the table so everyone can have a robust, open discussion about what a provincial pension plan could mean for the province. Bill 2, if passed, is a firm commitment from our government that your pension will be safe no matter what. The Alberta Pension Protection Act would guarantee that Albertans would not launch a provincial pension plan unless Albertans vote in favour in a referendum. This is Albertans' pension and their choice, and it will be up to them if they want an APP. Let me be clear. No decision has been made on an Alberta pension plan, and we won't decide to hold a referendum first without hearing from Albertans.

As we've said before, the cake is definitely not baked here. We are committed to having the conversation and to explore with Albertans the potential impact of an Alberta pension plan on our economy, on our pocketbooks, our future, and our security. We hope this promise locked into legislation gives Albertans the certainty they need to explore the option of an APP. The Alberta Pension Protection Act would also guarantee that Albertans would pay the same or a lower contribution rate than they currently do under the Canada pension plan, and it guarantees that an Alberta pension plan would provide Albertans, including retirees, the same or better benefits they currently receive under CPP.

We would never consider a provincial pension plan if we didn't see an opportunity. We want Albertans to reap the benefits of their hard work. We think the Alberta government should be doing all it can to help families keep more money in their pockets. An Alberta pension plan, if Albertans were to approve it, would have to provide them at least the same level of pensions and benefits offered under the CPP. This aligns with the language and rules in the Canada Pension Plan act, which states that a province can only withdraw from the CPP if it provides at least the same level of benefits as the national plan.

Some would say that this bill is redundant. My answer to that is that offering Albertans a choice is never redundant. The Alberta Pension Protection Act renews that commitment to Albertans. This

proposed legislation would lock in benefit and contribution certainty so Albertans know that an APP would categorically provide them as much if not more financial security in their retirement than the CPP.

The new legislation would also entirely protect the assets owed to Alberta from the CPP if we were to withdraw. The legislation would mandate that the entire amount of the asset transfer could be used solely to set up and operate an Alberta pension plan. This means that the full asset transferred from the CPP could not and would not be used for government initiatives or priorities and would be free from political interference.

Let me first say that no decisions have been made on which service providers would work best, and we're seeking input and direction from Albertans on this topic. Bill 2 would preserve and protect that fund so it would provide Albertans now and the next generations retirement security they can depend on.

This is not the government's money; this is the money of hard-working Albertans who have collectively contributed far more into the CPP than they have yet to receive in benefits. An APP would keep their contributions and earnings safe here at home.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't speak in this Chamber about the most recent meeting I had with Minister Freeland and my colleagues from across the country on pensions. In that meeting I made it abundantly clear that Alberta is committed to making sure that any potential creation of an Alberta pension plan will not leave our fellow Canadians without a stable pension and its associated benefits.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the past several weeks Alberta has been having an open discussion about the possibility of establishing an Alberta pension plan that will benefit our seniors and workers. This will only happen if Albertans vote to do so in a referendum, Madam Speaker.

I'm encouraged to hear the federal government commit to providing a comprehensive actuarial analysis of the asset transfer value Alberta would be entitled to should it withdraw from CPP. We've been asking for this for some time. It is critical for the ongoing discussion of an Alberta pension plan that we have a firm asset transfer number and the potential benefit increases to Albertans stemming from that transfer amount, upon which Albertans can make an informed decision.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, if passed, would provide Albertans the assurance they need that we always have their back. Bill 2 promises Albertans will decide if they want an Alberta pension plan. If they were to vote in favour of an APP in a referendum, the legislation guarantees that an Alberta pension plan would provide them the same or better benefits. An APP would guarantee Alberta employees and employers the same or lower contribution rates than the CPP, and all the funds owed to Alberta from the CPP would only be used to set up and operate a provincial pension plan that protects the interests and benefits of all Albertans.

I look forward to the debate around Bill 2 and to continued discussion and engagement around the province that will help Albertans decide what would work best for them, their futures, and their security.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, which proposes amendments to several of Alberta's tax statutes.

We review and update Alberta's tax laws regularly to legislate new policies, correct deficiencies, and maintain consistency between provincial and federal tax laws. These types of changes are important for maintaining the integrity of our tax system in Alberta, keeping our legislation up to date, and reducing red tape.

Specifically, Bill 4 would amend four pieces of legislation, including the Fuel Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act.

The proposed legislative changes would help ensure our tax legislation remains clear, current, and consistent while continuing to support Albertans and Alberta businesses. This includes legislating the extension of the provincial fuel tax pause to the end of 2023, a decision we announced earlier this year. We know the rising cost of living is a top concern for Albertans, and we remain committed to keeping everyday life more affordable by saving Albertans 13 cents per litre every time they fill up their vehicle for the remainder of the year. The fuel tax pause is currently in effect, and Albertans and Alberta businesses are saving the full provincial fuel tax as a result. Extending the pause to the end of 2023 will save drivers an estimated \$530 million. That money is staying in Albertans' pockets every time they fill up their vehicle.

To date, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have saved \$1.5 billion and paid what have often been the lowest fuel prices in the country. These savings have and will continue to have a real impact on the pocketbooks of Albertans. This measure is just one of many to help Albertans with the rising cost of living.

4:50

Legislation is now needed to retroactively authorize the pause's extension. Legislating the extension of the fuel tax pause helps us formalize our commitment to keeping life affordable in our province. If passed, Bill 4 will also align Alberta's tourism levy with administrative practices by repealing requirements for the collection and remittance of the tourism levy by online brokers such as Airbnb and Vrbo that were intended to come into effect on July 1, 2023. In response to industry concerns, our government is working with industry partners around how best to implement the commitment to require online brokers to collect and remit the tax on behalf of operators and to require online brokers to provide information to government to ensure the new rules can be effectively administered. The specific information that will be required will be outlined in the regulation.

Madam Speaker, I think I can speak for every member of this Chamber when I say that we're absolutely blessed to live and work in a place as beautiful as Alberta. Alberta's tourism sector has the potential to drive growth, create jobs, and showcase the unique experiences available to visitors. This legislation includes a new framework to collect the tax, with specific details to follow in regulation. Amendments to the Tourism Levy Act would also update information-sharing requirements to ensure temporary accommodation providers understand their tourism levy related obligations.

Bill 4 would also ensure Alberta's personal income tax system aligns with recent changes to federal legislation. Proposed amendments include a change to the eligibility requirements for the provincial disability tax credit to align with changes to the federal credit, which reduces the number of times per week therapy is needed to qualify for the credit from three to two times per week. Other technical amendments include an updated calculation for the recovery tax on qualified disability trusts, an added reference to the federal Income Tax Act to ensure that trusts are defined properly throughout the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and a change to

ensure that the Alberta calculation for tax on split income properly accounts for the disability tax credit.

With respect to corporate taxes, Bill 4 proposes two amendments that would clarify provincial policy. Specifically, the bill proposes to legislate a rule respecting the application of a measure announced in the 2021 federal budget that allows eligible businesses to immediately deduct up to \$1.5 million of the cost of eligible investments rather than expensing them over several years. Alberta made the decision to parallel this federal measure, and the policy is already reflected in our legislation. However, this additional change is required to clarify how the measure applies to Alberta businesses that are associated; for example, if one person controls two corporations.

The second change in the bill that clarifies provincial policy would correct the formula for calculating the innovation employment grant benefit for corporations that are associated with others. The change would ensure that the IEG entitlement for associated entities is calculated correctly and remains consistent with the policy of the program. Bill 4 also proposes a few more technical changes that would align Alberta corporate tax laws with federal to minimize red tape. Keeping our tax legislation up to date is essential to maintaining Alberta's low-tax environment.

I want to talk about our low-tax environment. Our government has created a pro-growth, low-tax, business-friendly environment, an environment that groups from around the country and the world have chosen to set up shop in. The amendments in Bill 4 would help us create further consistency and clarity in Alberta's tax system.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

Provincial governments across Canada have implemented a range of compensation governance models designed to strike a balance between their fiscal and accountability interests and their particular blend of public-sector governance models. British Columbia's compensation governance model has been recognized as the gold standard for compensation governance in Canada since it was implemented in the 1990s. Alberta's government already uses some of the core elements from the B.C. model such as co-ordinated bargaining directives for public-sector negotiations, and now we're going a step further with this proposed legislation, that would enable a new, flexible governance model for non-union public-sector compensation.

At the same time, the government would maintain strong fiscal oversight to ensure tax dollars are spent wisely. Public-sector compensation accounts for nearly \$23 billion in provincial spending annually. Without market-based and evidence-informed oversight from the provincial government, spending pressures can easily crowd out other priorities and grow beyond the government's ability to pay.

Most of that dollar figure goes to salaries established in collective agreements with Alberta's largest public-sector unions, including nurses, teachers, and government workers. The current approach for non-union and executive compensation is unsustainable. It doesn't account for competitive and changing labour market conditions. Under the current model, the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act, also known as RABCCA, inflexible and prescriptive compensation frameworks have restrained compensation

with a one-size-fits-all approach for diverse public agencies. This has led to many well-qualified and exceptional workers leaving and finding more competitively compensated work elsewhere. The framework puts pressure on agencies to shift compensation approaches away from market and sector norms and prescribed compensation levels at 2015 or 2016 rates as inflationary pressures increase.

Ultimately, this means the previous government froze compensation levels to 2016 levels for 30,000 public-sector workers. This includes non-union administrative support, nurse practitioners, Crown prosecutors, and many more out-of-scope employees. What we're doing with the proposed legislation is focusing on the thousands of front-line workers this will support.

This new proposed, governance-focused approach would strike a better balance and provide government with more flexibility to respond to emerging circumstances. Again, to be clear, this approach applies only to non-union compensation, to the 30,000 out-of-scope public-sector workers who help keep the public sector rolling. It would not change how unions work with their members or how they bargain with the employer on behalf of their members. Nothing in the proposed legislation would change the governance structures of individual public agencies or the relationships between agencies and ministries.

The proposed legislation would repeal the current legislation as it has been a source of frustration for employers and government because it is so prescriptive and rigid. It has been challenging for public-sector employers to compete and recruit and retain top-quality staff.

As I said, the current regulations do not take into account inflation and the evolving labour market conditions. The proposed legislation would streamline and harmonize the government's direction for non-union compensation across Alberta's public sector. Specifically, it would apply to Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health. This legislation would not impact any restructuring of Alberta Health Services. It would also apply to all postsecondary institutions except independent academic institutions, including Ambrose University, Burman University, Concordia University, The King's University, and St. Mary's University. As well, it would apply to some public agencies such as Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission, Alberta Innovates, Travel Alberta, and the Workers' Compensation Board.

Treasury Board and Finance staff have consulted with all of the groups that would be governed by this legislation, and their advice and suggestions are greatly valued. The proposed legislation enables a more flexible approach to compensation regulation that envisions the development of a common compensation policy that would apply across the public sector and would include provisions applicable to all employers. Built into this system would be a process for compensation planning. Employers would be required to work with the government to develop competitive compensation plans for their organizations. The plans would be reviewed and approved by the government before being put into place.

The proposed legislation also allows for the creation of shared structures to support ongoing collaboration between public agencies and the government on compensation and bargaining priorities. Voluntary, employer-driven groups could be used for better co-ordination amongst employers. There could also be a separate group that would serve as a forum for employers to engage with government on bargaining and public-sector compensation. These proposed changes aim to strike the right balance between public-sector employer independence and autonomy and oversight of public dollars now and into the future.

It would also ensure that Alberta can continue to attract and retain top talent. This province is fortunate to have hundreds of thousands of

dedicated employees, and on behalf of all Albertans I thank each and every one of them for their tireless efforts. The proposed legislation is a starting point. It is enabling. I assure you there will be continued consultation with employers to develop the details and processes to support a new compensation framework if the legislation is passed.

5:00

The proposed legislation allows for changes to occur and would take time to complete and be done in collaboration with employers. The legislation will help us evolve with changing labour market conditions and remain competitive. It would secure Alberta's future as a top destination for highly skilled workers while ensuring strong fiscal oversight, and it would harmonize government's direction for compensation across Alberta's public sector.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Public Health Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Speaker: Now the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023.

The amendments to section 29 of the act proposed in this bill are in response to a court ruling this past summer commonly known to many as the Ingram decision. The Public Health Act in its current form requires that all decisions with respect to public health orders during a declared state of public health emergency be made by medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health. Delegation of the chief medical officer of health's decision-making authority to cabinet is not permitted in the act in its current state. The COVID-19 pandemic and Justice Romaine's decision showed us that the Public Health Act must more clearly define the roles and responsibilities of cabinet and medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health, and that is what the proposed amendments in Bill 6 would do, Madam Speaker.

Amendments to section 29 of the Public Health Act would provide clarity about who is responsible for decisions on public health orders during a declared state of public health emergency. Of course, the chief medical officer of health will continue to play a vital advisory role, but amendments would ensure that cabinet and cabinet committees would have the discretionary authority to make final decisions with respect to public health orders affecting all persons or a group of persons, including a group of individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and educational settings, during a declared state of public health emergency where appropriate. Of course, these decisions would be made after taking into account any advice from the chief medical officer of health. Medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health, would retain final decision-making authority for orders impacting a specific person or persons or specific public places.

Madam Speaker, Albertans elect MLAs to represent them and to make difficult decisions when the situation requires. In turn, MLAs are accountable to those who elect them. As we all saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, public health emergencies call for difficult decisions. Legislation needs to be clear about who is responsible for making those decisions, and those making such important decisions must be accountable to the public. The proposed amendments to the Public Health Act make these necessary clarifications by giving cabinet and cabinet committees final discretionary decision-making authority during a declared state of public health emergency. These

decisions would be based on scientific and medical evidence and collaboration from the chief medical officers of health.

To further clarify cabinet's final decision-making authority, proposed changes in Bill 6 add a paramountcy clause that would provide cabinet with the discretionary authority to reverse or vary any decision of any decision-maker under the act beyond or outside of a declared state of public health emergency. This means that outside of a declared state of public health emergency, cabinet could have final decision-making authority over all decisions under the Public Health Act.

We know that public health emergencies occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic both during and after a public health order had lapsed, and this clause will allow important decisions to be made by Albertans through their democratically elected government.

By establishing clear lines of responsibility and accountability, all of the proposed amendments in Bill 6 affirm that the people elected by Albertans should make the final decisions based on scientific and medical evidence during a state of public health emergency. The amendments to section 29 of the act provide a response to the court's ruling this summer and align with our own legislation, with how things were and how they should be done. They make sure that next time Alberta declares a state of public health emergency, everyone understands their roles and who is making the final decisions.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7 Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 7, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023.

The proposed act will make changes to legislation which clarify the use of the "software engineer" title broadly to help attract skilled tech-sector talent. The Alberta government delegates self-governing responsibilities for certain professions and occupations to professional regulatory organizations. These organizations are responsible for the governance, registration, conduct, and discipline of their registrants. They are also responsible for ensuring their registrants deliver services in a way that protects life, health, property, the environment, and the economic interests of Albertans. Currently the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, otherwise known as APEGA, governs the engineering profession in accordance with the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act, which regulates use of the job title "engineer."

This current legislation is outdated and does not reflect how "software engineer" is used in the global technology sector. Today the term "software engineer" is used quite commonly in the tech sector to refer to the skilled individuals who work on the software that we interact with every day. Sometimes that software is safety critical, like the software that runs an elevator or a water treatment plant. In other instances that software does not directly affect our safety; for example, basic apps or games we use on our phones every day. The challenge we are facing is that Alberta's growing technology sector is currently unable to broadly use the title "software engineer," which has hampered its ability to compete for global talent and has the potential to jeopardize the significant growth we have seen in the tech

sector as tech businesses are highly mobile and have indicated that they can easily relocate to jurisdictions where it is easier to operate.

Our legislation today restricts the use of the term "engineer" such that only those who are professional engineers and registered with APEGA are permitted to use the title "engineer." The technology sector wants a greater ability to use the title "software engineer" to attract talent to positions where the title "software engineer" is broadly used in international recruitment. However, we would like to make it clear that we are only referring to use of title. Any work that involves the practice of engineering should and will continue to be fully regulated by APEGA.

Alberta is competing to attract new capital investments in the technology sector. We're competing to grow this sector and continue to diversify our economy, and we are competing for talent. Alberta's government has committed to technology sector growth through the Alberta technology and innovation strategy and is investing significant funding to ensure Alberta is competitive and is considered a leader globally. The sector has voiced quite strongly that one of their key talent attraction barriers is the inability to legally use the title "engineer" in their recruitment efforts and that many candidates will not even look at their job postings without the term "engineer."

Globally most of the world uses the title "software engineer" freely. They use it to post jobs. They use it on their websites, their business cards, et cetera. An ability to use it here in Alberta would help our companies compete to attract talent from a talent pool that is used to seeing this term in job ads.

Cam Linke, CEO at the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute, supports Bill 7 and recognizes the impact it will have on talent attraction, stating, "This is another example of the province listening to the tech sector about removing barriers in order to attract the best talent to Alberta and further grow industries and job opportunities for all Albertans."

5:10

In the mandate letters that came out this summer, the Premier has directed the Minister of Technology and Innovation and myself to ensure appropriate governance of software engineers that does not compromise the technology industry's ability to attract needed software engineers from around the world. APEGA is a self-governing entity that operates at arm's length from the government. Alberta's government has given APEGA direction to interpret and apply the act and to do so independent of us.

That brings us to the reason that we are making amendments to EGPA. The proposed Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act will allow the broader use of the term "software engineer" while protecting the health, safety, and economic interests of all Albertans. I'll touch on some key features of the bill. As I previously mentioned, the new act will be an amendment to the current EGPA. It will provide a consistent and standard way for the tech industry to carry out common, globally recognized core functions of the software engineering title while APEGA continues with governance, registration, and addressing professional conduct and discipline.

The Minister of Technology and Innovation and I think that this is a reasonable step to meet the needs of industry while not compromising public safety. We realize that some organizations and their professions may have unique needs and requirements. For a number of years APEGA has been asking the government to update the tools they have available to assess compliance with their act generally. Their act was last significantly updated in 1981, and their authorities are limited when compared to many modern-day regulators such as Quebec's engineering regulator, which has the

power to compel people to provide information. My ministry will also engage and conduct research to determine whether APEGA should receive additional legislative tools to help ensure that we don't see companies inadvertently getting involved in engineering work that may have safety impacts.

Madam Speaker, tech professionals add value and contribute to the economic success of our province. Since 2018 the number of tech companies operating in Alberta nearly tripled, from 1,238 companies to 3,083 companies. ATIS estimates that by 2030 Alberta technology companies could generate an additional \$5 billion in annual revenue and create over 20,000 new jobs. We are already seeing incredible momentum, and I'm confident that it will continue.

Speaking of protecting the public interest, public members are essential to help APEGA carry out their duties. The government appoints public members to the organization's governing bodies to ensure the public's interest is represented. Public members serve on professional regulatory organization governing bodies along with tribunals for complaints, discipline, or appeals. The current legislation governing engineering is more than 30 years old, as I had mentioned before, and didn't take technological advances or other changes into account. Madam Speaker, Bill 7 is an important step towards bringing professional engineering legislation into the modern world. It will serve to support the momentum in the tech sector.

Madam Speaker, stakeholder input has been critical as we move forward with the legislation amendments to the EGPA. Advanced Education and Technology and Innovation met with stakeholders to explore perspectives as we worked to develop the best solution, which was to amend the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act. Stakeholders included a few existing professional regulatory organizations, experts from our postsecondary education institutions, and leaders from the tech sector as well. All of the stakeholders were passionate, expressive, and generous with their time. I would like to thank them at this moment. They were enormously helpful to the Minister of Technology and Innovation and I in seeking a resolution to this issue, and we have already received tremendous feedback from leaders in the tech sector after yesterday's announcement.

According to Benjamin Bergen, president of the Council of Canadian Innovators, Alberta continues to be a place that invests and evolves to support its fast-growing technology sector. This is another example of the province listening to the tech sector about removing barriers in order to attract the best talent to Alberta and further grow industries and job opportunities for all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I'm confident that Bill 7 will pass. After the bill passes, we will continue to engage with APEGA in the coming months as we potentially explore additional tools that may be needed to help with overseeing this legislation. I'm confident their input will continue to help make Alberta's professional legislation the best in the country.

If passed, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act will take effect on royal assent, which is expected to happen in late 2023. Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues in this Assembly to support Bill 7. By passing this bill, we can begin a new era of bringing qualified tech professionals to Alberta. APEGA will continue to do their important work of safeguarding the public interest and safety of all Albertans. It will help attract a job-creating investment to support Alberta's economic recovery.

I look forward to the debate on Bill 7 and hearing the comments hon. members may have. I encourage members to participate in the debate and to support Bill 7.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 7, Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4
Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023
(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 4 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 4 is the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. It incorporates a bunch of conforming changes between federal and provincial taxes, also extends the fuel tax pause, which was an election promise by the government.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Albertans are facing a cost-of-living crisis. Now more than ever we need the government to make decisions that keep costs low for ordinary Albertans. We have long supported the fuel tax pause and were the voice behind its extension in 2022. The fuel tax should indeed be paused until inflation levels stabilize. Many Albertans are living paycheque to paycheque, and hundreds and thousands are on the brink of homelessness. This pause will help keep a roof over their head and help them afford essentials like food and utilities, the costs of which are increasing all the time, especially utilities, which are under the control of government action, Mr. Speaker.

On some of the other tax changes the Alberta NDP supports the move to align provincial income tax policy for people living with disabilities with the federal government. This change will provide clarity on who qualifies for the disability tax credit. It also ensures that the lower threshold is consistent between federal and provincial legislation. This means more people with disabilities will qualify for disability payments and is a good move to help people who need it. We support this lower threshold for people with disabilities to qualify as it means more Albertans are getting the support that they need.

Another provision of the bill includes changes to how the tourism levy is collected. Now, this one: we support the tourism levy being equitably applied, but we're concerned that there's been some confusion over how it gets collected, and we're just not yet sure. Something I look forward to in the debate is finding out more from the government about how that tourism levy is going to be collected and how we can ensure compliance.

5:20

Stepping back, on July 1, 2023, the tourism levy was to begin to be collected by online brokers as well as aggregators such as Vrbo and Airbnb. Prior to that, there was a voluntary remittance of the tourism levy by operators of homestays like Airbnb, and I understand that the number of operators actually remitting the payment voluntarily was small. Therefore, the previous version of the tourism levy actually required those aggregators and brokers to collect the levy on behalf of the operator. For a variety of reasons that I don't understand – I'm looking forward to finding out more – that didn't really work out in practice.

This bill actually puts the burden of collecting that tourism levy into the hands of the operators themselves. It is a burden. It means that the operator will have to apply for a tourism levy identification number. They will have to keep track of all of their paperwork, ensure that the returns are filed, that the appropriate levies are remitted back to the government, and, of course, collect that from their clients. There is, apparently, an IT infrastructure that allows Airbnb and Vrbo to collect this once all the numbers and all the paperwork are done. It

is going to be a substantial change in how operators of homestays and Vrbo and Airbnbs run their businesses, and they will need support to make sure that that happens.

From my perspective, what I would be concerned about is making sure that that tourism levy is applied equitably, that the hotels are not suffering at an unfair disadvantage against homestay operators, who are perhaps gaming the system a little bit by hoping to sneak under the radar and not actually levy the tourism levy as they're required to. Again, those kinds of questions are something that I'm looking forward to finding out more about in the debate because, certainly, an unlevel playing field helps no one.

While we're on the topic of the tourism levy, you know, one of the issues around that is that the purpose of that levy having been instituted was twofold. One was to compensate those communities who faced the burden of tourism in terms of, you know, just the stress that it places on the infrastructure, to enable those communities to invest in their infrastructure, and make it possible for those communities that already draw tourism to develop their tourism infrastructure so that we could attract more.

The second reason is part of tourism marketing. We have a multitude of agencies that are responsible for marketing Alberta and coming to Alberta and touring in Alberta. Travel Alberta is a perfect example. That is not actually how the levy is allocated. The levy, of course, like many levies, is allocated to general revenue, and the budget sets out, you know, what funding Travel Alberta and similar agencies receive. It's often been a sticky point, especially for those constituencies with a high level of tourism activity. They depend on these levies in order to upgrade their infrastructure and in order to market themselves, and they're not having the ability to do that.

That's not the purpose of this bill, but I note that this is an opportunity for Treasury Board and Finance to have another look at that and maybe give the communities that are providing this incredible tourism benefit the foreign exchange earnings that come from tourism to invest in their own communities and market their own unique characteristics.

Around these changes to online brokers about their role in collecting and remitting the tourism levy, we also hope that the UCP will proclaim the sections of the act that equitably collect the tourism levy from all hotels or homestays and pass regulations to ensure that the leakage is minimal.

This is a bill that basically enables Treasury Board and Finance to put together a suite of regulations, and from our conversations with stakeholders it appears to be very clear that those stakeholders are eagerly awaiting the regulations because that's what will determine how they collect the levy, who is responsible for it, and what consequences are to be faced by operators who, frankly, don't comply.

Around the cost-of-living challenges that the fuel tax extension is meant to handle, again, the fuel tax extension is a very small but extremely welcome piece, and I believe it's the first concrete proposal that the UCP government has made in actually addressing the affordability crisis in this legislative session that Albertans are facing. They are facing a crisis with fuel costs, with home heating, and especially with electricity, so this fuel tax pause extension actually impacts only one of those elements. By far the largest impact on Albertans with their energy and utility bills right now is electricity.

There's something of a missed opportunity, really, in this bill that it doesn't include any sort of action from the government around addressing the affordability of electricity, and that is something that is entirely within this government's control. Electricity prices are high because wholesale prices are high. Why are wholesale prices high? Wholesale prices are high because of an oligopoly.

[interjections] Oligopolistic – no. Failed again. Don't try that again. An oligopoly of dispatchable generation that is held within the hands of only a small number of operators, and the market design of the electricity market allows bidders to withhold their power.

Now, this was put in place a number of years ago. It was put in place for valid economic reasons at the time, but it presupposes that there is actually a competitive market, and in fact right now there isn't. This isn't me talking. This is actually research from the University of Calgary. Dr. Blake Shaffer has spent a long time not just trading Alberta power but also post his trading career has done a great deal of work on electricity market design.

5:30

The important thing here is that it is entirely under the government's control to make tweaks or changes to the market design that would allow utility rates to fall. Now, that's hard; it's complicated, and I can, you know, fully understand that maybe there are lawmakers across the aisle who are easily bored by the hard work and challenges of making a robust electrical market design that keeps prices low for ordinary Albertans while continuing to motivate investment. That's why you get weird stuff like bans on renewables and stuff that just will make everything worse for everyone.

This bill should have something in there about keeping electricity affordable for Albertans, and if the members of the government don't want to do the hard work of actually examining the electrical market design and improving it, then they should at least bring back a temporary cap on utility bills, which the Alberta NDP government, when it was in power, had in place.

I'll note, just to correct some misinformation here, that it is not necessary to ban investments in any form of energy in order to proceed with a review of how electricity markets work and how to keep prices low and how to manage transmission and distribution costs. All of those things can be done simultaneously, as the Premier is fond of pointing out. It is possible to walk and chew gum at the same time; it just turns out that it's not possible to walk and chew gum when it comes to renewable energy and all of the billions of dollars of capital investment that those projects are going to bring to Alberta and all the jobs that they're going to create.

The fuel tax rebate that is going on right now, that this bill proposes to lock in until January 1, is very welcome. This will make a difference for a number of Albertans. It will add, you know, a few dollars a month to Albertans who are struggling with an affordability crisis. So we on this side of the aisle are very pleased that the government is doing that to address their concerns.

Stepping to the Tourism Levy Act for a minute here. This bill contemplates a retroactive repeal of the provisions of the Tourism Levy Act through July 1, 2023, after which time period, when the new regulations are put in place, operators are going to be required to remit that levy back to July 1, 2023. So for operators who may not be aware that this requirement exists right now, they are going to have to reserve starting from three months ago and continuing on until this bill is passed and the regulations are promulgated.

What I want to know and what I'm looking for information on in debate is how those operators are going to be supported not just in their legal requirements to collect the levy but also to ensure that they know that they have to be reserving for it now so that they're not faced with an extremely uncomfortable and possibly very business-challenging payment, you know, for months of uncollected tourism levy, whether the regulations will contemplate that there will be a phase-in period, for example, or a period of time in which operators have flexibility to make whole their obligations. It's for, you know, the protection of both operators, in making sure that they know what their obligations are, as well as consumer protection, to make sure that consumers who are paying the levy in good faith have that

portion actually remitted to the government. It's extremely important, I think to everyone, that that occurs in a timely manner and that all the operators are aware that they're going to need to come up with that cash when they're required to do it and that they should be reserving for it now.

I'm interested in knowing what provisions the government has made to advertise their obligations to ensure that homestay operators know that they're going to need, you know, to identify who they are, whether the government is proposing funds for auditing the tourism levy and for making sure that it actually gets collected.

With that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Are there any others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner has risen, and he'll be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are feeling the pressure of living in the midst of our current Prime Minister's failed economic policies. A few constituents that spoke to me named affordability and the carbon tax as the largest concerns which they have living in Alberta today. The affordability issue, which many provinces, including our own, are dealing with, in part can be blamed on the inflationary spending of the federal government. We did not cause these concerns, but this government will take action to address them.

Our government recognizes that action needs to be taken on affordability. Bill 4 modifies various tax acts within Alberta, including the Fuel Tax Act, Tourism Levy Act, Alberta's Personal Income Tax Act, and Alberta Corporate Tax Act, which all have large effects on our economic landscape and administrative efficiencies. This bill is essential to provide relief to Albertans and ensures our commitment to a fair, more accessible and supportive tax system.

The first thing which Bill 4 does is retroactively legislate the extension of the provincial fuel tax pause to the end of 2023. We understand the financial challenges that many Albertans, including my constituents, are facing, and this government is working to ease those burdens. The pause which we put on the fuel tax helps Albertans every time they go to the pump, letting them see real relief which is putting money directly into their pockets. Albertans will save 13 cents per litre every single time they fill up their vehicles. With affordability being at the top of their list of concerns, this is just one of many important actions which we are taking to address this issue.

It is interesting to note that the Alberta government is taking real steps to lessen the burden on Albertans, yet Canada's federal Liberals and their all-too-willing accomplices, the NDP, are driving up the cost of everyday items that we need to live. We took off the 13-cents-per-litre fuel tax, and the federal Liberals have added 13 cents on to the price of fuel through the carbon tax. One hand giveth, and the other hand taketh away. Our Alberta fuel tax is used to build hospitals, roads, schools, and so forth, so the federal government is impeding our ability to provide these necessities for Albertans.

Another important part of Bill 4 is the changes to the Tourism Levy Act. These amendments will bring in a new framework to address a gap in the current legislative surroundings surrounding the collection of essential tourism levies by online brokers. The changes in this bill will help to address industry concerns and will streamline the process, ensuring efficiency and well-defined processes for everyone. This bill will also update a number of

technical and administrative aspects of Alberta's tax system, including the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act.

5:40

These changes will ensure that our tax legislation is aligned with federal legislation, making sure things like the eligibility criteria for tax credits remain consistent across the province and federal laws. By aligning our legislation, we are making sure that Albertans and their businesses have clarity, thus efficiency and certainty.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 is an important piece of legislation to show this government's commitment to making life more affordable for Albertans and improving our economy by maintaining the technical and administrative aspects of our tax system. By extending the fuel tax pause, we provide more than just financial relief to Albertans. We are doubling down on our commitment to make life more affordable in the face of poor federal fiscal policies.

My constituents need relief at the pumps, and this bill provides for them as well as updating our tax legislation to align with federal legislation by streamlining the process, providing clarity to businesses and individuals, which helps to nurture economic growth.

This is why I support Bill 4 and urge everyone in this Chamber to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti if there's still time remaining.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 4, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, in second reading. To set the context for Bill 4, Alberta is in the worst affordability crisis in a generation. Albertans are facing higher housing costs, power bills, grocery bills, insurance, tuition, and property taxes. Now more than ever we need the government to make decisions that will make life affordable for everyday Albertans.

Many Albertans are living paycheck to paycheck. Thousands of people are on the brink of homelessness. According to a Food Banks Canada report from last year Albertans accessed the food bank at an increase more than double the national rate in comparison to pre-pandemic levels, and, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned in her member's statement earlier today, seniors are facing skyrocketing rent increases.

Allow me to address several components of this bill. First, I wish to speak about the fuel tax pause. I'm pleased to see that the fuel tax pause has been extended. I should mention that the Alberta NDP has long supported pausing the fuel tax, and in fact we were the voice behind its extension back in 2022. We supported extending the fuel tax pause due to the high cost of living and record inflation facing Albertans. We urged the minister in the summer of 2022 to extend the fuel tax pause. Keeping the fuel tax stable will help Albertans keep a roof over their heads and afford essentials like food and utilities. While I'm happy to see the pause extended, the government should have done this sooner. Had the pause been implemented sooner, it would have provided relief to families dealing with financial stress and anxiety. Albertans deserve clarity on the costs they will face.

Next allow me to discuss Bill 4's amendments to the Personal Income Tax Act and its impact on persons with disabilities. On this side of the House we support the move to align Alberta's personal income tax policy for people living with disabilities with the federal government's. This change will provide clarity on who qualifies for the disability tax credit. It also ensures the lowered threshold is consistent between both federal and provincial legislation. I support

this lowered threshold for people with disabilities, as it means more Albertans can more easily access supports.

Now on to Bill 4 amendments to the Tourism Levy Act. We support the tourism levy being equitably applied, but on this side of the House we have serious concerns that the UCP can't seem to get this right for short-term rental brokers. The format of Bill 4 leaves the charges in the hands of operators, who have to register for a tourism levy ID, and it is our hope that these changes will provide the clarity to online brokers about their role in collecting and remitting the tourism levy and that the UCP will proclaim the sections of the act that equitably collect the tourism levy from all hotel or homestays with minimal leakage.

Now, I wish to connect the fuel tax pause to the larger economic issues that Albertans face. When we look at the fuel tax pause, we need to look at the big picture and measure Bill 4 against the enormity of Alberta's cost-of-living crisis.

Albertans want this government to fix the problems we are facing today such as the staggering cost of living and our worsening health care system. The facts of the cost-of-living crisis are grim. As previously mentioned by some of my colleagues earlier today, utility bills have doubled in the last year. Auto insurance is up 30 per cent. Tuition is up almost 30 per cent. Municipal taxes have increased due to funding cuts and downloaded costs to municipalities. The number of doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent over the past four years. School and bus fees are up. Alberta students get less funding per student than anywhere else in the country. And we're short many thousands of educational assistants after the UCP have underfunded education.

As I mentioned earlier in my member's statement, growth pressures mean that this government is woefully behind in building schools in my riding of Edmonton-South West, and that results in class sizes that are at unacceptable levels, long commutes to school, many children spending over an hour on the bus each way, and, frankly, the fragmentation of families and communities and neighbourhoods. When we contrast the fuel tax pause of Bill 4 against the reality faced by Alberta's working families and the reality faced by small to medium-sized businesses, it becomes clear that there is so much more work to do.

We must also remember that on matters of affordability the NDP has led the way. As I mentioned earlier in my speech, we wrote to the minister in the summer of '22 to extend the fuel tax pause. It is also important to remember, Mr. Speaker, that the previous Alberta NDP government imposed rate caps on both utilities and auto insurance premiums before the current inflation crisis, I might add, and it was the UCP government that then removed these caps, only to reinstate a temporary deferral after several consecutive months of record inflation and a public outcry. I sense a pattern where the UCP borrows Alberta NDP ideas and follows the lead of this side of the House, and I say: keep doing it.

Mr. Speaker, we can maintain affordability through promoting Alberta's economic prosperity, and that includes building the hospitals, schools, rec centres, roads, and bridges we need to keep our economy strong.

Maintaining affordability, like what Bill 4 seeks to deliver, means maintaining a strong economy. Alberta needs to see real action to grow and diversify the economy. For example, the provincial government needs to promote diversification within our oil and gas and petrochemical sectors, including finding new ways to use our bitumen and boosting petrochemical refining in Alberta's Industrial Heartland and investing in value-added industries within the petrochemical industry, all previously proposed by the Alberta NDP. Alberta needs visionary leadership that will expand our province's development of hydrogen fuels, exploration of

geothermal wells, and extraction of more rare-earth minerals as well as taking advantage of clean energy.

Mr. Speaker, the government also needs to diversify the economy in other ways. For example, we must continue to support the development of advanced technology, value-added agricultural products, and beyond, and this government must finally implement the digital media tax credit, something this side of the House has repeatedly championed.

Mr. Speaker, the government needs to do so much more to restore and maintain affordability, that Albertans deserve. Bill 4 addresses one small step towards the affordability crisis that we're facing, but more needs to be done.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This bill isn't just about a few legislative amendments here or there; it's about making things easier and fairer for folks in Alberta. We're all about keeping our promises, and part of that is making sure that our tax laws aren't just a bunch of complicated words but also work for us and help our economy stay strong and steady.

5:50

Let's kick things off with what we're doing with the Fuel Tax Act. We're talking about keeping the fuel tax on hold until December. Now, this isn't just a random move. It's a big deal because it means that when you're filling up your truck or car, you won't be hit with that extra bit of tax on your fuel. We know that prices at the pump can be a pain, and they keep bouncing up and down. This tax break is like us saying: we've got your back. It's a big help for everyday people: folks driving trucks across this province, farmers working the fields, and small-business owners trying to make a living. This is us throwing them a lifeline to help keep their businesses alive and kicking without the extra worry of fuel taxes.

Moving on to the Tourism Levy Act. We're tweaking the rules around the tax money that comes in from people staying in hotels and such, but it's not just hotels anymore; it's lots of folks renting out rooms or houses online. We need to update our rules to catch up with these new ways of doing things. This is only fair. It helps our tourism business keep up with the changing times.

Then there's the personal income tax side of things. What we're aiming for here is to get our rules to match up with what the federal government has. It's about cutting through the confusion so that you don't have to scratch your head over different tax rules. We want to make it simple for everyone to figure out what taxes they owe and to make sure they get the tax breaks they are due without getting lost in the maze of paperwork.

We're not forgetting about businesses either, especially the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. There's this thing called the innovation employment grant. It's pretty important because it exists to give businesses a boost when they're working on cool new ideas. We've noticed some parts of it aren't working or aren't quite hitting the mark, so we're going to straighten that out to make sure that the money goes to the right places and it's all done fairly. Every single change we're making here, every little adjustment to the law is about building a tax system that's straightforward, fair, and helpful to our economy. We're not just here to collect money; we're here to make sure that our tax system actually helps Alberta grow.

We want everyone to know that their government isn't just sitting back. We're actively trying to make life better for them. We're making sure that the tax rules make sense and that they stay that

way. Albertans should feel sure about what's coming their way and know that we're looking out for them not just today but down the line, too. These changes are a big part of our plan. They're about giving Alberta a break, helping our businesses grow stronger, and making sure our communities thrive. It's more than just adjusting numbers. It's being real. It's about real lives, real growth, and the well-being of all our neighbourhoods.

By making these tweaks, we're going to make sure that everything works better for businesses, which is good news for everyone. It means more jobs and more stable, more prosperous life for the people in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this isn't just government talk; this is about action. This law is the way of showing that we mean business when it comes to our economy. To all Albertans out there: I want you to know that with these changes we're protecting our way of life today and creating a future that's bright and secure for each and every one of us.

To sum it all up, these changes are all about making things better. We're cutting through the red tape, keeping money in your pockets, and ensuring our province stays and is a great place to work. It's about being fair, clear, and supportive. And let's not forget that it's also about trust, the trust you have in us to manage the rules in a way that benefits all of us. We know that taxes aren't the most exciting thing to talk about, but they really do affect all of our lives. These changes we're talking about: they're a real big deal because they're going to make life a little easier for all of us here in Alberta.

I stand here in front of you, Mr. Speaker, and in front of every person in Alberta with a promise. These amendments, these changes to our tax laws: they're proof that we're looking out for you, fighting for you, and making sure that our province doesn't just keep up but leads the way into the future. These tax law amendments are our commitment letter to Alberta. They tell a story of the government that listens, acts, and delivers, a government that sees beyond the horizon and ensures that each step we take secures a better, brighter, more prosperous future for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all Albertans for trusting us with this important work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on her feet.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak somewhat briefly to Bill 4, which is the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I think I would like to begin my comments by saying – this bill does a couple of different things. It's worth, I think, putting on the record – I do this sometimes – things that the government is doing that we actually like. We had called several times for the extension of the fuel tax pause. We're happy to see that that is in there. I don't think it is enough to help people with their cost of living, but it is a concrete step forward, so that is good. I think there is definitely more that could be done in this regard. I think, for instance, of the issue of economic withholding, which is driving power prices significantly in the province.

I'm hopeful that we will see more steps like this from the government because I think – cost of living: I mean, it was already an issue. It was already an issue, the inability of a regular family to afford, you know, housing and hockey camp and a vacation a year, like a fairly simple life. That was already an issue when I first ran in 2015. It was one of the things that caused me to want to run in the first place. I think that problem has only become worse. We went through a very serious recession. We have been four and a half years now under our government, who seems to be taking us in the wrong direction on that file. So those things are a concern.

Also, I think we're questioning the tourism levy, and I guess my questions on that are – it seems to be repealing changes that required brokers like Airbnb and Vrbo to collect and remit the tourism levy. You know, what's important about having those brokers do that is that for individual people, their ability to do that is a bit more limited. To me, it seems like that would be the obvious mechanism by which to do that, so I'm interested to see that the government is changing that. They're saying that they'll collect the levy from the purchaser. I don't know if they're doing that, like, at the time of purchase or how that – because it has to sort of go through and be remitted. I'm just curious as to the mechanism of that and how it's intended to work, because it seemed like it ought to have worked before. I'm just curious: what has the government heard, and why are they changing it? Like, what was wrong with the previous mechanism, and why are we changing to this new mechanism?

I'm hopeful that we'll actually hear the answers. It used to be the case, once upon a time in this place, that members would ask questions and ministers would do their best in subsequent speaking opportunities to answer those questions. We haven't seen that in four and a half years, but new Premier; perhaps we'll see a new attitude in this place, and maybe some of those questions will be answered.

Those are, I would say, the main questions I have on that. I think the other thing worth noting about this bill is that it really doesn't do anything to address some of the biggest issues that are facing people today in Alberta: the cost-of-living crisis, for instance, the mounting crisis in health care, the fact that we haven't had new schools built in quite a long time. I think there are a number of things that the government could be addressing, and I hope that they will turn their minds to addressing those things, to governing the people of the province, the people that sent us here. At the end of the day, I think that that is a responsibility. It's one we should all take seriously. I'm hoping that perhaps we can see a more respectful attitude in this new . . .

The Speaker: Well, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	133
Introduction of Visitors	133
Introduction of Guests	133
Members' Statements	
Seniors' Issues.....	134
Remembrance Day	134
Agency, Board, and Commission Executive Compensation.....	135
2023 Wildfires.....	135
School Construction in Southwest Edmonton	135
Community Initiatives in Calgary-Falconridge	144
Oral Question Period	
Health System Reform.....	136
Premier's Appearance on <i>Tucker Carlson Live</i>	137
Disability Benefits.....	138
Technology Industry Development	138
Affordable Housing.....	139
Firefighter Training and Funding	139
Municipal Funding	140
Women's Shelters.....	140
Irrigation Infrastructure Water Management	141
Funding for Policing.....	141
Affordable Child Care	142
Addiction Treatment Drug Use and Crime Prevention.....	143
School Construction in Calgary-Foothills	143
Presenting Petitions	144
Tabling Returns and Reports	144
Orders of the Day	145
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 1 Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.....	145
Third Reading	
Bill 1 Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023.....	147
Division	154
Second Reading	
Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act	154
Bill 4 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	155, 159
Bill 5 Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023	156
Bill 6 Public Health Amendment Act, 2023	157
Bill 7 Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023	158

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