



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 20, 2023

Day 9

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 20, 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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to former members of this Assembly who have passed since we last met.

Mr. Neville Sydney Roper March 5, 1922, to August 28, 2023

The Speaker: Mr. Neville S. Roper served as the Alberta Social Credit Member for Ponoka from 1967 to 1971. Prior to his service as a member Mr. Roper served his country during the Second World War in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was first elected to public office in 1953 as a councillor in Rimbey and then as mayor from 1960 to 1966 and again from 1972 to 1977.

Mr. Roper was involved in numerous boards and associations, including the Union of Alberta Municipalities, the Rimbey Municipal Hospital Board, and the Royal Canadian Legion. He spoke with pride of his advocacy for senior citizens, for the senior citizen lodge in Rimbey in 1971, and continued with his community support into his 90s, volunteering to drive residents and seniors in wheelchairs to and from their appointments using the Rimbey community van. He received the Queen Elizabeth II golden jubilee medal in '22.

Mr. Roper passed away on August 28, 2023, at the age of 101. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Neville S. Roper each as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Marie Hill and her daughter Nora Hill. I invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the family members of those who have served this Assembly, and today we pay tribute to former member Neville Roper. It is my honour to introduce members of Neville's family who are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. I ask them to rise and remain

standing. It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Roper's daughter Lisa Madsen, grandsons Kelly and Dain Madsen, and great-grandson, Jacob Anderson. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: It's also my pleasure to introduce our anthem singers this afternoon. Marie Hill and her daughter Nora Hill have been lifelong Edmontonians and have a deep, deep love for music. You may catch Nora singing her heart out in the Citadel's *A Christmas Carol* playing this season. Marie has sung the anthem at Rogers Place a number of times, at Commonwealth Stadium for football games. They're happy to share their love of country through song today. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also, it is my pleasure to introduce members of the public service joining us in the gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores legislative, budgetary, and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply this knowledge to their role in the public service. I ask that you all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

There are also a number of school groups joining us, and I'll call upon the hon. Member for Sherwood Park to introduce the first one.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce the students and staff from Mills Haven, where I attended kindergarten, in the great community of Sherwood Park. Please rise and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Hodgkinson's grade 6 class from St. Bonaventure school in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are here with their teacher, parent volunteers, and staff for School at the Legislature, and I was so happy to spend some time with them this morning. Great questions. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my mom, Josie Fir; friends and constituents Lyle Rowe and Diana Rowe; and friend Cathy Harbinson. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Charlie Bredo, current board member of the Alberta Craft Distillers Association, as well as prominent brewery and business owners in the Leduc area: Lynn Schrader, Lorraine Schrader, Eric Schrader, and Michelle Schwengler. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you former MLA for Banff-Cochrane Cam Westhead, and he's brought with him a whole slew of nurses: Mary Rose, Brooke, Victoria, Beth, Melissa, Jackie, Edith-Rose, James, Jane, Tony, Lien, Katharina, Melinda. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests: Diane Dammann, Dorothy Fisher, Odette Dionne, and Julia Feltham. They are joining us from the Alberta Women's Institutes. I'd like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the remainder of the nurses who are joining us here in the gallery today: Jerry, Paul, Stephanie, Opa, Gladys, Colleen, Wanda, Anahi, Janet, Margaret, Rosanne, Tracy, and Devon. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House and our deep thanks for their courageous work on the front lines of our health care system.

The Speaker: Are there any other introductions? The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. With me I've got Chief Danny Gaudet of Dêlîŋe Got'ine – he's a chief with the government of Northwest Territories – and Danny's business partner and former mayor of Tuktoyaktuk, Mervyn Gruben. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary–Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House my daughter Ana. She is a dedicated student, volunteer, and gives me hope for the future of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan–Vegreville.

Women's Entrepreneurship Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, November 19, marked Women's Entrepreneurship Day, celebrating the ambition, triumphs, and invaluable contributions of women entrepreneurs in our province. Their perseverance, innovation, and determination have not only shaped our economy but have also significantly influenced our community's growth and prosperity.

Empowering women in our economy is a blueprint for a thriving Alberta. My colleague the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women has a clear mandate to support Alberta's women. Our efforts are resolute, backed by initiatives like the Women's Hub, an online resource directory providing vital support and information. Through scholarships like Women in STEM and Persons Case we're fostering an environment that encourages women to excel in fields traditionally dominated by men.

But it doesn't end there. Through the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade our government offers strategic investments and partnerships designed to empower women in our workforce. The workforce strategies, workforce partnership grants, and self-employment program, where women constitute a significant percentage, are testaments of our commitment towards enabling women to reach new heights of success. Our Alberta at Work initiative, with an investment of \$700 million, ensures that women have equitable access to the resources and skills needed for fulfilling careers and meaningful contributions to our diverse

economy. We are seeing a dramatic rise in women-owned businesses in Alberta. The wage gap is closing for women in our province, and more women are entering fields of study and employment that they are traditionally underrepresented in.

I encourage all Albertans not only to applaud these incredible women entrepreneurs but to actively support their businesses. Investing in women-owned enterprises not only fosters economic growth but also inspires future generations of women leaders. As we celebrate Women's Entrepreneurship Day, let us renew our commitment to creating an environment where women thrive, excel, and lead, shaping a brighter and more inclusive future for Alberta.

Thank you.

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on Transgender Day of Remembrance to speak directly to Albertans who are two-spirit, transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse. Your existence is not an ideology, nor is it a debate; it is an undeniable reality. Your rights are human rights, and the Alberta NDP stands with you always.

Transphobia is on the rise across Canada, and we must be bold in our actions of allyship. We know that transgender and gender-diverse individuals are five times more likely to attempt suicide, and in 2023 320 transgender and gender-diverse people, at least, were murdered. Many transgender individuals have unmet health care needs as a result of a lack of access to quality, affirming, affordable care. Demonstrations of hate targeting transgender and gender-diverse people are becoming more common. We have leaders across the country devaluing transgender people through their words and through their actions and simultaneously voting to adopt policies that would put already vulnerable youth at further risk.

This government and the Premier fail to unequivocally condemn this hate and are therefore normalizing this intolerance. The Premier will soon be sitting down with Tucker Carlson, who emboldens this kind of hateful ideology and weaponizes misinformation. Carlson once referred to trans and gender-diverse people as, quote, the natural enemy. It is shameful for him, for any Albertan, or any Canadian to attempt to eradicate the human rights and dignity of others through such hateful rhetoric, and we cannot ignore the harm it brings.

Mr. Speaker, as members of the community with the honour and privilege of sitting in this House, we must be steadfast and resolute in protecting the rights and dignity of each and every Albertan, ensuring a true sense of belonging, especially if they choose to call this province home. Each member of this House has a responsibility to build a safe and inclusive community. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Federal Impact Assessment Act Court Ruling

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, the results are in: we've scored a big win for Alberta and it's about time. The Supreme Court told Ottawa and the Prime Minister that they went too far with a law they tried to push on us. Some folks even nicknamed it the No More Pipelines Act. Imagine that, a law that would have hurt Albertans, killed jobs and growth in our province.

From the get-go our team, the UCP, believed that this law wasn't playing fair with Alberta. Yes, we're all for taking care of our environment. We love our majestic landscapes, we want to protect them for future generations, but we also want to make sure that we

make our own decisions. After all, it's Albertans who know what's best for our province.

Big kudos to our UCP government. We went toe to toe with this law, fighting for our province's rights. Now we see the results of that fight, and the victory is for all of us. This win isn't just about one law; it sends a message loud and clear to Ottawa saying: "Hey, remember, we're a team. Every team member has a voice. You can't make all the calls without listening to us."

Every province in Canada is unique with its own strengths, challenges, and needs. We need to be respected, heard, and considered in the big national decisions. What's great about this law is that it's not just good news for Alberta; it's good news for all provinces. It's the Supreme Court's way of saying that the folks in Ottawa can't always tell the rest of us what to do for no good reason.

We took on a big challenge, stood firm on what we believed was right, and got the support of the highest court in the land. This is a proud moment. As we move forward, let's remember this win and use it as fuel to keep pushing what's best for Alberta. Cheers to us, cheers to Alberta, and let's keep the spirit alive.

National Child Day

Member Batten: Today, November 20, is recognized as National Child Day. This day celebrates the rights of children, specifically children's rights to be heard, where they're both given the space to be heard but also to be understood; the right to be protected from harm; and the right to have their basic needs met, things like shelter, food, clean air. Today also serves as a reminder to all of us and to the rest of society of the responsibility to ensure that these rights are being met.

How are we doing here in Alberta today, protecting children? Well, we're in the middle of a housing crisis with a government that funds mats on the floors instead of permanent affordable housing. We're in the middle of a mental health crisis where the UCP ignore evidence-based, harm-reductive initiatives, leading to tragic loss of lives; a health care crisis where this government has decided to blame the consequences of their short-sighted decisions on the very same people who fought for us during the pandemic. A government slow to respond to an E coli crisis that impacted hundreds of children and families, many of whom are still suffering. Food insecurity is at an all-time high, and this government brags about increasing funding to food banks instead of addressing the root cause. Oh, yeah, and clean air: this past summer was the worst wildfire season on record, but this government again ignores the science and sets Albertans up for an even more terrible season this summer.

On this day, national children's day, let's again recall our responsibilities and put the rights of children above partisan concerns, above ideologies. When I stand in this Chamber next National Child Day, I truly hope that I have a much better report to share. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Report

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Manning report, the partisan Manning report, includes several alarming recommendations for managing public emergencies, including that so-called nonscientific evidence be balanced against peer-reviewed medical science. Given the Premier's own erratic history of promoting quack theories during a

health crisis, this recommendation is troubling. To the Premier: does she still believe that horse dewormer is a valid treatment for COVID, and does she plan to make similar recommendations as a treatment for future health emergencies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear the hon. member hasn't read the report. No surprise there. What the panel is simply asking us to do is to make sure that we look at all of the consequences if there ever is a decision for future lockdowns. Dr. Ari Joffe is one of the experts that was quoted. He, as early as 2020, was talking about undiagnosed cancers, undiagnosed stroke, undiagnosed heart disease, mental health, addiction. He was talking about the impact on children it would have, on learning loss. All of those things have to be factored in, and we absolutely will next time.

1:50

Ms Notley: He was talking about cancer. She was talking about blaming cancer victims.

Another recommendation was that the courts vet emergency management orders before they're adopted. Legal experts have already noted that this kind of requirement would paralyze the government from taking timely and effective action in the midst of an emergency. To the Premier: for a government that constantly complains about so-called red tape, why would she impose the most onerous form of red tape at a time when Albertans need their government to act as fast as possible to save lives and livelihoods?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 90 recommendations. We're going to sift through them, and then we'll determine which ones to adopt.

What I like about the approach that we take with other emergencies is that when an emergency hit, like the fires, and we needed to establish emergency measures, we had an Emergency Management Cabinet Committee that convened and met every single day throughout the month of May, making sure that we were constantly up to date on what was happening and also able to make decisions quickly. That's the model we should pursue in future.

Ms Notley: Well, the report also calls for public education to be given the highest priority in an emergency, and I actually couldn't agree more. However, forcing teachers and students into unsafe conditions is the most dangerous way to achieve this objective. Why won't the Premier acknowledge this government's failures during the pandemic re education and instead build schools, improve current schools, reduce class sizes, and invest in school-based mental health so that we can actually support kids during the next crisis?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are building schools. They didn't. We are investing in mental health in schools. They didn't. We do have \$820 million that is going to be invested in the classroom as school boards have decided what their priorities are. They didn't do that either.

When it comes right down to it, Mr. Speaker, we know that we are dealing with learning loss in schools because of the in and out and up and down and not sure whether or not they were going to be online or not, and we can't continue to do that to our kids. We have to make sure that priority is given to education.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week the Alberta NDP hosted an in-person town hall to discuss the UCP's risky plan to gamble away Albertans' pensions. Nearly 500 folks showed up, and almost everyone wants Alberta to keep the CPP. Now, while he won't meet with people in person, Jim Dinning will periodically offer up random comments on the phone. Last week he acknowledged that the UCP's plan is not a risk-free proposition. To the Premier: why won't she drop this risky plan?

The Speaker: The hon the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are doing what Albertans asked us to do through the Fair Deal Panel process, where we went and we did the work. We hired LifeWorks to do their report. They went through systematically, looking at how Albertans overpay year after year after year. Those dollars get invested into a fund, compound over time, and it's why we're now entitled under their formula to 53 per cent of the assets. This is the information that we have put out there so people understand just how much Albertans are overpaying. Looking forward to seeing the Finance minister come back with her alternative calculation.

Ms Notley: Well, this Premier's Finance minister lifted the veil just a bit when he told the Calgary Chamber that his task was to sell the UCP pension plan. Problem is that he's spending 7 and a half million dollars to promote a plan full of fake numbers. If we had real consumer protection laws in this province, this government's ads would be breaching them. Why won't the Premier stop spending millions in Albertans' money to sell them on a risky plan they don't want?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet another report that the member opposite hasn't read, and I directed her last time we spoke to go to the appendix in the LifeWorks report, where it goes through and it shows year after year after year how much Albertans pay in, how much our seniors receive in benefits. I believe last year, if my memory serves, we had \$9 billion worth of premiums that Albertans paid, \$6 billion worth of benefits paid to our seniors, which means we are subsidizing the program \$3 billion a year. This is information Albertans need to have to know whether or not they want to continue.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, those numbers have been completely debunked. Here are the facts. We don't actually have solid numbers; therefore, we don't have a solid plan, and we don't have anyone who has an actual problem with CPP. But this government won't stop wasting millions promoting a plan no one wants. What we do have, though, is a cost-of-living crisis, a housing crisis, a health care crisis. Why won't the Premier stop threatening Albertans' retirement security and focus on the things that really matter to them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans wish the member opposite would stand up for Albertans for a change rather than take marching orders from the federal NDP leader. The one thing that is driving the affordability crisis, as we know, is the carbon tax, which they implemented. We tried to get rid of it, and

her federal leader won't let us do it. If they had just agreed to eliminate the carbon tax, it would reduce inflation 16 per cent, which means we wouldn't have to see an increase in interest rates, which means people could afford to buy a house as well. Maybe she should stand up for Albertans for a change. [interjections]

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

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, leaving CPP and establishing an Alberta pension plan seems to have as much popular support as a skunk at a garden party. That's not me talking but, rather, long-time Calgary businessman George Brookman. He added his voice last week to the growing chorus from the business community that thinks gambling CPP is, well, bad for business. Can the Premier . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Kayande: Can the Premier for the record in this House name one businessperson who thinks this is a good idea? If she can't, why are we pressing ahead with this plan which stinks so, so bad?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is being plowed ahead, as the member opposite said, is us having this conversation with Albertans. It's a live conversation. The federal minister has said that they're going to come back to us with their own actuarial analysis involving the chief actuary, involving the help of their department, and we can continue to have this conversation with Albertans. If there are updated numbers, that'll be brought to them, and we'll look at that with the fullness of everything and in a good-faith conversation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, I really don't understand why we can't have simple answers to simple questions. This is people's retirement security we're talking about here. We have heard from 37,000 Albertans through our survey on pensions at albertasfuture.ca, and their message is crystal clear. The UCP needs to keep its hands off CPP. Ninety per cent of respondents have said that they don't support gambling CPP away. Can the Premier tell this House how many e-mails and phone calls she has received about gambling our CPP?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to listen to Albertans. The telephone town halls led by Mr. Dinning and the team: I think they've reached out to over 62,000 Albertans by now. The next telephone town hall is this week for central Alberta, where they'll continue to have that conversation. I do not get why any Albertan wouldn't want to continue to have this conversation. It's something that is very live. It has the potential to impact every Alberta family, every Alberta business, and our economy overall. Why would we be scared of having that conversation? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Kayande: Again, this government is gambling away pensions, and they can't even answer basic questions. The man at the head of this pension gambling plot, Jim Dinning, admitted last week that pulling out of the CPP is not risk free. You know what is risk free? The CPP. It's been there for decades. It's reliable and

world renowned. Albertans have retired with dignity for 60 years because of the CPP. Albertans have spoken. They want to stay in the CPP. Why isn't anybody over there listening?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to have this conversation with Albertans. There is risk in everything, even for a skunk at a garden party. They've got to watch themselves. But I think what we're committed to is having that conversation with Albertans. If the information changes, so will the conversation with Albertans. Once again, something that the LifeWorks report said is that it could impact the Alberta economy overall by \$5 billion annually, every Alberta family, every Alberta business. When affordability is a main concern, why wouldn't it warrant fair consideration?

2:00

AHS Board Chair

Dr. Metz: Albertans know that this Premier wants them to pay to see a family doctor. Now she's appointed Lyle Oberg to lead AHS, someone with a legacy of wanting Albertans to pay for medical services. He co-chaired the report that stated, quote, true consumer health insurance must become a reality. But while it stated that alternative methods of paying for nonessential services should be provided, it called many essential services nonessential. Will the Premier say that she agrees or . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Oberg is the right person for this task. He has vast experience providing care as a physician of 12 years in rural Alberta in addition to his experience in governance and executive management. He understands first-hand the issues that our valuable health care providers are facing in delivering the vital services all Albertans need and deserve. Back when Alberta moved to a central model 15 years ago, he had concerns for rural Alberta, and – you know what? – he was right.

Dr. Metz: Some of the nonessential services that Oberg thought Albertans should pay for included routine mammograms, prostate cancer screening, and ultrasounds for pregnant women. On this side of the House we think that mammograms, cancer screenings, and ultrasounds are essential services and no one should have to pay out of pocket. Will the Premier commit here and now that no Albertan will ever have to pay for these critical screenings and examinations?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. The Premier has been very, very clear that we made a public health care guarantee to Albertans. That means that no one will ever have to pay out of pocket for a visit to a doctor or for hospital services, and that is not changing. This is not about privatization. This is about refocusing the system to make it more effective, more efficient, more timely, and more available to citizens of Alberta right across the province.

Dr. Metz: Albertans don't trust this government on health care. They don't trust this Premier, who has advocated for decades that Albertans should pay to see a doctor, or Oberg, who advocated to pay for essential services. Today the UCP will face a choice. The Member for Calgary-North East's bill comes up for a vote. Bill 201 will protect Albertans from ever having to pay to see a doctor. If the Premier is serious that she no longer wants to charge Albertans for basic care, will she commit and will she vote for Bill 201? Yes or no?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, we have been extremely clear. No one will ever have to pay for an insured service by a physician. We can't be more clear than that. Public health care publicly funded will continue. This is about refocusing and making sure that we're actually getting the services that Albertans need where they need it, when they need it.

Renewable Energy Project Approvals

Ms Al-Guneid: On Friday the Finance minister told a room full of business leaders that the renewable sector was actually expecting his government's seven-month ban on new projects. This came as a shock to many in the room, especially those working in renewables, who were never consulted despite documents showing that the UCP started planning to shut down the industry right after the election. Will the minister take this opportunity to correct the record and admit that this moratorium is hurting the renewable sector?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I said at the Calgary Chamber is that, you know, Alberta, who, I think, was responsible for three-quarters of all of the renewable projects that were built in Canada the year before last and currently has 40,000 megawatts in front of the queue – the people that I've spoken to: there wasn't a lack of certainty. They knew that the moratorium would be lifted in January, and they expect that there are going to be changes brought in that will make a lot of sense for baseload power, dispatchable power, and renewable energy.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the minister also said that his government's renewables ban isn't having an impact on investor confidence and given that renewable companies have shared the negative impacts this is having on their business and given that one Alberta-based company said that they do have growth plans in Alberta but cannot justify them right now – instead, they will, quote: spend our time and effort elsewhere – will the government admit that shutting down an entire industry for seven months without warning is creating uncertainty in investments and jobs?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. The government is addressing a long-standing problem within the industry where land use has been looked at and been a concern of rural municipalities for over a decade. We are addressing those issues, and we are addressing the issues comprehensively, from the beginning all the way through the process, including our potential market corrections, to make sure that we can provide for Alberta reliable, dependable, and affordable electricity. We're doing the work the NDP failed to do, and we're going to answer that question for Albertans.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that Albertans are facing massive increases to their power bills due to a few companies using their market power to drive up power prices and given that the Finance minister also said that these companies are at risk of going out of business as early as next year and given that the Premier has said that she wants to, quote, derisk natural gas generation, even as these companies see massive profits and Albertans face massive bills, will the minister promise that not a single taxpayer dollar will go towards these companies driving up Albertans' power bills?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the market to make sure that all market behaviour is according to Alberta laws, and where we need to correct Alberta laws, we are looking at that, too. That's why we've asked not only the Alberta Electric System Operator to review the market and market structure, but we've asked the Market Surveillance Administrator to review all market practices so that we can protect Albertans from price spikes. The good news is that since August the price of electricity in Alberta is less than half what it was then, and it is expected to continue to go down.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve to have access to top-tier health care, and I know that is something this government is committed to. With continued investments in capital, this government is making moves to bring top-tier health care to Albertans. Last week we saw the opening of a new, state-of-the-art emergency department at the Misericordia community hospital, a crucial step in meeting the health care needs of communities in and around Edmonton. Can the minister please explain how this \$85 million project, especially the facility design, will alleviate wait times in the Edmonton area? [interjections]

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring top-tier health care is a priority for this government, and we know that wait times are too long. With strategic investments, including the new emergency department at Misericordia community hospital, our government is taking decisive steps to address wait times. The facility's design, facilitating more than double the patient capacity of the original department, is specifically tailored to streamline patient flow, enhance efficiency, and ensure timely care responses. These critical design elements will work to directly address and alleviate the long-standing challenge of wait times in Edmonton areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this facility is set to significantly increase capacity, addressing long-standing concerns about wait times, giving Edmontonians peace of mind that they will see timely treatment for an emergency, and given that additional improvements such as enhanced patient flow, privacy, and integration of advanced technology will ensure that health care providers are able to provide the best care possible, can the minister please explain how these enhancements will benefit patients beyond the increased capacity?

Member LaGrange: Thank you again for the question. Beyond the needed increase in the capacity, the new emergency department brings numerous benefits for the patients. The redesigned space promotes more efficient patient flow, ensuring a smoother journey from registration to discharge. Patients will now experience enhanced privacy in treatment areas, and there's a dedicated mental health area integrated into the emergency department providing much-needed comprehensive care. Additionally, advancements like integrated radiology and laboratory areas, additional isolation

spaces for future medical needs, and the incorporation of new technologies will contribute to a more effective . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that innovation has always been a priority for this government and that finding ways to make health care better is top of mind and given that the minister has provided an insightful overview of the benefits extended to patients from the new emergency department's design, including enhanced efficiency and integrated care spaces, can the minister delve further into how these advancements, particularly in technology, align with the government's commitment to improve patient care and overall efficiency in the Misericordia community hospital's emergency department?

2:10

Member LaGrange: Innovation is indeed a top priority for our government, especially in health care. The advancements in technology, as highlighted in the new emergency department's design, align seamlessly with our commitment to improving patient care and overall efficiency at Misericordia hospital. From wireless cardiac monitors to advanced ultrasound machines these technologies enhance diagnostic capabilities, ensuring our dedication to providing high-quality health care services to all Albertans. This investment reflects our ongoing efforts to foster efficiency and effectiveness in delivering the best possible care. Mr. Speaker, we're committed to this.

Postsecondary Student Financial Aid

Member Hoyle: Students are dealing with an affordability crisis. We've seen reports from them being forced to skip meals, live in their cars because they can't afford a place to live. This is unacceptable. There are currently 13,000 student loan applications in queue. That's right: 13,000. I've heard from students that are considering withdrawing from their studies because they don't have an update on their applications. To the minister: why must students have to sacrifice their education due to . . .

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our student aid programs help a wide range of students across all forms of postsecondary education. These programs are continuously reviewed to ensure investments and student supports, to make sure that they're effective or that they reduce financial barriers and support economic growth. Budget 2023 provided \$1.1 billion in Alberta student loans to help 131,000 students, \$112 million in scholarships and awards to 57,000 students.

Member Hoyle: Given that students put their trust in the government to support them through Alberta Student Aid and given that more students are being forced to take additional student loans while this government piles additional costs onto them, from electricity to car insurance, tuition, and more, and given that I was joined last week by Aarush Bhat, a second-year University of Alberta student forced to reduce his course load and move off campus because of this government's budget cuts, to the minister: why is the government turning its back on our future leaders like Aarush?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to ensuring postsecondary education is accessible and affordable for all who pursue it. That's why in Budget 2023 we capped tuition

for domestic students at public institutions at 2 per cent at the institution level from 2024-25 onwards, we reduced the interest rate on student loans to the prime rate, and we extended the student loan grace period from six to 12 months.

Member Hoyle: Given that as of today Alberta Student Aid has only processed applications submitted between September 1 and 8 of 2023 and given that we are nearly through the fall semester and students don't have word on whether their education is actually going to be covered and given that I was joined last week by Haruun Ali, a student forced to take a payday loan due to a shortfall in student aid, listen closely, Minister. I'm going to share your answer with all students suffering under this government. How did this government let the situation get so bad? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, it's been an unprecedented year. Alberta Student Aid faced an increase in the volume of students applying for funding, with over 4,000 more applications compared to the previous year. Additionally, the application process opened slightly later than usual, and as a result processing delays have occurred due to higher application volumes and the shorter time frames available for processing. Despite these challenges, our team is working diligently to address the number of applications in the queue, and they are almost complete.

Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments

Mr. Schmidt: On Saturday the Premier stated that one reason Bill 8 is essential is because she was unable to accept free hockey tickets from the NHL commissioner for the Heritage Classic. She said, quote: I wasn't going to go to a hockey game if I was only going to spend 20 minutes at it. Aw. And while I'm sure the members of the UCP are outraged that the Premier was unable to attend the Heritage Classic for free, 55,000 people attended the game and paid for their own tickets. Albertans can't afford rent or groceries. Can the minister explain why he's getting free tickets for his boss?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, our government is taking steps to meet the challenges of today and move into the future times. These changes reflect what we've heard from Albertans all across this province. Albertans want a government that is responsive to their needs, that meets their challenges, and that is listening to all of them. Elected representatives, this government at the very minimum, are there for Albertans. We'll continue to be there for Albertans. It is what Albertans just asked for in the mandate, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Gary Bettman isn't an Albertan and given that Albertans are struggling with the cost of living, overcrowded classrooms, no family doctors, or access to primary health care but the priority of this government is getting more luxurious gifts from lobbyists and special interests and given that the Premier actually said that the inability to give her gifts was, quote, actually interfering with the ability of myself and our ministers to be able to do our work, unquote, given that as minister I was able to do the job without gifts, why can't . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister. [interjections] Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure where that member hails from, but the Oilers are Albertan.

We are updating the act to ensure that it provides clarity and remains current. We're also making sure that the laws governing members reflect the current state of affairs and the times that we live in. Other provinces have already moved to make sure that their laws align with 2023 and today's environment. Alberta is no exception, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to represent the Albertans of today and the future. They can continue to live in the past. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this government is laser focused on getting more gifts for more money rather than on helping Albertans pay the rent or put food on their tables and given that neither the Premier nor any member opposite told Albertans that they were campaigning on making it easier for them to accept these expensive gifts and given that the minister wouldn't have his job if the Premier had been up front about her plan to line her own pockets during the campaign, will he just stop the gravy train and withdraw this selfish, entitled piece of legislation?

Mr. Schow: Point of order. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. members will come to order.

A point of order is noted at 2:17.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, nothing could be further from the truth here. The Conflicts of Interest Act still governs all of the members of this House, and the Ethics Commissioner will continue to ensure that the act is followed. What we're doing here is making sure that the act reflects the current demands of today and in the future. Unlike the NDP, this government will continue to be focused on moving forward. I'm not quite sure why the members opposite are so opposed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: The Premier is going to need a bigger purse.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, I'm not sure why the members opposite are so opposed to innovation. But, then again, they seem to be holding on to things that are long, long past their due date. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Gull Lake Water Level

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Gull Lake is the oldest provincial park in the province and is home to many lakeshore communities, including 3,000 residences and over 2,000 camping lots. Gull Lake has been a destination for young and old since 1895, but Gull Lake has a problem. Since lake stabilization measures were ceased in 2011, the lake is drying up. Given how important the lake is to the surrounding community and province, to the minister of the environment: have you identified the current state of Gull Lake as a priority for your department?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for that great question. Gull Lake is absolutely a summertime favourite for many families across central Alberta.

Like most lakes in central Alberta and across our province, Gull Lake's water levels are mainly based on how much precipitation we get. Many parts of the province have seen dry conditions in recent years; however, my staff have been meeting regularly with the Gull Lake Watershed Society to find a solution. They're looking at regulatory approval and implementation of a proposed Prussian carp exclusion filtration system. The system could potentially help pump water into the lake while preventing this invasive species from entering from the Blindman River.

2:20

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the lake is only 5.5 metres to begin with and loses more than two inches every season, given that in 1975 the Alberta government recognized the importance and succeeded in the stabilization of this lake, given that once again this lake is now unstable, harming critical habitats for local threatened species, including the western grebe, to the minister of the environment: is there a long-term plan to ensure that water levels don't continue to recede?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Staff from Environment and Protected Areas have met and continue to meet with our local partners on a solution. They're exploring the impacts that pumping water from the Blindman River would have on Gull Lake's water levels. As I noted, this is a challenging situation. We also have to ensure that Prussian carp aren't introduced into Gull Lake, but the Blindman River is currently under a water shortage advisory as well. With low water levels, pumping may be limited in the coming years if we don't get more rain and snow. This is a challenging issue, but staff from my ministry as well as Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation are working to help support a longer term solution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you. Given that there have been attempts to stop the lake from drying up by pumping water from the nearby Blindman River and given that these effects have been halted due to concerns about invasive Prussian carp and given that alternatives such as aquifer siphoning or the force to pressurize water filtration systems have been given a stamp of approval from Stantec, to the minister: do you have a plan to consult with organizations like the Gull Lake Watershed Society to find a safe and long-term solution so we don't lose this valuable treasure?

Ms Schulz: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for that question. I am happy to say that my staff are actively engaging with local stakeholders, including the Gull Lake Watershed Society. We do know that water management is a shared responsibility, and we're working with those who live in the area and know this lake and watershed the best. As I've said, Prussian carp is an invasive species that is extremely hardy, reproduces rapidly, and once introduced are very hard to get rid of. Since they're already in the Blindman River, pumping water could propose a risk by introducing this invasive species into Gull Lake. That's why we're working with the Gull Lake Watershed Society and others on alternatives like the carp exclusion filtration system.

Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans

Member Tejada: Today we honour transgender, two-spirit, and nonbinary people who have lost their lives in devastating acts of hate-motivated violence. In 2023 Transgender Day of Remembrance is especially sobering considering the rise of hate against 2SLGBTQIA folks. The Alberta NDP are committed to stopping the violence, hate, and intolerance against gender-diverse communities. To any minister: what is the UCP doing to stem the rise of hate and criminal acts targeting members of the 2SLGBTQIA community? Please be specific.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no place for hate or intolerance in our province, and today, on Transgender Day of Remembrance, we pause to honour and remember those who tragically lost their lives to violence and prejudice, and we reflect on the realities many transgender individuals face both in Alberta, in Canada, and around the world. Today we not only mourn these losses but are reminded of our collective responsibility to continue the fight for acceptance, understanding, and equality.

Member Tejada: No specifics, and that's a real shame from a government who just raised the flag on the Legislature grounds this morning.

Given that the Premier is welcoming with open arms her friend Tucker Carlson, a man who spews hateful rhetoric, lies, and has publicly bragged about his own acts of violence against the 2SLGBTQIA people, and given that hate speech incites hate crimes because we know that words have power, Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing and use their voice to condemn the Premier welcoming her pal Tucker to spread more hate here?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my mandate letter I've been given a clear mandate to work in support with the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community. Over the summer I was able to attend many different Pride events in central Alberta, Calgary, and Edmonton. I was happy that our government supported Calgary Pride through a community initiatives program grant and recently sat down and had a meeting with Calgary Pride. Looking forward to continue the engagement and the dialogue.

An Hon. Member: What about Carlson?

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Tejada: Given that 2SLGBTQIA Albertans are health care workers, teachers, activists, lawyers, elected officials, our friends, family, and loved ones and given that they deserve a government that loves and accepts them while defending their human rights but, instead, have had to listen to members of this Legislature openly make hateful comments about 2SLGBTQIA people and cozy up to the alt-right . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Tejada: . . . and given that the UCP has already rolled back human rights for queer and trans youth, will the minister admit . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Tejada: . . . that to stop this hate, they need to look at themselves, their policies, and public figures they promote?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to continuing to collaborate with the community when we're celebrating them as champions. An example of this is our introduction of a specific category in the Stars of Alberta volunteer awards for those advocating for 2SLGBTQIA-plus inclusion as a testament to that. Over \$290,000 has been channelled towards 2SLGBTQIA-plus initiatives in just the last two years, and our Premier's office also has a dedicated staff member focused on 2SLGBTQIA-plus matters. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:26.

Bail System

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, constituents are calling to tell me of criminal activity happening that highlights the need for robust measures against repeat offenders. The same criminals are committing the same crimes over and over and continue to put Albertans' safety at risk. My constituents understand that weak federal bail policies lead to the criminals being caught and released but still want to know what our government is doing to fix it. Our government has brought in some policies, including a law targeting scrap metal thieves, which was struck down as intruding on federal jurisdiction, but Albertans want more. Can the minister tell my constituents what our government is doing to hold people accountable who have a lengthy history of criminal offences?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Many Albertans have had a friend or a neighbour whose catalytic converter has been stolen, and this comes at a huge financial cost. That's why we're reviewing the court's decision and we're assessing our position, but as it is within the appeal period, that is the furthest I can comment on that particular issue.

The Premier, however, has tasked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services and myself with developing and implementing a strategy to ensure violent criminals and gang members are detained and effectively prosecuted, and that's what we're going to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, given that last week I learned of an individual in West Yellowhead who was arrested and charged with 21 different firearm offences and given that this individual was then released that same day on \$100 bail even though they already had 38 prior convictions and given that my constituents and our law enforcement are getting tired of our police officers doing their job day in and day out only to have the justice system continue to fail our communities, can the Minister of Justice inform the House on what steps our government is taking to protect citizens in my riding against dangerous repeat offenders like this?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, Albertans absolutely deserve to feel safe in their communities and to be protected from repeat violent offenders. Putting the onus on violent offenders to prove why they should get bail keeps criminals accountable and protects public

safety, which is why we'll continue to put pressure on the federal government until substantial bail reform becomes law.

We've also done away with the abhorrent triage practice, a disastrous NDP policy that saw victims of crime revictimized over and over. We're going to continue to protect Albertans in every way possible. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Long: Given that the federal government's soft-on-crime policies towards repeat offenders, particularly Bill C-75, have created a justice system that is nothing more than a catch-and-release merry-go-round for criminals and given that my constituents are becoming far too familiar with stories of stabbings, shootings, and murders and given that our police officers are being deployed to the same offenders over and over and over again, can the same minister please outline how our government intends to ensure that dangerous criminals stay behind bars despite the Liberal-NDP alliance's soft-on-crime policies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and let me begin by saying that the first responders are doing a tremendous job in arresting these criminals. Our prosecution teams are doing also an incredible job of addressing deteriorating safety and supporting our government's efforts to keep Albertans safe by prosecuting those violent criminals. We'll continue to push for the repeal of the federal government's lenient bail system and are calling on our federal counterparts to step up and support policies and legislation that protect Albertans. Both the minister of public safety and I are working tirelessly to protect Albertans day in and day out.

2:30

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts was created 25 years ago to support Alberta's artists, cultural groups, and organizations. The foundation, which is part of the very fabric of this province, has done incredible work to promote the arts. Despite this, under UCP governments, the AFA has seen its funding cut by 10 per cent. This is backwards, as we should be doing more and not less to support the arts. Does the minister of culture understand that contributions that make arts and artists great need to go forward not backward in terms of funding?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do understand the importance, and particularly our Premier understands the importance, because she added arts to the title of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Alberta artists form the basis of the cultural fabric of our province, and our lives are richer when the arts thrive in our province. Through Budget 2023, Alberta's government committed \$28 million in funding to support the arts, including stable funding of \$25.6 million to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Arts funding also supports government initiatives such as the artist in residence program and Month of the Artist.

Member Ceci: Given that AFA funding has decreased by millions and millions in the years that the UCP has been government and given that the costs have gone up consistently and dramatically due to inflation, arts organizations and cultural groups – and COVID

has impacted the size of audiences that venues can count on . . . [interjections]

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

Member Ceci: . . . and given that the arts and cultural sector is a significant employer with a substantial positive impact to our province's GDP, will the minister acknowledge that a vibrant arts and culture sector is critical to our economy, and will she agree that cutting funding is actually bad for jobs and economic growth?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do agree with the member opposite that a thriving arts community is important in Alberta, and we support the arts in this province. My focus is on celebrating and promoting Alberta artists, on making arts and culture affordable and accessible to all Albertans. I've had so many fantastic meetings with arts communities throughout the province, from Arts Commons to Contemporary Calgary, to the Winspear Centre, and just recently had a reception in the home of some art supporters the other night where they gathered 20 small independent artists who gave me invaluable feedback on the community in this province.

Member Ceci: Given that advocating for sufficient funding for the arts sector to enable it to recover from the pandemic and thrive through the current economic challenges now and into the future is the very definition of the minister's role and given that while these are early days for the minister in this portfolio, I expect no one on that side of the cabinet table, aside from the minister, will actually prioritize Alberta arts and artists, can the minister outline what steps she'll take or help necessary to ensure Alberta Foundation for the Arts receives the funding it deserves?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is not receiving its fair share of funding from the Liberal government – surprise – for the arts in Alberta. In 2021-2022 Alberta received 6 per cent of Canadian Council for the Arts funding while holding 9 per cent of the nation's artists. Alberta would need to see a 30 per cent increase in CCA funding to align with the proportion . . . [interjections]

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

Ms Fir: Alberta would need to see a 30 per cent increase in CCA funding to align with the proportion of artists in Alberta. I will continue to advocate for Alberta artists. I reached out to the new, recently appointed Canadian Heritage minister to advocate for further funding for the arts in Alberta.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal (continued)

Mr. Dach: This weekend the Premier heard from D.J. in Rimbey, who wanted to know why the Premier was focusing so much of her time and attention on gambling with Alberta's pensions. D.J. noted that the Canada pension plan works, and wondered aloud why this government is spending money on a propaganda campaign rather than addressing things like the Ponoka hospital ER, which was closed this weekend because of a lack of physician coverage. Why does the minister think that wasting money on the Premier's pension gamble is more important than ensuring the people of Ponoka have an open emergency room? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's never a waste of money to give Albertans a choice about something that could be so impactful to their lives and their families and the overall Alberta economy. This is a lot different than when the former NDP government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: I was just saying, Mr. Speaker, that this is a lot different than the circumstance when the former NDP government rammed a carbon tax down Albertans' throats to try to legitimize the idea for the Liberal government federally and then ran an ad campaign to try to tell Albertans how great it was. This is a live conversation about something that's forward looking.

Mr. Dach: Given that this caller noted that while there is a crisis in Alberta health care, homelessness, affordability, and support for seniors, this government is more focused on weakening their retirement than on supporting them, given that \$7.5 million could help reopen the Ponoka ER, that has closed time and again under the UCP's watch, it could help seniors get the shingles vaccine, help people find more affordable homes, and so much more, will the Finance minister finally put Albertans ahead of the Premier's political pet projects, cancel this campaign, and spend the money supporting Albertans? Get the UCP's hands off our pensions.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm heartened to hear that the NDP think that now is the time that they want to be fiscally responsible. I think about it often because the province is going to be faced with refinancing 26 and a half billion dollars of debt over the next three years. The largest debt stack would have been from 10-year bonds from 2016, when they were in government, over \$13.2 billion that we will be refinancing at something a lot closer to 5 per cent than at 2 per cent. Your debt will ripple on into the future for Alberta generations to come. [interjections]

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

Mr. Dach: Given that D.J. also noted that . . . [interjections]

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

Mr. Dach: Given that D.J. also noted that Alberta seniors cannot afford the shingles vaccine because the UCP will not cover the cost but given the Finance minister found \$7.5 million to run ads against the Canada pension plan, which even the chair of their consultation says is providing a good service, why would the Finance minister rather spend money on convincing seniors to leave the CPP than on helping them afford to get this essential vaccine?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, like I said, I am glad to hear that the NDP are fiscally responsible all of a sudden. I hope that you keep that line of thinking as we move towards Budget '24, Budget '25, Budget '26, Budget '27, because what we need to do is spend appropriately now because it ripples into the future; \$77 billion: that's where I hope our debt will be after the end of this term, after we provide the province with a sizable surplus. That's what we need to do. If you can't pay down principal, you need a surplus to pay down principal; that's what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a world leader in job creation and the economic engine of Canada, home to some of the hardest working folks that I've ever had the privilege of meeting. For decades this province has been a massive contributor to the Canada pension plan. In fact, based on a recent report, we have been contributing way more than our fellow Canadians. However, a recent report has also shown that Albertan seniors could be receiving more monthly if there were some changes made to the management of that fund. Can the Minister of Finance tell us, the House, what Alberta's government is doing to ensure all Albertans have the information they need about the Alberta pension plan and how it can benefit seniors? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It sounds like that member is giving it fair consideration. Since the release of the LifeWorks, formerly Morneau Shepell, report the independent engagement panel led by Mr. Dinning has been engaging with Albertans on this important issue. The LifeWorks report shows that an Alberta pension plan could mean more benefits for seniors and higher paycheques for workers and employers. I encourage Albertans to fill out the survey and continue to submit their thoughts, comments, and concerns to the engagement panel. The next engagement telephone town hall is this Wednesday, focused on central Alberta, but anyone can participate.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta pension plan would put more money in the pockets of Albertans, based on the third-party findings, and given that a possible APP would help make life more affordable for Albertans by providing seniors with higher benefits as well as lowering the premiums for working Albertans and given this government has been consulting the potential move for an Alberta pension plan, to the same Minister: can you tell this House how the consultation is going around the possible creation of an Alberta pension plan? [interjections]

2:40

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our job is always to advocate for Alberta and Albertans and provide clear and accurate information about Alberta's economy; the risks we are facing, and the opportunities we see. And it is with the future in mind that we're currently consulting with Albertans on a potential Alberta pension plan. So far over 61,000 Albertans have attended the four telephone town halls. We're reaching every corner of the province. The panel is engaging with Albertans by the thousands and is having many rigorous conversations about what an APP could mean for them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister, given the NDP has chosen to side with their federal friends Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau again, causing fear for seniors in the idea of an Alberta pension plan, and given that this government is committed to consultation about pensions and given the ongoing conversations with the federal government to ensure Albertans are given all the information on how they could benefit from the pension plan, can the minister tell the House about these recent conversations, how they've gone with their federal counterparts? [interjections]

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can assure this House that we don't call the mother ship and find out how we're supposed to think this week. In the meeting with Minister Freeland and my colleagues from across the country, we made it clear that an Alberta pension plan will not leave our . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: We made it clear that we will not leave our fellow Canadians without a stable pension. I was encouraged to hear the federal government commit to providing a comprehensive actuarial analysis of the asset transfer value that Alberta would be entitled to should it withdraw from the CPP. We've been asking for this for many weeks; it's critical to the ongoing discussion on an Alberta pension plan that we have a firm asset transfer number. Look forward to hearing back from them shortly. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of Oral Question Period Live Streaming

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period, but prior to rising, I would like to take a very brief moment and recognize a special occasion in which we have just undertaken. I'm not sure if the decorum was better or worse on this particular occasion, but it is important for the record's sake.

Members will know that online streaming, virtual meetings, and constant streams of e-mails have been part of our everyday lives for as long as most of us can remember. It was only 20 years ago today that the very first Oral Question Period was streamed live on the Internet. November 18, 2003, was the first day that anyone, anywhere in the world with an Internet connection was able to see, hear first-hand the lively debates that take place here in the Legislature.

I understand there were a few minor glitches for those in rural Alberta, who listened to a tone while they were dialing in for their daily dose of question period.

An Hon. Member: What was the tone?

The Speaker: You heard it.

The Assembly takes great pride in making sure that our daily proceedings can be available to as many Albertans as possible. This started over 20 years ago today. Hi, Mom.

In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a statement to make.

Craft Breweries

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is pro business, pro entrepreneurial spirit, and supports strong local economies. Our government also promotes made-in-Alberta products and recently launched its made-in-Alberta voluntary

labelling program to encourage and promote our local businesses and manufacturers.

I can't think of a better way to highlight all of this than celebrating the craft brewing industry in Alberta. Local craft breweries are often the heart and soul of small towns across the province or add a small-town feel to our big city centres. In 2022 Alberta's small breweries recorded \$932 million in local beer sales.

In terms of tourism opportunities, there are currently 15 recommended Ale Trails, comprising over 140 craft breweries, that cover every region of our province. This represents the potential to attract local, national, and even international tourists to Alberta.

In the Leduc-Beaumont riding we are fortunate to have successful and dynamic craft breweries, including the Leduc Brewing Company and Sea Change in Beaumont. These local gems not only craft exceptional beverages but also contribute to the local economy and boost community spirit. Their commitment to quality and innovation showcases the success that can be achieved when we support small businesses in our community. Small brewers will often integrate themselves into the community by utilizing local suppliers and distribution channels and sourcing their ingredients from local farmers and agricultural networks.

My constituents and indeed all Albertans appreciate the work and efforts of these craft brewers and celebrate the ways they contribute to our culture and communities. I ask all Albertans to help celebrate this important industry by researching, visiting, and buying delicious craft beverages from the local craft brewery in their area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Support for Immigrants

Mr. Haji: Settlement and immigration services are shared responsibilities. Both provincial and federal governments have a role to ensure that newcomers have the means to settle, integrate, and thrive. In quarter 2 of this year alone Alberta welcomed over 45,000 newcomers. This is over a 100 per cent increase compared to the same quarter in 2022. With more people there will clearly be a need for increased services.

The Calgary Centre for Newcomers alone welcomed about 40,000 newcomers over the last year. Unfortunately, this summer alone the Calgary Centre for Newcomers, the largest settlement-serving organization in the province, laid off 65 settlement workers, forcing to cease services that are so vital to help newcomers. La FRAP, the leading francophone settlement organization in the province, laid off 30 per cent of their staff, making francophone new immigrants fall through the cracks. In Calgary approximately 1,500 newcomers are on a wait-list for language assessment alone and over 5,700 for language classes.

The Alberta Immigrant Women & Children Centre, located in Edmonton, can only accommodate 35 out of the 200 newcomers who are on their roster for language support. Due to their backlog it can take six months to a year to access language classes. That delay means it can take at least a year for a skilled newcomer to get the language skills to fully participate economically in the province.

The government allocated \$50 million in funding over three fiscal years but only granted less than \$5 million to settlement organizations that are struggling to meet the increasing demand. To address this pressing issue, Mr. Speaker, I ask this government to partner with . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The time allotted for the member's statement has expired. My apologies to the member.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a petition.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present, in accordance with Standing Order 98(2), one petition that has been received for private bills, the petition of Dr. Shawn Flynn of St. Joseph's College for the St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a petition launched by Friends of Medicare in support of Bill 201, which would protect Albertans from having to pay to see their doctor. There are more than a thousand signatures from right across Alberta, and I'm told that more than half of these Albertans are getting involved for the very first time. These Albertans are speaking out in support of Bill 201, and they will . . .

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

2:50

Mr. Dach: I rise to table five copies, Mr. Speaker, of a CBC news item which reports that the minister of transportation has refused to meet with city of Edmonton councillor Jo-Anne Wright since April 2022, when she first requested to meet with him. It leads one to wonder how those preferential meetings are made, if it's government policy or just a minister's personal design.

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I've got two letters on the same topic from two constituents, Mr. Shevalier and Mr. Rowbotham, urging this government not to bring forward an Alberta pension plan but stick with what we have, CPP.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter to a constituent from AISH notifying her that because her disabled husband is now eligible for CPP, she will be cut off her AISH benefits just three weeks before Christmas, a decision so cruel that it would make even Scrooge blush.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Ms Sawhney, Minister of Advanced Education, pursuant to the Agrology Profession Act Alberta Institute of Agrologists 2022 annual report; pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta 2022 annual report, Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta 2022 annual report.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: At approximately 2:18 a point of order was called. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). When the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking in his second supplemental, with reference to the Premier and changes to the conflicts of interest, he said – and I have the benefit of the Blues: “the minister wouldn't have his job if the Premier had been up front about her plan to line her own pockets during the campaign.” The

Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is clearly making an accusation that the Premier is taking bribes and lining her own pockets.

The Speaker: Order. That is an absolutely unacceptable gesture directed to the Government House Leader, for which you can return to your seat and apologize.

Mr. McIver: Jackass.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays will rise to his feet and apologize.

Mr. McIver: I do apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schmidt: I apologize that the House leader is so sensitive and had to rise on that point.

The Speaker: No. You don't apologize for that. You apologize for making an inappropriate gesture at the doorway to the Chamber. You will do so, or you will be named and you will leave the Chamber until a committee deals with it.

Mr. Schmidt: I have offered my apology, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: You will be well served that the Speaker spoke last week about not judging the quality of an apology. You behaved like my 12-year-old, slowly waltzing across this Chamber after being spoken to directly. It's absolutely unacceptable and unbecoming of a member of this Assembly.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at point of order 2.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Schow: All right, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that. I'll move on to point of order 2. At the time noted, the Member for Calgary-Klein was speaking in her question and said something to the effect of – without the benefit of the Blues: members on the opposite side have been making antitrans comments.

Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge there is not a single member on this side of the Chamber who has made antitrans comments. Such an accusation demands proof. Words have meanings. While I can appreciate that the Member for Calgary-Klein might be trying to do something for the 'gram or for X or Twitter, it is certainly unbecoming of a member of this Chamber to make such an accusation. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker: the previous Member for Calgary-Klein would have never said something so despicable. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) in this point of order, and I ask that that member apologize, withdraw, and be better.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise because this is a matter of debate. Now, I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but I do have the language from the Member for Calgary-Klein in her question, and the language was: but instead have had to listen to members of this Legislature openly make hateful comments about 2SLGBTQIA-plus people and cozy up to the alt right.

Mr. Speaker, I argue that this is a matter of debate given all that has been said about this Premier hanging out with Tucker Carlson and the alt right. As well, in reference to members of this Legislature openly making hateful comments, we know that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has had to apologize for comparing transgender children in schools to having feces in food. Given that today is Transgender Day of Remembrance, I think that the

Member for Calgary-Klein's comments are completely in order because I believe that particularly on Transgender Day of Remembrance all Albertans deserve to have representatives in the Legislature who love and accept them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. For clarity's sake, members may have the benefit of a transcript or some other piece of information that they have acquired in the intervening period, but it is only the Speaker who has the benefit of the actual Blues. I just don't want to give anyone the impression that the Government House Leader had a copy of the Blues, which he couldn't have, but he could have a transcript or some other record of it.

I do have – and I believe that the Official Opposition House Leader has quite appropriately reflected what was said. The Blues say: “but instead have had to listen to members of this Legislature openly make hateful comments about 2SLGBTQIA people and cozy up to the alt right.” She proceeded to say, “and given that the UCP has already rolled back human rights for queer and trans youth, will the minister admit . . .” I think that is the only piece of context which we need.

I would just say and provide some context with respect to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* pages 623 and 624, specifically on 624, that

in dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner, and intention of the Member speaking, the person to whom the words at issue were directed, the degree of provocation, and most important, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber.

One thing I think we can all agree on is that those remarks did create disorder here inside the Assembly today. I think making accusations of a similar nature, particularly when it seemed that they were directed at members of the United Conservative Party – given it was the immediate statement that followed the hon. member's remarks, it's reasonable to assume that in fact she was speaking about those members making allegations – that members were making hateful comments, certainly is not appropriate.

Having said that – and I appreciate that it certainly sounded like I was going to rule that that was a point of order – I also recognize the context in which those statements were made, in light of the day that it is and other factors, and I want to provide the absolute strongest caution possible. Well, maybe we've seen the strongest caution possible that I can provide moments earlier, so perhaps not that strong, but as strongly as possible, that making allegations that members of the Assembly are hateful or make hateful comments certainly will not improve decorum, as it didn't today.

Having said that, I won't find it a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Prior to calling Orders of the Day, hon. members, I'm sure that each and every one of you noticed . . .

Mr. Schow: I'm going to keep calling that.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The matter is dealt with and concluded.

. . . that there was an error in the November 20, '23, Order Paper, which was distributed on the 10th of November. The time remaining for debate on Bill 201 is a total of 26 minutes, not 21 minutes as previously indicated. A revised Order Paper for today, with the corrected information, has been distributed. It's available on the members' desks. As well, the online version of the Order Paper has also been corrected.

That brings us to Ordres du jour.

3:00

Orders of the Day**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading****Bill 201****Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees)
Amendment Act, 2023**

Mr. Yao moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government already has the tools necessary to ensure compliance with the Canada Health Act and maintain a publicly funded health care system in Alberta.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 6: Mr. Getson speaking]

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the Member for Calgary-North East.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP in Alberta has been increasingly squawking about a bill concerning health care services here in the province, thus creating tension around the issue. It is imperative to cut through the fog of their noise and to understand what’s truly at stake and why the government is taking a firm stance on this issue. Here’s the harsh reality. The NDP is fretting over certain clinics ignoring the rules by unlawfully charging individuals for services that should be accessible under our public health care system. They’ve thrown a bill as a supposed remedy. In the wake of this, our government is adamantly resisting the urge to say: hold your horses; we’ve got this covered. So let’s dissect why this government believes the NDP’s concerns to be blown out of proportion and why this bill is utterly unnecessary.

Alberta boasts a public health care system where you’re not expected to open your pocketbooks when you visit a doctor or receive care in a hospital. The government foots the bill through the Alberta health care insurance plan. Now, the NDP is insinuating that some clinics are tacking on extra fees for these services, which is strictly forbidden. How does the government hit back? The answer is that we already are. Each year Alberta Health furnishes a report to Health Canada assuring that everything is copacetic within the clinics and within the health care system. So far Health Canada hasn’t raised any red flags about how these clinics conduct their business. Also, Alberta Health conducts checks on clinics by scrutinizing their billing practices and ensuring that they’re charging solely for noncovered services. These are services that are considered uninsured because they’re not part of the basic health care package.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let’s delve into the so-called uninsured services for a moment. They have been around for eons with a clear definition of what’s covered and what is not. If a clinic charges for uninsured services, that’s perfectly okay so long as they’re not nickel and diming the patients for regular doctor visits and treatments which are meant to be freely accessible to everybody. So why is the government criticizing the NDP’s bill? It’s because we believe the NDP is stoking an imaginary fire. The system already has robust mechanisms in place to ensure that everyone toes the line. There are

stringent regulations against overcharging for covered services, and the government maintains that doctors are well aware of these rules and regularly comply with them. In terms of ensuring that clinics adhere to these rules, the government has data enthusiasts, auditors, and health specialists who meticulously scrutinize doctors’ billing practices to ensure everything is authentic.

Now, if the government unearths any shady dealings at a clinic such as charging patients for free services or offering queue-jumping privileges for a fee, they won’t just sit idly by. They’ve made it abundantly clear that they step in and take decisive action. Even when the NDP points fingers at specific clinics, the government conducts thorough investigations to ensure rules are being followed by physicians and are being held accountable. This was made evident this past summer, when it came to our attention that Marda Loop clinic in Calgary was advertising membership fees for services that are supposed to be covered by provincial health insurance. The members opposite like to ignore what happened following this discovery, but our government immediately began an investigation and took every appropriate action to ensure that this clinic was compliant with our current legislation. Not only that, but our government is in constant collaboration with the College of Physicians & Surgeons, the authority overseeing doctors, to ensure that everyone plays by the rules.

The NDP is making an enormous fuss with this bill when it’s entirely unwarranted. The government is resolute in its faith that the system and safety nets are already in place. They’re holding steadfast, reiterating that they’re already exerting efforts to uphold accessible and equitable health care for all Albertans. According to the government the NDP’s bill is merely a redundant step that doesn’t contribute anything significant to the safeguards that are already functioning. The government firmly believes that they have everything under control, and they perceive the NDP’s proposed bill as more about political manoeuvring than practicality. The government remains focused on ensuring that every individual in Alberta has unhindered access to the care they need without unnecessary legislative complications.

On the other hand, the NDP’s bill seems fixated on hypothetical issues rather than addressing any concrete problems. They’re chasing shadows and needlessly stirring up panic where due diligence is already in place. Our government contends that health care professionals are well versed in the rules. The regulatory bodies such as the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta establish clear benchmarks where there are severe repercussions for those who deviate from them.

When we discuss health care, we’re essentially discussing something fundamental to every Albertan’s existence. It’s about securing medical assistance without fretting over a price tag. It’s about trust, trust in a system that promises to provide care to you and your loved ones when you’re at your most vulnerable. Ultimately, Albertans simply yearn for a functional health care system devoid of drama and devoid of political jockeying, and that’s exactly what we’ve been delivering here on this side of the House, so, no, I do not support the NDP’s Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Are there others wishing to join the debate before the mover closes?

Oh, on the amendment. My apologies. The hon. Member for Calgary-North East on the reasoned amendment.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House we believe that Albertans deserve equal access to care regardless of their income, and that's, sadly, not a universal view in this House. That's exactly what this bill tries to achieve.

In this bill there are two simple things. Just in case the members on the other side have not understood the bill, I would like to explain that in detail. There are two simple things that this bill addresses. The first one is that this bill defines the access fees: what do the access fees mean? The members on the other side are saying that this bill is not concrete and this bill does not address the concrete issues. This is the concrete issue, Madam Speaker, because Albertans do not want to pay out of pocket to go see a family doctor. In this bill the access fees are well defined, that under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act Albertans will not have to pay in any form any sort of payment for insured services. This is a concrete thing in the bill.

The second thing that this bill addresses is about the minister's discretion that the minister currently has to investigate any kind of violations. We have seen in the summer of this year that there were some incidents, there were some clinics that were charging fees from patients, and the investigations are still going on. We don't know the results of those investigations, and currently under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act it is up to the minister if the minister wants to investigate or the minister does not want to investigate or whatever process the minister wants to follow. This bill will address that as well, Madam Speaker. Under this bill, this discretion will be taken away. There must be consequences for these violations. That's what all the members on this side of the House believe, and this is another concrete thing that this bill addresses, that this bill intends to achieve.

3:10

What we have seen from the other side is a cardboard guarantee before the election and nothing else, nothing concrete from the other side. What we have seen are just the promises which have never been fulfilled, Madam Speaker. We have seen on various occasions that the Premier has said – and not only openly said on videos; she has written policy papers with the University of Calgary School of Public Policy where she wants Albertans to pay out of pocket to go see a family doctor. Why should Albertans trust the Premier or the UCP on Alberta health care, on this public health care? That is why we had to bring this bill, so that Albertans can trust, Albertans can rely on this Alberta publicly funded health care system.

Madam Speaker, the UCP's priorities are not the same. They have some different priorities. They are focused on gambling with Albertans' pensions. They are focused on hanging out with Tucker Carlson. They are focused on removing the caps on the gifts that they receive from their rich friends and lobbyists. They are not focused on Alberta's health care system.

We have seen tuition fees have gone up in the past four years. We have seen they have removed the caps on utility bills. We have seen they have removed the caps on utility bills. Albertans are leading the unaffordable life at this point, and we have not seen from them supporting Alberta's health care system. We have not seen them investing in Alberta's health care system. This bill is necessary so that Albertans can at least trust, Albertans can at least believe that this government will make sure that they don't have to pay out of pocket to go see a family doctor. That's what this bill intends to achieve.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, there are no plans from this government to build more hospitals in Calgary and in Alberta. I represent Calgary-North East. I have heard from so many people in Calgary-North East that they deserve and they need a new hospital

in Calgary-North East. We have not seen in the past four years – we have not seen any kind of movement towards that direction. That is why Albertans do not trust this government when it comes to Alberta's health care system. And that's not only the condition with hospitals; that's the exact same situation with Alberta's schools as well.

Out of the seven communities that I represent, there are four communities in Calgary-North East which have zero schools, Madam Speaker, and kids have to travel more than an hour a single day each way to go to school. The parents are upset, the kids are suffering, and we have seen this government, who is giving billions and billions of dollars to the wealthy corporations – they have given \$4.5 billion in 2019 to the wealthy corporations. We have seen that they have given more than a billion dollars to the pipeline which is leading to nowhere.

We have seen this government – with the R-star program they have given billions of dollars to clear the mess that these corporations should have already cleared. And when it comes to the health care system, Madam Speaker, they have no funding. When it comes to building more schools, they have nothing to offer to Albertans. When it comes to making life more affordable, they have nothing to offer. All they have to offer – they cannot speak a single sentence without mentioning the carbon tax and without mentioning Justin Trudeau in their speech.

They do not talk about the health care system. All they talk about is Tucker Carlson. All they talk about is Lyle Oberg, and Lyle Oberg is the person who has tried to privatize our health care system. He has a decadelong record of privatizing the Alberta health care system and trying to build the private hospital in B.C., and before the shovels could get into the ground, he got sued. That's the record of that person.

We have seen the similar statements, we have heard the similar statements from the Premier as well. Let me remind some dates when the Premier has made those comments. In 2021 she wrote a policy paper; on October 27, 2000, it was in the *Calgary Herald*; on June 1, 2003, she made similar comments; August 14, 2004, again; May 16, 2006, same thing; June '21, same thing, June 3, '21, same thing; September '21, same thing; June 3, 2021, same thing. These are so many occasions, and that is why Albertans do not trust in their cardboard guarantee, Madam Speaker. This is why we need a bill that will make sure that Albertans do not pay out of pocket to go see a family doctor.

Madam Speaker, why should Albertans trust? Today itself the members on the other side said that Lyle Oberg was the perfect person to lead the Alberta health care system. That is not correct, that is not what Albertans feel, and that's why I have tabled a petition with more than 1,000 Albertans signing that and asking this government to support Bill 201.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, I want to assure that members on this side of the House do support that because they believe in the public health care system whereas on the other side it is – Albertans will be watching today, right now, after this, where the members on the other side do stand. That's why I'm asking and I'm appealing to all the members on the other side to please support this so that Albertans can believe that this Assembly as a whole supports Alberta's public health care system.

In conclusion, I want to say that when I was at the doors during the campaign, the health care system was top of mind for my constituents. They were repeatedly telling me how deeply they care about the health care system. They were telling me that they rely on Alberta's health care system. They were telling me that emergency wait times went up under this UCP government. They told me that the wait times for the ambulances went up under this government. They're still telling me that they cannot access a family doctor, that

they cannot find a family doctor. I got a call from one of my constituents last week, who told me, in fact, that there is a doctor, there is a clinic in Calgary-North East that is not accepting any new patients.

People from all over Canada are coming to Alberta because they believe that they will have a prosperous future in Alberta, because they believe that their kids can go to schools. Unfortunately, when they come here to Alberta, they find some different reality. They find that there are no hospitals in Calgary-North East. They find that their kids cannot go to schools in the neighbouring communities.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I need to correct the record. The member opposite was obviously sharing things that are inaccurate. Under the NDP the budget for health care was \$22 billion. Right now my budget is \$26.4 billion. That is not a cut. That is a significant increase over the last four years.

This bill does not meet what the member opposite is intending it to meet. In fact, it's unnecessary. We are already ensuring that insured products, insured items are covered and that anyone that doesn't follow the law is dealt with. In fact, Madam Speaker, this summer I had to take a clinic to task for that very item. We have audits in place. There is a process in place. To add redundancy, to add duplication to something that's already happening doesn't help us at all.

Public health care is just that; it's public health care. It's going to remain public health care. We are fully committed to funding public health care, Madam Speaker. Nothing is going to change. In fact, the only changes that are going to happen with the refocusing that I'm so excited about – and you know what? Albertans across the province are extremely excited.

Madam Speaker, I was in Sundre this weekend, this Saturday evening, for the Sundre health care foundation. There were paramedics. There were nurses. There were doctors. There were leaders from across the community. They are excited about change because they know that under the NDP very little was done for rural Alberta in health care. They are excited. In fact, I got a standing ovation. Exciting to hear and see that the people across Alberta are excited about the refocusing. It's time that we actually look at providing better service, better quality of services, ensuring that the citizens of Alberta get the health care that they need and, in fact, the health care that they're paying for.

I just want to end by saying that public health care will be just that, Madam Speaker. We are committed to public health care, fully funded public health care. That is not changing. Albertans will not have to pay out of pocket for insured services. That is not changing, no matter how much the members opposite continue to fearmonger and create anxiety within the community.

3:20

Albertans know we need change. What's been happening hasn't been working, and we need to do something different. They're committed to supporting the refocusing, and I'm excited to see where we're going here across this province. Again, this bill that was introduced, while well intentioned, is just going to add further redundancies. It will not do anything to further health care in this province, but in fact, Madam Speaker, it is just going to add more bureaucratic red tape, more angst in the system when it's not necessary.

Madam Speaker, I've already spoken to this, but I felt very strongly I had to get up and speak and correct the record, that the

members opposite were trying to say that, you know, this is going to do something that it absolutely will not do. I encourage all the members here to vote against this bill. We don't need more redundancy; we need to actually streamline the system, make sure it's better, more efficient, more effective, and, in fact, doing what it needs to do for the citizens of Alberta. That's what we on this side of the House are committed to: better health care for Albertans where they need it in a timely fashion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's public bill to close debate. I would now like to invite the hon. Member for Calgary-North East to close debate on Bill 201.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At the same time, I have already said that we need to support Alberta's health care system and make sure that it remains public whereas I have seen and we have all heard from the Premier and other members that their intentions are not to do so. Their intentions are to privatize it, and they ask us to trust in their cardboard guarantee. Well, when the Premier got in last year, she said that she would fix Alberta's health care system in 90 days. It has been more than a year, so it is time – it is time – for them to support this bill so that Albertans can actually trust the law instead of trusting their cardboard guarantees.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I am standing here with the support of all my colleagues on this side of the aisle. We need to support Alberta's public health care system. We need to make sure that we invest in it. We need to make sure that it remains public. We need to make sure that it is available for Albertans whenever they need it, wherever they need it. We have seen in the past four years that that has not been the case. That is why this bill is important. That is why to support this bill is important as well.

All the constituents, all the Albertans that the members on the other side are representing are also watching. It's not the NDP versus the UCP; it is about Alberta's health care system, Madam Speaker, and that's what Albertans deserve. That's what Albertans are waiting for right after I end my speech, that they are looking for all the members of this Assembly to support this bill. I stand before you to make an appeal to everybody to please support this bill so that Alberta's health care system can be protected from privatization.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you done?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 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	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Smith
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Wiebe

Glubish	Nicolaides	Williams
Guthrie	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Against the motion:		
Al-Guneid	Haji	Metz
Arcand-Paul	Hayter	Notley
Brar	Hoyle	Pancholi
Calahoo Stonehouse	Ip	Renaud
Ceci	Irwin	Sabir
Chapman	Kasawski	Tejada
Eggen	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eremenko	Loyola	
Totals:	For – 48	Against – 23

[Motion on amendment RA1 carried]

Bill 202
Education (Class Size and Composition)
Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: I understand that some members will be taking other meetings. I ask that you leave the Chamber as expeditiously and quietly as possible with respect to the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington, who has the call.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to second reading of the bill that I have brought to the House. Bill 202 is titled the Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023. If I had been able to add a subtitle, it would have been that good information begets good decisions. Bill 202 is a straightforward ask of this government. It's a bill that is focused on addressing concerns about increasing class sizes and a lack of transparency.

There are three pieces to this bill. The first is to return the public class size reporting that was long the standard before 2019, when the UCP made fuzzy what once was very clear. Now, the number of kids in a class doesn't paint the full picture, so in addition to class size reporting we are also asking to see the complexity in our classrooms.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The foundation of this bill is that good information begets good decisions, so the second piece is to ask the ministry to start making some good decisions, to set standards in our classrooms, to determine how many teachers, EAs, support staff are needed to prioritize student learning and student success.

Finally, the third piece is to ensure that we continue to make good decisions going forward. The last commission on learning excellence in Alberta was assembled in 2003, and we are asking the government to assemble this group again now and then every 10 years. This group of experts will make recommendations not just on class size and composition but also on the impacts of technology, changing demographics, and formulas for determining sufficient funding of education programs. Good information begets good decisions.

Over the last week we have heard the minister throw around many numbers: the number of teachers they're hoping to hire, the number of EAs, the number of school projects moving forward. So it is clear to me, at least, that the ministry has no issue with tracking numbers and reporting those numbers back to the public. The core of this bill is asking for just that: do that same tallying of numbers,

and report back to the public on how many kids are in a classroom. How many English language learners need support? How many neurodiverse kiddos would benefit from an EA to help smooth the dozens of little transitions that happen during your average school day? Those numbers and that information should be made transparent to the public because they provide context.

Now, the minister had no problem taking to social media in August to report that the budget was made available for 2,600 new staff expected to be hired for the current school year. He had no problem standing in this House last week to report that 3,000 new support staff, including teachers, will be hired into our classrooms. It was interesting how that number has grown, and one does wonder if by the end of the school year we'll be told that 4,000 or even 5,000 new positions are being filled, but really what the minister failed to do was provide context.

Increasing funding to our education system by 5 per cent over three years: it might sound good to the casual listener. And, certainly, an additional \$820 million over those three years: well, that sounds like an awful lot of money. The question is: is it enough? Twenty-six hundred or 3,000 or whatever number the minister chooses to throw at us: it may sound like a lot of staff, but is it enough? Is it keeping pace with growth in our schools? Is the budget increase informed by the needs of local decision-makers? In a province where some school divisions are experiencing 5 per cent growth year over year, is 5 per cent over three years enough?

When we are asking this government to increase transparency, we are simply looking for that context. Class sizes can help shine a light on where growth is happening, where new physical classroom space is needed, and we need to see more than that. In order to know that the increasing complexity in classrooms is being addressed, it is critical that we know the class composition piece as well. How many adults are in the room? How many teachers? How many EAs? What other types of professionals are needed to best support our kids' learning needs? Good information begets good decisions.

Those of us with children in the public education system and especially those of us who have had the privilege of time to be physically present, to support our schools and classrooms: we know that classroom complexity. We have seen that teacher with 30 students, 18 of whom have a coding of some type, a single teacher in front of a class of 30 kids, half of whom are English language learners, two who are spinning like tops because they can't regulate, and one who has completely retreated into their shell as a coping mechanism. I'd say these kids are falling through the cracks, but when more than half the classroom lacks the support they need, it's not so much a crack as it is a chasm.

The minister has said that it's up to school boards or school divisions, whatever they're called these days, to make these decisions about where funding and support needs to go. I can agree with the minister on this, and after witnessing the big-government approach the UCP has taken on the health care file, it is a relief to hear that this ministry won't be attempting to consolidate control of our education system inside the ministry or the Premier's office. Locally elected school board representatives know their populations. They know the changing demographics in their communities, and they are focused on doing everything they can to support the learning needs of their students, their students in their communities.

3:50

There is no mandate for school boards to negotiate the sharing of resources across school divisions. No. That is the job of the ministry, and just as growth isn't happening equitably across the province, neither is classroom complexity. So while the good folks at Peace River school division will know best whether resources are

directed to Dixonville school or école Springfield or T.A. Norris, it is the ministry that should know how those schools' needs compare to Catherine Nichols Gunn in Calgary or St. Paul in Lethbridge or Westhaven elementary in Edson.

Now, back in July the Education minister received a mandate letter, and this bill dovetails quite nicely with a few of the outcomes laid out in that letter. I was heartened to see that the letter directs the minister to evaluate and, if needed, expand supports for qualified professionals such as speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists. Another section of the mandate letter directs investment in improving testing and educational supports for children with complex needs, including children with autism. Yet another directs implementing additional EAs in classrooms to address the increasing complexity of learning needs. Teachers have been shouting from the rooftops about classroom complexity for years now, and while this is clearly not the top priority for this ministry, it is at least something that they have been directed to address.

This bill isn't about limits or caps; it's about making sure we have the full picture and are fully informed before taking steps to address the complex challenges faced in almost every classroom across this province. The students learning in our classrooms today are Alberta's future leaders. They deserve a quality education, and Albertans expect nothing less. Good information begets good decisions. I hope the minister and his colleagues make the good decision to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join or – sorry.

Hon. member, can you just confirm that you are moving second reading?

Ms Chapman: Oh, I'm sorry. Pardon me, Madam Speaker. I thought I had opened with that.

I move second reading of Bill 202.

The Deputy Speaker: Perfect. Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise before you today with a profound sense of duty as a member of this Assembly and, above all, as a concerned parent. In my role as the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake I'm acutely aware of the pivotal role education plays in shaping the future of our society. Today I stand not only as your representative but also as a father to two young, inquisitive daughters who embody the promise and potential of our next generation. My youngest, who's now in grade 2, loves art class and music class. My oldest, who also loves art and music, is also in grade 6. She recently told me how she loves social studies class because she gets to learn about where her daddy works. I can honestly say that there aren't too many moments where I've been prouder as a dad.

Education undoubtedly is the bedrock upon which a better tomorrow stands. It is the beacon that shines on the path to a brighter future for our children, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving world. As a parent I witness first-hand the transformative power of quality education in the lives of my own children, and I'm driven by a deep-seated commitment to ensure that every child in the Lesser Slave Lake riding and all of Alberta and indeed the province is afforded the same opportunities.

However, today I address this Assembly with a sense of unease as I implore each of you to carefully consider the implications of the opposition's proposition of Bill 202. While the intentions behind this legislation may be commendable, its proposed

measures, particularly the implementation of costly class size reports and the creation of measures to address class complexity, raise significant concerns. I believe it is the responsibility of this whole House to advocate for policies that not only enhance the quality of education but also prioritize fiscal responsibility and the prudent allocation of resources.

In the ensuing debate on Bill 202 I urge my fellow members to consider the potential ramifications on our education system, weighing the necessity of these proposed measures against their impact on the already strained resources of our schools. The first reason I believe this House should vote down the bill is its stipulation on class size reporting, which, of course, is one of its main facets. While reporting class sizes may seem beneficial on paper, when we look at them from a cost-benefit perspective, it's anything but. Since the program was first introduced in 2004, the province has spent a whopping \$3.4 billion on class size reporting. When the government decided to launch a review of the program's effectiveness in 2019, the class size initiative was swiftly discontinued.

That said, Madam Speaker, this government didn't simply pull the funds out of our education system, as the folks on the other side of the aisle may have you believe. Instead, we had to reallocate these funds into various initiatives that actually make a difference in the lives of our young learners. For example, over the last four years Alberta's government has approved 98 school projects. We also committed \$2.3 billion over the next three years to either build or renovate schools across this province. In Budget 2023 Alberta's government announced support for 58 priority school projects that will provide new and improved student spaces, create jobs, and support our communities. Through Budget 2023 Alberta's government created the new school planning program that will serve as a transparent pipeline for upcoming school projects so they can hit the ground running as soon as formal construction funding is approved. That is tangible change that actually makes a difference in the lives of our children instead of needless class size reporting, which evidence has shown offers no benefits.

This government is committed to ensuring the best possible education for our children for years to come. We are taking significant steps to make sure that our education is the best anywhere in Canada and the world. In our last budget this government increased funding by 5.2 per cent, reaching a total of \$8.8 billion, aimed at providing support for students, classrooms, and schools throughout the province. This increase in funding is intended to facilitate the hiring of up to 3,000 educational professionals over the next three years, encompassing teachers, educational assistants, bus drivers, and school support staff. Some school administrators anticipate recruiting over 2,600 teachers and support staff exclusively for the 2023-2024 academic year. In fact, at the commencement of the school year the Calgary board of education made an announcement indicating the addition of over 700 full-time teacher and learning staff to enhance support for a greater number of students.

The second component of this bill, Madam Speaker, addresses class complexity. It states that we should bring back mandatory complexity reporting in schools across this province as a way to deal with the growing complexities of our educational system. It is no secret that the landscape of classrooms is becoming increasingly intricate, particularly for students facing unique challenges. This is something that our government cares deeply about as we want to ensure that every single Albertan has an equal chance of getting a quality education.

Our government is acutely aware of the diverse needs within our educational system, ranging from newcomers to Canada and English language learners, to those requiring specialized learning

supports. Students grappling with behavioural changes and heightened socioeconomic obstacles further contribute to the complexity of modern classrooms. Additionally, the widespread effects of pandemic learning loss have added a layer of urgency to addressing the evolving needs of our student population. In recognizing the challenges faced by newcomers to this province, the government is actively working to create an inclusive and supportive environment. Initiatives are being implemented to enhance language acquisition programs, cultural integration, and community support, ensuring that these students have the resources they need to thrive academically and socially.

Within the framework of Budget 2023 the classroom complexity grant is an integral element of the learning support funding, which encompasses an allocation of nearly \$1.5 billion. Specifically earmarked in Budget 2023 is a newly assigned fund totalling \$126 million over a span of three years. This financial provision is designed to proactively address challenges associated with classroom complexity, with the dedicated amount of \$42 million earmarked for the ongoing academic year of 2023-2024.

4:00

Madam Speaker, while the intention behind this bill may be noble, we must critically assess whether it aligns with the comprehensive educational strategy we have tirelessly pursued. I believe that as responsible stewards of education it is our duty to ensure that every policy we endorse directly contributes to the betterment of our education system. Bill 202, unfortunately, falls short of this standard. It introduces burdensome reporting mechanisms that threaten to divert precious resources away from the core of our educational mission.

Our government firmly believes in implementing initiatives that directly impact the quality of education such as investing in teacher training, updating curriculum materials, and providing students with cutting-edge resources. I implore all members of the Assembly to consider the broader perspective. Let us focus on policies that truly enhance the learning experience for our students and empower our educators. Voting down Bill 202 is not a rejection of concern for education; rather, it is an assertion of our commitment to effective, impactful, and meaningful progress in the realm of education.

Thank you.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What an honour to rise in this House. As is customary for me, first time speaking in the Chamber this week, I just want to give a shout-out to all those folks who are working on the front lines. I know that a number of nurses were in the Chamber today, and it was truly an honour to see them up there. We know that folks on the front lines, whether in health care, in retail, in education, which I'll speak about today: they've been dealing with a lot, so a shout-out to all of them.

You know, it is an honour to rise and stand to speak to Bill 202, the Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023. Gosh. I have a lot to say, especially in response to that interesting defence, not that I would presuppose this Chamber, of what seemingly appears to be killing this bill. I'll get to that in a moment.

Before I do that, let me talk a little bit about Bill 202, and I'll start by noting that, as many folks in this Chamber will recall – I know the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in particular loves when I regale this Chamber with tales of my teaching experience in rural Alberta. I do have more stories that I haven't yet shared in this

Chamber. You know, why I want to connect to Bill 202 is just to acknowledge the fact that I do know first-hand the complexity of classrooms these days. I know you might say, "Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you don't look all that young anymore," but it wasn't that long ago that I taught in the classroom, relatively speaking. I stopped teaching in – oh, my gosh – 2011, I believe. Yeah. Clearly my memory is failing me as well.

Even at that time, you know, I taught in two K to 12 schools. That meant that in some cases some of my what we call nonacademic, my Dash 2 high school classes: sometimes they were really small, actually, and at other times they were quite large because we would have combined classes – right? – having a small population in the school. I know what it was like having to juggle 30-plus kids in a classroom, having to juggle, as the Member for Calgary-Beddington so aptly stated, a whole lot of different kids just coming with different skills and abilities. Especially when I would have – I was a high school social studies teacher, for those new members who haven't had the honour of hearing about my classroom teaching experiences. I was a high school social studies teacher, so we would often have the Dash 1, so like the academic stream; the Dash 2; and sometimes even the Dash 4, which would be like the knowledge and employability stream as well.

You'd have students, like I said, with all different abilities coming to a classroom, different curriculum as well. Similarities, especially in senior high social studies, but different. You know, having to be as one teacher – I didn't have EAs in most of those classes – really having to sort of tailor to each student: it was a lot. It was a lot of work and a lot of pressure put on me as a teacher. I can say that I was pretty fortunate, right? I was fortunate compared to some of the stories we've heard from teachers and educational assistants across the province about what they're dealing with as well. I can say that I started teaching in Bawlf, Alberta. Shout-out to Bawlf. I always like to get them on the record.

My second position was that I was a vice-principal in Forestburg, Alberta. As a vice-principal I had to fill the timetable a little bit, and I'd only ever taught senior high, a little bit of junior high. When I got to Forestburg, I had to teach grade 2. Now, I gained so much respect for elementary teachers because that, let me tell you, was a challenge. I had 27 grade 2 students, and I still remember them very well, but I learned right away just how much those elementary teachers have to manage and balance when they've got so many students coming with all different forms of abilities. Consider as well: this was pre-COVID times. We've talked about the learning loss and the other impacts of these young people having to live through a global pandemic.

Although, I will add: teaching grade 2 physical education was one of the best experiences of my life because we would play – I wouldn't do this now – boys against girls soccer, and it was 20 boys versus seven girls. I would be on the girls' team and we would dominate. Just saying.

Anyway, I want to get a little bit more to this bill, but I wanted to just frame it by saying, you know, that there are a few of us in this Chamber who have actually been in classrooms and get first-hand how important this piece of legislation is. I really respect – I hate to have to follow her – the work and the effort that the Member for Calgary-Beddington and as well the Education critic, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, have put into this bill and the conversations that they've had, because what they've done is that they've gone out to schools, they've actually talked to teachers and to parents and to the key stakeholders and to students as well, the people for whom we should be making these decisions. We should always be keeping students' interests at the top of our minds.

What is Bill 202 trying to do? If passed, as mentioned by my colleague, boards will be required to report to the minister on

various aspects of class composition, including the number of students. As has been noted, we're not talking about just a cap, to counter some of those arguments from the member across the way: the number of students requiring specialized support, the number of English language learners, which, as we know, again, that was something – me teaching in where I was in rural Alberta: I didn't have many English language learners. I can tell you the students, the teachers in the riding I represent, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: they have a lot of newcomer students who bring so much richness and diversity to their classrooms, but also some of those teachers report it being challenging to really meet the needs of all those students. So what does this reporting do? Well, it offers transparency to our education system. It means that those stakeholders I mentioned earlier – teachers, parents, school staff, students – will have some sort of understanding, an accurate, a clearer picture of what's happening in Alberta classrooms.

Now, I think it's all fair, we should agree, we should all agree in this Chamber, that transparency and accountability are good things, although we've seen from this UCP government's record in the past that they don't always agree that transparency and accountability are good things. I will mention as well, as was noted by my colleague from Calgary-Beddington, it's been 20 years since the last time Alberta had a learning commission, the Alberta Commission on Learning. I can tell you that was in 2003, that was just after I graduated high school. That's 20 years ago. That's a long time, right? A lot of things have changed since that commission on learning.

What will this bill do, Bill 202? It will establish the commission on learning excellence, consisting of nine members appointed to make recommendations on class size, composition, impacts of technology, which is an important one as well, education program funding, and other matters. It'll be a research-based approach. That commission will conduct research, will actually engage with the stakeholders who are most impacted, request necessary information, and provide a report to the minister within two years.

Now, to give a little background on ACOL – many of us who have been in the classroom remember that commission, because we can often point to: well, that was 20 years ago – what did ACOL recommend? It recommended that K to 3 classes should on average have 17 students – as I said, when I taught grade 2, we had 27 – grades 4 to 6 classes should have 23 students or fewer, grades 7 to 9 classes should have 25 students or fewer, and high school classes should have 27 students or fewer. I and I guess most of the members in this Chamber who've got high schools in their riding, especially in the urban areas, can tell you that it is very rare for a high school class these days to have 27 students or fewer, but that does not mean we should accept it and say that that is just the way it has to be. Absolutely, it doesn't have to be.

Since ACOL in 2003 there have been no commissions on the significance of class sizes or composition. Again, it's been 20 years. A lot has changed in 20 years. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I can guarantee you that Alberta's population has ballooned significantly since 2003, and we know that the complexity of classrooms has changed as well. Of course, we don't have data, which is what we're asking for, but I can tell you anecdotally that classroom complexity has absolutely changed since I graduated high school in, well, 2002. It's interesting, pointing to the track record of this government, that in 2019 the UCP government ended the practice of tracking and really trying to have some sort of accountability for what's happening in schools across this province.

4:10

This is where I have to turn to the remarks of the member opposite. Now, he has a lot of concerns about fiscal responsibility.

I tried to jot notes down as quickly as I could, but, wow, there was a lot there. The member talked about – and I'm appreciative of this – the importance of, you know, caring for the education of his own children and children in his riding as well but was worried about the costs.

Now, this is absolutely laughable to claim fiscal responsibility at a time when this government is spending millions – millions – to give money, to give contracts to their pals, \$2 million for the panel on COVID – I can't remember the long title for it – \$250,000 of which was given to Preston Manning, right? Speaking of, you know, the need for education and teachers being able to spend more one-on-one time with students, perhaps that's a lesson that this Education minister and this government should keep in mind. We know that Manning desired in that report an emphasis on alternative scientific narratives, right? So, I mean, at a time when we need evidence-based decision-making, at a time when we need data, this government is ignoring it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just appreciate the opportunity to rise. I know there are lots of individuals in the House who would like to speak to this particular piece of legislation, so I'll be fairly quick, but I had to rise in response to the hon. member's comments about evidence-based results.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you I have had the privilege of serving in this Chamber almost 10 years for the great consistency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and let me talk about evidence. When that hon. member's party was in power, nothing happened in my constituency for any school-aged children. No schools got built. Nothing positive at all happened for K to 12 students inside the great constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Now, fast-forward to 2019, and they went to that side of the aisle. They got fired by Albertans and sent over there.

Mr. McIver: How many terms?

Mr. Nixon: Well, now they've lost twice, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. He wanted to know.

They got sent over there, and we came over to this side and got to become a government. We got our now the hon. the Minister of Health who was at that time the hon. Minister of Education, and I can tell you in the communities like Rocky Mountain House: two brand new schools, Madam Speaker. We begged the NDP to invest when it comes to rural Alberta. The reality is that the more you hear the NDP get up, including with this piece of legislation, the more you realize that they have no idea where rural Alberta is, but they want to rise and act as if they're champions for rural Alberta and for rural Alberta students. They get really mad because they don't like this pointed out, but this is the fundamental flaw with the NDP and their legislation that they have before the Chamber today, is that they're writing legislation about something they have no idea about. They're talking about things that they have no idea about . . . [interjections] And they get upset. You can hear them. You hear them heckling away. That usually means we're getting to something very sensitive when they start to act like that, particularly the hon. Member for St. Albert. We know we're getting somewhere good when she starts to heckle like that.

It is ridiculous to see the Official Opposition continue to get up in this Chamber and try to act as if this bill or anything that they've ever done is actually in the best interests of our children, Madam Speaker, because the proof is when they were in government. They did nothing for the communities I represent, not one thing when it

came to education whereas this government delivered multiple schools for my constituents and has made sure that our education system has worked.

The former Minister of Education, now the Minister of Health, was also one of my trustees when I was in Official Opposition, so she could speak to the fact that none of my communities got anything from the NDP government, not one thing. They let them continue to suffer when it came to that. Nothing that I see in this legislation will in any way be able to address that issue. God forbid if there was ever an NDP government, though I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, I hear they're thinking of changing their name because they want everybody to forget that they're a socialist party who devastated our province, who did nothing for the education system, including with this bill. Now, I think they could probably try to change their names, but they won't change their stripes. Albertans are going to still know what behaviour you will see from the Official Opposition, particularly when it comes to education, which is not proper investments in education and certainly not in rural Alberta. Certainly not in rural Alberta. They don't care about rural Alberta, and this legislation here makes no – there's nothing in here, in their bill, that would prevent the abuse that we saw by the NDP government for rural communities. Not just on schools, Madam Speaker; you saw it on things like agriculture legislation and other components where they just don't care about rural Alberta.

I really encourage the members to come to rural Alberta. You know, we saw in question period today, Madam Speaker, a member get up and talk about the great town of Rimbey – great place; Martha and Henry, Ralph Klein's Martha and Henry, Rimbey – and then get up and talk about Ponoka as if it was Rimbey. Rimbey is on the west side of highway 2, quite far away from Ponoka. Completely different communities. What's next, they're going to call Olds Airdrie? They have no idea about the whole province that is outside of a place like Calgary and Edmonton, and they don't show that with this legislation, but the hon. member gets up here and professes to bring legislation forward with this private member's bill to help rural Alberta.

But it won't help rural Alberta, Madam Speaker. Do you know what will help rural Alberta? This government, continuing to elect a Conservative government who will continue to stand up for rural Alberta. That's why the hon. member should go back to the drawing board and try better, because they continue to bring forward legislation to this Chamber that does not address the very issue that they say they will address. It's outrageous.

Now, I'll give you another one – and they should consider maybe bringing forward an amendment on this private bill around this – and that is to deal with carbon tax and the relationship to schools. The reality is that any of us who are rural MLAs, who spend time with our school boards – I have four school boards. The number one issue, Madam Speaker, that school boards raised with me is the cost of the carbon tax for both their transportation costs and for their school. But those hon. members continue to stand up in this Chamber and vote each and every time with Mr. Singh and Justin Trudeau to continue to ram the carbon tax down Albertans' throats. If they truly want to help with education, let's help school boards with their biggest cost, which is transportation of students in rural Alberta. But they continue to jam that tax and make sure that rural Alberta, who pays way more for it – now, they don't understand that.

That's why when they were in government they brought forward a program in relation to the carbon tax – and it's very relevant to school boards. Go talk to school boards. That's why this should be in this legislation to fix it. They brought forward a program – you'll remember this, Madam Speaker – with light bulbs and shower

heads. They were going to take everybody's carbon tax and they were buying light bulbs and shower heads. But here's what they really messed up. It shows they don't understand rural Alberta, including with this bill. You know what they messed up? The shower heads didn't work for low-pressure water lines that we have in rural Alberta, because they don't know anything about rural Alberta. So don't pretend to be a champion of rural Alberta.

And they're certainly not a champion of kids because when they were in power they also built no schools, Madam Speaker. They didn't get any schools built, not urban or rural, did nothing. Do you know who did, though? The hon. the Education minister, now the hon. Minister of Health, who continues to build schools. The largest reason why this NDP government got fired and got sent to the opposition benches where they are . . . [interjections] You know, I love it. They don't like it. They are mad. They're mad at Albertans. They're mad at Albertans who have rejected them not once but they've rejected them twice, so much so that they have to try to change their name to try to trick Albertans.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, I rise pursuant to 23(b), which says "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." For the last I don't know how many minutes I didn't hear a word about what this bill is about. We are discussing quite an important bill, quite an important issue, and I think all we heard is rhetoric which has nothing to do with this bill. It will be helpful – it's about the future of our kids, future of our public education – if we keep our discussion about what this bill is doing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

4:20

Mr. Amery: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. The hon. minister spoke at great length about this particular bill, about education, about schools, about the lack of schools that the opposition members failed to put up during their time in government during the 2015 to 2019 period. The fact that they continue to heckle over and over again may have prevented the hon. opposition deputy House leader from hearing the minister's comments, but he certainly referred to the bill at great lengths as it relates to education throughout his submissions. This is debate. The member is free to exercise his right to debate so long as it pertains to the bill. He has spoken about the bill at great lengths. This is not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I would tend to agree. This is a matter of debate. However, I also tend to agree it was very loud in here and hard to hear the member who was speaking, so perhaps we could try this again with the remaining time.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I didn't catch how much time I have left.

The Deputy Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Nixon: Three minutes. Perfect. Well, I will try to get it all done in three minutes, Madam Speaker, and look forward to maybe being able to speak about this as well if it gets to Committee of the Whole,

but I suspect it won't because this legislation is faulty. It is yet again the NDP playing politics and not working on getting real results for Albertans.

Again, Madam Speaker, the number one issue facing Alberta schools in rural Alberta – and the hon. member got up and talked about rural Alberta, so it's very relevant to this legislation. I'm always happy to educate the NDP about rural Alberta, where we are, what we do inside rural Alberta, and invite them at any time to be able to come and experience the true rural Alberta in my constituency. Any time. In fact, I would love it if they would come there, besides just to go on vacation, and actually talk to real people.

But the number one issue that is taking place when it comes to rural school boards hands down is the cost of the carbon tax on those school boards. Every rural member in this House who has met with the school boards knows that is the number one thing that will be raised by the school boards. Nothing inside Bill 202 deals with that, Madam Speaker, because as we know the NDP have to do what their federal leader tells them to do. And the federal leader has continued to tell the NDP over and over that they must stand with the job-killing carbon tax, which is so brutal for the entire social services sector and for the education industry.

Madam Speaker, they are making it harder to get children to school. They're making it harder to build schools, and they're making it harder for all Albertans to be able to succeed, including children in our K to 12 system. And they don't want to be reminded about that, but I want to stress that very much, that this is an NDP policy. It's being shored up for Justin Trudeau by their leader and the NDP. For some of my new colleagues they may not know this, but they're the same party federally and provincially, the exact same organization. They must take their marching orders from Mr. Singh, which is why they've stood in this House each and every time and voted to keep the carbon tax, voted to support Justin Trudeau on that dreadful tax that is impacting everyday Albertans, and that's why in Bill 202 they have not brought forward a solution for the biggest issue, which is the cost of the NDP-Liberal carbon tax.

So I encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, and get back to work and be able to help Albertans.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 202, education amendment act, class composition reporting and standards. Obviously the member opposite didn't realize what bill he was debating or speaking on, so he's just going to, you know, spew the normal rhetoric that we hear in here every day.

But what I will say, one of his points that was really sort of weird or led me to believe why I know he didn't read it is that he said that this bill does nothing for rural Alberta. I don't think he realizes that we would collect data in all areas of Alberta, Madam Speaker. That means all school boards. That means all schools. That means complexity in all schools. So maybe the minister will stop yakking for a minute and just read the bill. That would be great.

I'm going to talk a little bit about why this piece of legislation is important. You know, I think just last week – was it? I think it was last week, Madam Speaker, that Inclusion Alberta had a fundraiser. I am quite sure that a number of the members opposite have attended that fundraiser. I've seen some of them there. I wasn't able to go this year, but I've seen them in previous years. I've seen them talk about the work that Inclusion Alberta does. I've seen them actually even use the word "inclusion," not that I'm convinced they fully understand what that means in classrooms, but I have heard

them say it. The reason I'm bringing this up is that Inclusion Alberta is a provincial body. It's actually a national body, but Inclusion Alberta is the provincial body that works really hard in this province to ensure that kids have inclusive education.

Now, what we need to know in this place about inclusion: it's more than just a word. It's more than just a word that you use in this place. It requires investment, it requires energy, and it requires oversight, and the first step that you have to take is that you need information. You have to know exactly what you're dealing with, so for these members to continuously talk about the good work that groups like Inclusion Alberta do – and they do engage in good work, Madam Speaker. They do great work, and they advance inclusion at many different levels, but for these members opposite to show up to these events and to talk about inclusion but not actually comprehend the value of this piece of legislation is a bit shocking because what this piece of legislation does is say that we need some information about the number of kids in classrooms and the complexity in classrooms because it can get actually beyond just bad for our kids and bad for the future; it can actually be dangerous. It can be very dangerous.

If we want to invest in our kids, we all know that we need to invest in education. I think we can all agree, no matter what party we're from, that we need to invest in education, great education, because our kids are our future. Let me tell you: if you are not investing in all children – and that means an inclusive education because not every child needs the same thing, and not every child learns the same way, and the only way that you can know what they need is if you have data and information.

I loved what my colleague said about this piece of legislation, that information makes good policy. I wish I could remember the actual quote, but I didn't write it down, and I apologize for that. But she is quite right, that we can't make realistic changes that are going to change lives and change the future without actually knowing how deep the problem is and where the problem is. So how do we keep our kids safe in school? This is another issue. How we keep our kids safe in school is that we fund classrooms appropriately because when we don't do that, Madam Speaker, we create situations where all kinds of things can happen.

Now, I think that even the new members in this place will understand, again, that the UCP have demonstrated very clearly, over and over again, – and we're seeing it right now – that they are opposed to sunlight, Madam Speaker. They don't like the sunlight. They don't like to know what the actual problem is. They don't like to know the facts. They like rhetoric, they like to point fingers at Ottawa, they like to heckle, they like to laugh, but they don't actually like the facts. And the fact is that what this piece of legislation is trying to do is – let's not presuppose that we know there's a problem. We do know there's a problem, but let's not presuppose we know how big the problem is. Let's figure out exactly what the problem is, and that's what this bill does.

This is a party, this is a government that is patently unwilling to know the extent of the problem and to collect data. Instead they like to take petty little shots over there about what we are as a government, what we stand for, and point fingers like they do because they're incapable of taking responsibility. I will add that it is their responsibility, squarely on their shoulders, that we don't have the data that we need. We don't know the depth of the complexity. We don't know how big the classrooms are because this government, the UCP government, decided that's not important. We know that that's not true.

Let me tell you that when you don't understand the complexity or the depth of complexity in classrooms, you're opening yourself up to all kinds of problems, and by "opening yourself," by "us," I mean the province of Alberta. It's not just an individual school or

school board or location; it is all of us, and it's our future. Let me tell you one of the things that happens when you don't meet the needs . . . [interjections] I honestly don't know what's so funny about this. Let me tell you about what happens when you don't meet the needs of children. We often say they're coded. They have different codes. They've been assessed in different ways, from a learning disability to cerebral palsy to a brain injury to autism to Down syndrome, whatever it may be, whatever the disability may be. But if you have a classroom that has too many children, not enough educators, not enough EAs, not enough physical space, not enough resources, not enough technology, and not enough accessibility, you end up using things like segregation rooms and isolation rooms, Madam Speaker. That's what happens.

Now, fun fact: when the NDP formed government, one of the things that we did, because we knew it was important to do, was to stop using isolation rooms because we know that they're dangerous. They impede children's learning, not to mention the damage they do on their mental health, not to mention the damage they do in the classroom environment. Instead of properly funding classrooms and the complexity of classrooms, this government chose: let's bring that back. Let's bring back the use of isolation rooms or segregation rooms or whatever you want to call them. That's not okay, because nobody learns that way, particularly children with disabilities.

4:30

I'll tell you, when you don't include a child in their education – and by include I don't mean just plop them down on a desk in the classroom; I mean ensure that you have the tools and the resources and the staffing so that they can learn and they can be all that they can be. Let me tell you, when you do it properly, they go on to postsecondary education and they go on to employment. And maybe they don't. Maybe they do something else, but they are better off, as is their mental health and their family and their friends.

But when you fail to make that investment, you're asking for all kinds of problems, and then you're going to end up in a system like we have here in Alberta. Persons with developmental disabilities, that pays for staffing for adults with developmental disabilities: is that number going down ever? No. The complexity is going up, people are more unemployed, people are staying home, they're in dangerous situations, and all of that because we sometimes miss it by not investing properly in education, in early education specifically.

Now, this UCP government stopped collecting data, stopped checking on class sizes. Not only that; they cut PUF funding, and for the newbies in here that don't really know that file yet, I will explain it. PUF stands for program unit funding, and what that is is funded early intervention. What the UCP government did at the time, last term, was they cut PUF funding so that it was one less year for kids to receive early intervention. Now, I don't care what side of this aisle you're from. You have got to know that early intervention is a huge investment. It is massive, and it allows kids to be successful through school. But, again, another example of this particular government not seeing the big picture and certainly not seeing the future.

Now, I will tell you that in St. Albert the school boards – the two school boards, but I will specifically point to the St. Albert public school board. I think it was a couple of years ago, and I know the then Minister of Education received a copy of it that didn't seem to faze her, but what the report did was really counteract some of the stuff that was coming from the government. The government said: "No, we didn't cut it. We didn't cut it. It's all good. Don't look over here." They did cut it, and as a result it meant fewer hours of support and intervention for the kids in St. Albert public. And it wasn't just

a few hundred hours; it was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours. The kids were not getting the supports they needed. Then it talked about the pressures it put on other systems, so we know there is a real-life, real-world implication to cutting early supports.

Now, if this government is going to continue to damage education, particularly for students with complex needs, if they're going to continue on that path, I would suggest that they should support this piece of legislation so at least they know how bad the problem is or maybe where to invest.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: I'll be quick. I won't need the whole time, Madam Speaker. [An electronic device sounded] What's the matter?

The Deputy Speaker: I don't know. Just give us a minute.

Mr. Nicolaidis: I'll wait.

The Deputy Speaker: Technical difficulties. Just give us a minute. The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, fantastic. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad we were able to get the technical difficulties sorted out.

Just rising today to talk a little bit about the bill before the Assembly. I agree with a lot of the commentary from my colleague the minister of seniors, community, and housing as well with a lot of his concerns. I know he was talking a little bit about the carbon tax, and it was interesting because I've had some recent conversations with some of our school divisions who have, on their own accord, come to me and given me a full picture about some of the costs that they're incurring as a result of the carbon tax. I didn't actually know, but interestingly they're not eligible to receive any of the rebates that others might receive, so they're having to deal with some significant cost escalation, that school divisions are documenting, that is directly attributable to the carbon tax and to the projected increase.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Name those schools. Evidence based: let's hear it. Name the schools. Name the principals.

Mr. Nicolaidis: The member is yelling because the member doesn't believe I had these conversations, but of course I can assure you, and those are indeed facts.

I mean, it's a fact. I don't know how we can disagree with the fact that a carbon tax increases costs. I mean, that's the primary purpose of it, to increase costs and to subsequently alter behaviour of consumers so that they will make more informed decisions. I don't think we need to provide a mountain of evidence before the Assembly when I say that school boards are concerned about rising costs due to the carbon tax. I think that we can all expect that, because I'm sure – I know the members opposite like to talk a lot about the fact that they're hearing about a lot of the affordability challenges, which are indeed occurring, and many Albertans are struggling with the rising costs. They should know full well that Albertans, organizations, and school divisions are all having to contend with increasing costs partly due to the carbon tax and its slated increase.

All that aside and being said, with respect to the bill, as my colleague mentioned, I would encourage members of the Assembly to vote against the bill, and that's for a number of reasons. I'm concerned with the bill, Madam Speaker, because there are a lot of unnecessary elements in here. As an example, this proposed commission that the bill contemplates developing. It states that the

commission must work to “research and analyze information about education programs.”

Just on that first part, “research and analyze information about education programs,” you know, we have some really fantastic individuals that work within the Ministry of Education: assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, and others. I know they spend a lot of their time doing precisely that type of work, so I’m not sure why we need a commission to replicate a lot of the work that’s already occurring within the ministry.

Secondly, the bill calls upon the commission to “consult with individuals and organizations representing boards, students and teachers that it considers necessary,” also something that I think is quite repetitive because that’s the job of the minister. That’s the job of other members of the minister’s office and staff, to do precisely that, to make sure that they are consulting with teachers, organizations representing boards, students, and other groups.

As an example of that work, just this morning I had the opportunity to participate at the fall convention of the Alberta School Boards Association, take some questions from them, and hear a little bit about their priorities and collective concerns. I’ve also continued a practice of previous ministers and constituted a Minister’s Youth Council. We met for the first time over the weekend a few weeks back in October and had an opportunity to hear directly from some amazing students across the province about their concerns and priorities. That work is already under way, and it’s something that the Minister of Education should be doing, so I’m not sure why we need a commission to do that.

4:40

Furthermore, I’m also concerned with some of the timelines that the bill highlights. If I remember correctly, the bill says that a commission must be up and running – I know it doesn’t need to be that specific date, but it does provide a deadline that the commission should be up and running by December 31st of 2024. There’s no way the commission – unless, of course, it is put in place a little bit earlier. But if it is put in place close to that deadline, there’s no way the commission would be able to really get any work under way until ’25. Subsequently, I believe it’s stipulated here that the commission should report back within two years. So we won’t have any information from this commission until 2027 at the very latest. Again, I know we can constitute the commission a little bit earlier if possible, but we wouldn’t see any real information from this commission until 2026-2027.

Member Kayande: You can make it quick.

Mr. Nicolaides: I hear the member making some comments. I’m happy to welcome an interjection if he wants.

You know, in my mind, it’s a very, very long period of time. Furthermore, there’s work that needs to be done, and there’s work that needs to get under way immediately. That’s what I’m focused on, and that’s what Alberta’s government is focused on, Madam Speaker, getting the job done and getting the work done by having very open and frank conversations with our school divisions.

Seeing some of the population challenges that we have in the province, we know that the Alberta advantage is back and booming once again. It’s very clear through the numbers that many more Canadians and people from around the world are choosing to call Alberta home once again, which is great to see. When we were first elected as government four years ago, our primary objective was to do just that, to restart the economy, to make Alberta a place of hope and opportunity once again, to make it a beacon and a magnet that attracts people from around the world. I’m so happy to see that we’ve been successful in that goal as we see that reflected by the

fact that thousands and thousands and thousands of people are choosing to call Alberta home.

As an example, Madam Speaker, from April 1, 2022, to April 1, 2023, Alberta’s population grew by 200,000 just in that 12-month period, which is quite remarkable. It’s really encouraging to see that Alberta is back, that Alberta is booming, that people are once again finding opportunity in our incredible province.

Now, certainly, with that kind of increase in population, it presents some pressures on our school divisions and presents pressures with respect to enrolment, so our government is focused on expanding the number of schools in our growing communities to be able to accommodate that growth and demand as well as to continue to explore – I know the Member for St. Albert was talking about classroom complexity and PUF and other complex needs. That’s precisely why the Premier has asked me to take a look at the program unit funding, to take a look at classroom complexity.

In particular, the Premier has called upon me to increase screening for autism and other learning and cognitive delays and disabilities early. It’s very important that we identify those needs and challenges as early as possible to give our kids the support that they need. If we can make sure that we build the right foundation, we set them up for success. I think we can all agree with that. So that’s a priority for us.

Again, I just want to encourage my colleagues and all members to vote against the bill. I think there are a number of unnecessary elements here. I further believe that it’s important for government to get to work, as we are, in building new schools. As I mentioned a couple of times in this House through question period and other opportunities over the last four years, Alberta’s government has moved ahead with 98 school projects. When the NDP was in power, that number was approximately 47. It’s important that we continue moving forward with school projects. It’s important that we continue providing funding for classroom complexity and addressing the concerns of students.

I mentioned to the Member for West Yellowhead that I wouldn’t take up all of the time because I think he wanted to jump in on the conversation, so I’ll leave it there, Madam Speaker. I’m very happy for the opportunity to speak to the bill this evening.

Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and speak in support of the bill put forward by the Member for Calgary-Beddington. Just as a reminder, what the bill is actually trying to address is very straightforward. I know there was a lot of meandering conversation about, you know, various other items here, but we’re talking about introducing not only the idea of reporting back on class sizes, which, to be frank, I am hearing from many Calgarians is in just a desperate state. We’re hearing stories about people having classes in hallways, in areas that aren’t designated for learning and definitely not conducive to learning. So we’re talking about reporting back on class sizes; we’re talking about reporting back on class composition.

We know that the last few years have been very, very tough on our education system, on our professionals and the experts in education, our teachers. What we’re hearing from them is that in addition to some of the learning loss that people experienced over the course of the pandemic, there are other complicating factors that are having an impact on how classrooms are able to function. We know that we have a lot of newcomers.

The idea that one teacher with not enough supports would be able to meet the needs of, first of all, you know, that first piece of responsibility, which is educating students and following the

curriculum and providing support for those students, which we know can be complex just on a day-to-day basis for any student: when we're thinking about downloading that responsibility onto a teacher on top of having to account for the learning losses that were experienced over the pandemic, on top of having to determine what the needs are for many of our newcomers, and then, in addition to all of this, wanting to obfuscate the information that we can get about what's needed in a classroom, it just makes absolutely no sense to me.

We are asking, if this bill is passed, that we establish a commission on learning excellence. The last time we did this was in 2003. I don't think it is beyond the pale to require reporting and to do an analysis of what's happening in our classrooms and to be up front and transparent about it to Albertans. This is on class composition, on class size, on funding formulas, and what we need to do to adequately meet the needs of our students. I think that on either side of the aisle we can agree – and we hear, you know, comments to this effect – that students are our future and that they are the future leaders of this province, so the idea that we would not want to pass a bill to adequately meet their needs, to proactively get the information from the experts about what is needed in the classroom is just beyond me.

I do hear from a lot of families in my constituency about the state of their class sizes on top of the affordability crisis, the impact that that has on students day to day, on their ability to focus and to concentrate. You know, we know that this has been a concern for Alberta families for a long time. You see, Madam Speaker, in 2019 this government actually decided to end the practice of classroom size reporting. I find it interesting that any government would rush to stop collecting the data about such a critical service that we provide to Albertans, one that feeds into our postsecondary system, one that feeds into our economy by providing students and citizens that are engaged, that are educated, that feel confident about their areas of specialization once they leave high school.

But that's exactly what this government did in 2019. So why would a government wilfully obfuscate important information to make decisions on staffing and on how we provide students support when we hear all the time that this is sorely needed? I'm not really sure what conversations the members on the opposite side are having or with whom, but something that I've heard, you know, easily since the spring, over the course of the work that I've done for many years in constituency offices, is just how desperate people are to get supports for their students in their classrooms.

4:50

In addition to what I've been hearing from folks on the ground, I am myself the mother of two students in the Calgary public school board. Now, I can say that in our family we've also experienced times where the learning complexities required that we actually have extra analysis done on exactly what one particular student needed. At the time, when we were under Conservative governments, we weren't able to get what we needed. It took years – it took years – and it took until we actually had an NDP government that was willing to invest not only in analyzing the composition and in investing in staffing in schools and building schools. It wasn't until then, until they were also giving funds to be able to do – I'm trying to think of the word right now. It wasn't until we were able to get funding for them to provide proper supports to students with special needs that we were able to actually get a diagnosis for my daughter. Since then things have gone much more smoothly. She feels much more prepared and much more supported.

I'm thinking back to some of the things that the members opposite have pointed out about fiscal responsibility, and I can't help but think about the cost of not investing in our schools, in our

students, especially when they're at such a critical time and in such dire need, with so many other factors outside of the classroom weighing on their ability to learn. I think about the cost down the line, and I think that when we reduce providing supports to a line item, we often fail to see the greater cost to our communities as a whole.

Now, we know on this side of the aisle that we want to ensure that every child receives a high-quality, relevant, inclusive education, where they're safe and supported. We know that if we're able to pass this bill, boards would be required to report to the minister on various aspects of class composition, including how many students, how many require specialized support specifically, and, I think, more importantly, in the times that we're in right now, the number of English language learners that we need to be supporting. Really, reporting is transparency.

I mean, I know that we have a history of this government not being fond of transparency, but I think that in this case, especially when our students and our children are concerned, that is critical. That's critical. Parents want to know why it is so much harder for their students to get support in their classroom. They're hearing from their, you know, social circles, from professionals, from the teachers in their school: we want to be able to help your student, but I simply don't have time. This is one of the things that I've been hearing from parents that have come to me talking about the lack of supports available for their children.

Bill 202, the education class composition reporting and standard amendment act, is a step towards strengthening Alberta's education system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak about Bill 202, the Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023. As the father of two young children this bill, for me, hits especially close to home as my kids will be entering the education system soon. As such, I do have a keen interest in making sure that my kids and all Albertan children are set up for success.

You know, I've heard a number of people on both sides of the aisle make comments about this bill today. I will say that the member who just spoke talked about investing in our schools and in our children, and I agree wholeheartedly that that's something that government needs to do. Unfortunately, this bill does not do that.

I heard members talk about going out and talking to teachers. I appreciate that. I'm fortunate that I get to go home and talk to teachers. My mother was a teacher in the elementary system for over 35 years, my sister has been a teacher for about the same length of time in a number of different countries, and my wife has been a high school teacher in B.C. and Alberta for over 15 years. I'll tell you that the message that I've heard for several decades from educators is that the government makes so many decisions around education and around the funding, and there's always a project to do and a project to invest in. Teachers broadly are saying: just put the money into classrooms. They don't need more reports. They don't need more commissions struck up. They need money put in classrooms, and this bill does nothing to address money being put in classrooms. It's creating another panel. It's creating another committee.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When the members talk about classroom sizes, yes, that's very important. Classroom complexity: very important. But this bill does nothing to actually address classroom sizes or complexity. It

captures data, and the reality is that the data that's been reported over the years – from 2004 to 2019 the government put \$3.4 billion towards class size reporting, and guess what happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. This \$3.4 billion did not yield desired results. My wife has been a teacher throughout that entire time, and her classroom sizes got bigger. In fact, from 2015 to 2019 they grew exponentially. As the minister of community and social services mentioned earlier, the NDP did not put money into rural Alberta classrooms, into rural Alberta schools. I'm not sure if they understand that rural Alberta is outside of the boundaries of Edmonton. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, as I say, that was \$3.4 billion that did not go into classrooms and into reducing the size of classrooms or the complexity in those classrooms that it should have.

Another one that I'd like to address is that this bill does nothing to actually talk about administrative burden. A friend of mine recently told me about running PUF programming through the program that she is involved with. In her words, PUF programming funding is not the issue; the administrative burden is. Their program can run one support staff for every three children that receive PUF funding, yet I know countless stories of kids who are receiving PUF funding in our education stream that get zero supports.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

502. MLA Calahoo Stonehouse moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective November 30, 2022, be amended in Standing Order 6 by adding “, followed by an Indigenous land acknowledgement,” immediately after “The Speaker shall offer prayers.”

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If passed, this motion would ensure that an Indigenous land acknowledgement would take place every morning as we gather.

I confess this feels odd to speak on the importance of a land acknowledgement. For me it's self-evident that the land supersedes all else. I was born thinking this way. I was raised to appreciate, pray, respect and honour the land as my relative, my kin. I know these things intrinsically. In Nêhiyawêwin, in the Cree language, we call this mutual recognition and interrelationship as *wahkohtowin*, which encompasses the ecological balance of land, water, air, body, and our relationship to one another. The challenge in trying to explain this concept self-reflexively is, well, the gesture of a land acknowledgement is an important opportunity, but it needs to be meaningful. It needs to matter.

This is a chance to reconstitute the Indigenous and settler world views in this place and space as equal and legitimate, to advance reconciliation by distributing the rightful recognition to the land as its due. To even take a step further, a land acknowledgement calibrates our associated points of view regardless of who we are or where we come from. It calls on us to think seriously about what the land means to each of us. It prompts us to think of the land with affection, and it reminds us of those who steward the land and were responsible for the lands and water long before Westminster parliamentary Legislative Assembly process was established in this region.

A land acknowledgement can make us feel and think things in a good, positive way, but from a procedural point of view a land acknowledgement ought to do four things. First, a land acknowledgement today is, in essence, a decontextualized Indigenous practice. We always open our work, our ceremonies, our important events, our gatherings, depending on the nation, but we pray, we lift our pipes, we sing songs, we feast together, and we give thanks to the land.

In our Indigenous practices we pay respect always before we commence our work. Having our Speaker deliver a land acknowledgement is a way that this Assembly can pay a respect in a decontextualized way. The Legislative Assembly is filled with decontextualized and symbolic acts. In the case of a land acknowledgement at the first session every week it would be the restoration of a practice and a respect like other symbolic acts, like the Mace procession, the prayer, or even the national anthem.

Secondly, a land acknowledgement resurfaces the buried history of original First Peoples who have lived within and across the boundaries of our province for millennia. By naming those nations in the language that they use to describe themselves, it reifies their unique, beautiful, cultural, living contribution to our province, that is within what we call Alberta today the ancestral territory of the Nehiyaw, the Niitsitapi, the Isga, the Nakawê, the Dene, the Kootenay, the Haudenosaunee, and the extended western homelands of the Métis peoples.

The United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples articulates the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to inhabit, define, protect, and practice our inalienable rights on our traditional territories. A land acknowledgement declares appropriately the traditional territory of our Indigenous nations.

Thirdly, a land acknowledgement honours the peace and friendship, the peaceful coexistence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within our distinct treaty. Treaties are a binding agreement. They are law. They ensure the rights and privileges of all people in this region are shared with mutual respect and recognition as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow.

There are five numbered treaties that reach within the provincial boundaries of Alberta. Edmonton and the Legislative Assembly, of course, sits on Treaty 6, a beautiful stretch of land that extends from the Red Deer River in the south, north to the Athabasca, west from the Rocky Mountains, all the way east to Saskatchewan. There are many signs for counties, cities, towns, rivers, bridges in our province, but there are very few for treaty regions. Being able to know when you've crossed a treaty boundary without a sign is something we learn by looking closely and reading the changing geography, knowing the names of rivers and hills, hearing stories of place names from elders, and developing a deep love for all the subtleties of the beautiful land.

We know we have crossed into Treaty 8 once the wide Athabaskan rolling prairies give way to thick pine, spruce, and the dense boreal forest. Sometimes there are signs on highway 43 near Whitecourt, for example. But you really can feel it when you've reached the woodland and the northern Cree and the Dene of Treaty 8.

We know when we're in Treaty 7 when we've passed Red Deer River, and on a clear day you can see the mountains in the west. The lands get flat out there, and it gets drier and windier the further south and east that you go. The native grasses of the badlands in the Blackfoot territory, they blow in the wind along with the tumbleweeds.

If you go west, we reach the foothills, the territory of the Iyarhe Iyethka, the Nakota Sioux, now in what we call Kananaskis. We

leave out so much when we do not account for the land that is covered in our treaties.

Lastly, land acknowledgements convey the spirit of reconciliation. In fact, most land acknowledgements sprung out of the rush to adhere to the truth and reconciliation 94 calls to action. The TRC did not explicitly say that you should do land acknowledgements, but it was a gesture of a genuine place to reflect the spirit of reconciliation if, in fact, it doesn't achieve it. Within the 94 calls to action are many appeals to every level of government, including this one, and we have to reconcile the injustices and the legacy of the Indian residential schools. These actions include consultations, investments, reparations, responsible policy, and meaningful legislation. This work our government can and is expected to execute to the best of all of our abilities.

Establishing a land acknowledgement at the opening of our weekly session is a reminder that this work is vital and it's ongoing for each and every one of us in this room. Land acknowledgements do these four things: practice respect, declare traditional territory, honour treaty, and reflect reconciliation. They do have their shortcomings. They are not perfect. Cynical observers might say that a land acknowledgement is performative. There is no shortage of opinions on social media about how they have caused harm, but they are a start. At their worst they can do harm, but at their very best they are crystal clear recognition that Indigenous lives matter. [Remarks in Cree]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has risen.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to speak to this motion of critical importance to me both as an Indigenous person and a Member of this Legislative Assembly. I would also like to thank my fellow Indigenous Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for putting forward this motion.

As an Indigenous person, land acknowledgements are something that hold deep significance to me. These acknowledgements are more than just a customary prelude to events or gatherings. They are vital recognition of the historical and ongoing connection between Indigenous people and their ancestral lands. But, for me, more simply put, Mr. Speaker, it's about making me and others like me feel welcome in a world and a journey where it wasn't always the case. It's the same as when people ask me what I want to be called: Indian, native, Aboriginal, first people, First Nation, *nichi*, or Indigenous? I like to say: as long as there's no adjective in front of it, I'm good with all the above. But if you ask me my preference, it's to be called Scott Sinclair, because I would like for you to view me as an equal. But when someone at least asks my preference about it, I know that at least comes from a good place, and they have a good heart.

Land acknowledgements are a small but crucial step towards fostering awareness and understanding of the complex history that Indigenous people share with their territories. Through these acknowledgements we confront the uncomfortable truths about the injustices that have taken place and that can persist today. However, it is important for me to tell people that I firmly believe that good people are good people regardless of race, colour, culture, or religion. Thank you. I don't believe land acknowledgements are meant to divide or lay blame or guilt people. My genuine hope and intention is to bring people together and to collaborate for a greater good.

Every time I watch an Oilers game, I'm filled with joy and optimism thinking about an Indigenous kid for the first time watching Chief Littlechild on the big screen, knowing that it not only makes them feel welcome; it makes them believe that the

world isn't so big and impossible and that they can do or become anything.

5:10

Moreover, land acknowledgments offer an opportunity for education and allyship. By publicly acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, non-Indigenous people are encouraged to learn about the unique histories, customs, and challenges faced by Indigenous communities and, hopefully, our wicked sense of humour as well, which I know is one of our unique superpowers. [interjections] It's okay to giggle a little bit, too.

Beyond verbal recognition, there is a need for tangible efforts to support Indigenous communities, uphold their rights, and promote a genuine process of reconciliation or, better yet, Mr. Speaker, reconcili-action. This is why I'm glad to see that our government is consistently taking meaningful action to create true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous communities across this province. Our government has made commendable progress on more than 20 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Some notable achievements include: collaboration with the Indigenous Wisdom Council to produce a framework for better treatment of Indigenous people in Alberta's health system, the establishment of Alberta's family resource networks to ensure Indigenous families have access to culturally appropriate family supports, and the permanent waiver for Indigenous name changes, just to name a few.

While the calls to action serve as a crucial guide, our commitment to reconciliation goes beyond them. I know that our government is actively listening to and including Indigenous voices, working collaboratively as partners in various areas such as economic and community development, health, addiction treatments, and justice initiatives. Our commitment to a crossgovernment, collaborative approach with Indigenous partners remains steadfast as we walk the path toward reconciliation together.

Mr. Speaker, our government knows the importance of consistent and strong communications about our actions and initiatives. In addition to the progress on the calls to action, Alberta has taken significant steps to honour the TRC's 82nd call to action by establishing a residential school monument, Mother Earth Circling: Healing from the Residential School Experience, on Alberta's Legislature grounds. This monument, crafted by Saddle Lake Cree Nation artist Stewart Steinhauer, stands as a meaningful symbol dedicated to survivors and children lost to residential schools. Having attended the unveiling of this monument personally, I was proud and grateful for the good that can come when our government works with Indigenous people towards righting the wrongs of the past.

Mr. Speaker, our government has also initiated the Indigenous learning initiative and the Indigenous reconciliation initiative in direct response to the TRC's 57th, 14th, and 92nd calls to action. These programs support economic independence, collaboration, and economic participation as well as ideas that enhance, protect, and revitalize Indigenous languages, heritage, culture, and arts. I hope that as Albertans and Canadians we take notice of the meaningful action our government is undertaking. It inspires them to contribute to reconciliation in their own ways.

The journey towards reconciliation is ongoing, and we are committed to advancing it with practical and meaningful actions along with transparent communications about our initiatives. As an Indigenous Member of this Legislative Assembly I recognize the critical importance of reconciliation between both Indigenous communities and the provincial government, and in my role as an Indigenous MLA I'm committed to bridging the gap there might be between Indigenous communities and the Alberta government.

Reconciliation is not merely a buzzword, Mr. Speaker; it is a fundamental necessity for building a just and inclusive society. It's a path forward. One of the foremost reasons why reconciliation is crucial lies in the need to address historical injustices. Indigenous communities in Alberta have endured centuries of mistreatment, including the residential school system, forced assimilation, and the dispossession of traditional lands. Reconciliation is vital for building trust and collaboration between Indigenous communities and this government, which includes incorporating Indigenous perspectives into decision-making processes through meaningful engagement and consultation with Indigenous communities. Reconciliation truly holds the key to unlocking the full potential of our Indigenous communities, empowering them through education, economic opportunities, and self-governance. It fosters resilience and contributes to the overall well-being of our society and all Albertans and all Canadians.

It is crucial that we continue to engage in meaningful consultations with Indigenous communities and leaders and ensure that our policies are inclusive, respectful, and reflective of their unique perspectives. I stand here today knowing that we can create effective and culturally sensitive societies that benefit all Albertans. Recognizing the historical injustices faced by Indigenous people is not only a symbolic gesture but a commitment to rectifying the systemic issues that persist today.

Mr. Speaker, while I strongly believe that land acknowledgements are an important practice in working towards reconciliation, I would like to move the following amendment so it better aligns with the procedures and standing orders of this House.

The Speaker: Prior to moving the amendment, if you can send me a copy of the amendment and if you'd just take your seat and then pass it to the pages and then once I get a copy and the table gets a copy and the mover of the motion gets a copy, I'll ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 41(5.2)(a) and (b) there are a number of specific requirements with respect to moving a notice of motion for a motion other than a government motion. Specifically, (5.2), an amendment to a motion other than a government motion moved by a mover may be moved – oh. Jodi . . . [interjections] Whoa.

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called, which is the most egregious of all points of order today, but I apologize and withdraw to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. That's an example of a very good apology.

Standing Order 41(5.2)(a), "be approved by Parliamentary Counsel no later than the Thursday preceding the day the motion is [to be] moved" – that condition has been met – and (b), provided that the mover of the motion no later than 11 a.m. on the day the motion is moved is provided notice of the amendment, of which I believe both have been met.

So I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake to conclude his remarks. Read the motion into the record. He has two minutes and seven seconds remaining.

Mr. Sinclair: I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "effective November 30, 2022," and substituting "effective October 31, 2023"; (b) by striking out "Standing Order 6" and substituting "Standing Order 7(1)"; (c) by striking out "followed by an"; (d) by striking out "Acknowledgement" and substituting "Acknowledgement (First sitting day of each week)"; and (e) by striking out "The Speaker

shall offer prayers" and substituting "*O Canada* (First sitting day of each week)."

I would like to propose this amendment to Motion 502 so that the Indigenous land acknowledgement in the House is delivered weekly. This amendment would make it so an Indigenous land acknowledgement is added immediately after *O Canada* on the first sitting day of each week under Standing Order 7(1) regarding daily Routine.

I would like to sincerely thank from the bottom of my heart all the members for their consideration and urge all members of this House to continue making reconciliation one of their guiding principles in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford should she choose to wish to speak to the amendment.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment brought forward by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. This cannot be blamed on the carbon tax, that you're reducing it from five days to four days. This is not Trudeau's fault. But I'm grateful for your words, and having, you know, words spoken about the land, our people, the treaty is a powerful act of reconciliation. [Remarks in Cree]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. members for bringing forth first the original motion and the amendment. I appreciate the ethos in which we find ourselves with respect to territorial and land acknowledgements, and I just want to remind this Chamber that we set the orders of this House and the procedures in which we follow. I'm honoured that we are going to be making these acknowledgments and that we are going to be changing the practices of this Chamber.

I would urge us to consider potentially doing this every single day because we recognize that our treaty rights are at stake every single time that this House makes decisions. For us as Indigenous people, me as a Nehiyaw Napew, I am reminded every single day that this place, this colonial institution, has not always been there for us. We recognize that it's not just the provincial Legislature but also the House of Commons which has not always been our friend, and we have to work every single day to remember the importance of our responsibilities to each other, whether through treaty or our responsibilities to the land as the stewards.

I appreciate the wonderful words that were spoken by the hon. member who pushed forward this amendment, and I appreciate the member on this side who is able to so eloquently deliver those remarks in urging this Chamber to consider making the changes to the way that our practices and procedures are operating, but I would strongly urge this House to consider doing this every single day as we move forward in all work that we do, when we meet with our constituents, when we meet with Indigenous leaders, and when we stand up and represent every single Albertan that deserves to be recognized and appreciated. I am so thankful that we are having this conversation, but I think we can do more, and I would strongly urge that this amendment be defeated.

The Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, I believe.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to debate a proposed motion by the opposition which looks to implement a daily acknowledgement while the House is sitting. I would like to begin by stating that this government recognizes the importance of the land acknowledgements, which is why we opened the first sitting of this Assembly with acknowledgement from the Lieutenant Governor during the Speech from the Throne.

In Alberta, as in many other parts of the world, First Nations and Métis land acknowledgements have become a crucial aspect of public events, gatherings, and official proceedings. It has been great to see some of the province's major sports teams such as the Edmonton Elks, Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Stampeders, and Calgary Flames adopt this practice in recent years. In addition to sports teams, various education institutions, government officials, and cultural organizations across Alberta have also embraced the tradition of incorporating First Nations and Métis land acknowledgements in their activities.

These practices reflect a growing commitment to recognizing and honouring the Indigenous people who have inhabited this land since time immemorial. These acknowledgments hold profound importance in recognizing and respecting the long-standing connection between Indigenous people and the land that they have inhabited for generations.

First and foremost, land acknowledgements serve as a reminder of the historical and ongoing presence of First Nation and Métis communities in Alberta. They provide an opportunity to acknowledge the diverse culture, languages, and traditions of the Indigenous people who have called this land home for thousands of years. This recognition helps to counteract the erasures of the Indigenous histories and contributes to a more inclusive and accurate narrative of the region.

Moreover, land acknowledgements play a vital role in fostering reconciliation and building meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. By openly acknowledging the traditional territories and the impact of colonization, there is a step towards understanding and addressing historical injustice. This recognition lays the foundation for respectful collaboration and partnership between different communities, promoting a sense of unity and shared responsibility for the well-being of the land.

In a broad context First Nations land acknowledgement contributes to the process of decolonization by challenging stereotypes and promoting a more accurate understanding of the Indigenous people. These acknowledgments encourage individuals to reflect on their own roles in reconciliation and to engage in meaningful dialogues about the complexity of Indigenous-settler relationships.

In Alberta, where the rich cultural diversity of First Nations communities is intertwined with the vast and varied landscapes, land acknowledgements take on a unique significance. They serve as a symbolic bridge between the past and the present, acknowledging the enduring relationship between Indigenous people and the land while encouraging a collective commitment to a more equitable and harmonious future for all who call Alberta home.

As previously mentioned, these acknowledgments are hopeful, helpful ways to work towards reconciliation. That said, this government strongly believes that the best way to work towards reconciliation is by taking action that actually helps our First Nation and Métis communities. Our government is committed to providing support and funding that directly addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by the First Nation and Métis communities. This commitment extends beyond mere rhetoric. We recognize the importance of tangible and sustainable initiatives that empower Indigenous people to thrive. In collaboration with Indigenous

leaders and community members our government aims to develop and implement policies that prioritize education, health care, and economic opportunities. We understand that the holistic approach is essential to fostering self-determination and resilience with First Nations and Métis population.

One way we are fulfilling this commitment is through strategic partnership and initiatives that focus on economic reconciliation and prosperity of Indigenous people in Alberta. Our collaborative efforts with the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, Aboriginal business investment fund, First Nations development fund, and the employment partnerships program exemplify our dedication to fostering economic inclusion, creating jobs, and improving social outcomes in Indigenous communities. The Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation stands as a cornerstone in our commitment to Indigenous prosperity. By increasing its capacity to \$3 billion, we are empowering the AIOC to support a broader range of Indigenous investment projects. This includes major pipeline systems, exemplified by a recent \$103 million loan guarantee that brought together five Indigenous communities to invest collectively.

5:30

The Aboriginal business investment fund plays a vital role in supporting community-owned Indigenous businesses, thereby creating jobs and enhancing economic development. The recent 50 per cent increase in annual funding to \$7.5 million underscores our commitment to fostering Indigenous economic growth. Successful projects like Kainai Forage, exporting premium hays world-wide, are showcasing the positive impact of ABIF.

The First Nations development fund continues to channel revenues from government-owned slot machines in First Nation casinos back into community-led projects. In 2023-24 nearly \$150 million is expected to support projects across 47 nations, Mr. Speaker, ranging from arena renovations to training and development programs. These initiatives reflect our commitment to holistic community, economic, and social developments. The employment partnerships program is a crucial tool in our strategy to connect employers and job creators with Indigenous workers. By providing targeted training programs and industry partnerships, we are ensuring that Indigenous people, including youth and tradespeople, have opportunities to enhance their job skills and be included in Alberta's economy.

In 27 funded projects in 2022-23 \$4.5 million has been allocated to support Indigenous employment and training, further demonstrating our commitment to building a skilled and diverse workforce, Mr. Speaker. Through these programs and partnerships our government remains steadfast in its commitment to economic reconciliation, working collaboratively with Indigenous people to create sustainable and thriving communities. These initiatives underscore our dedication to walking the path of reconciliation together and are essential components to our holistic approach to supporting the well-being and prosperity of Indigenous communities in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary for Indigenous Relations I would like to assure this House that our government is committed to fostering meaningful reconciliation through action. While this government wholeheartedly supports the meaning and symbolism behind Indigenous land acknowledgements, we feel a weekly acknowledgement is more suitable as it is more in line with standard House proceedings. This approach ensures consistent and respectful reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment RA1.

If there are no others on RA1, I'm happy to vote on the amendment, and then if there are others who would like to speak to the main motion, they're able to do so. Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment RA1 carried]

The Speaker: We are on the main motion, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has the call.

Member Arcand-Paul: [Remarks in Cree] Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is an honour to speak in favour of this motion. With deep roots to this land, I recognize and honour my commitments to the land and those that live on it: our human relations, the four-legged, winged, and those that swim. In recognizing the territory in which we find ourselves, we commit to more than just acknowledging the people who have lived with this land since time immemorial, which is a very good thing, I might add. In recognizing the first people of this land, we also acknowledge that we have deep responsibilities to the land in maintaining it for the next generations and ensuring that the prosperity that we are all benefiting from today is also something that our great-grandchildren and their great-grandchildren can continue benefiting from in the same way.

This is what was expected when my ancestors entered into the treaty relationship with the forefathers and foremothers of Confederation. What was taught to me from my kookums and my mushums was that we came together. It was understood that we would be forming a solemn relationship, as witnessed and locked in with our most sacred ceremony. We lifted the pipe to mark the momentous occasion. In doing so, my ancestors and those non-Indigenous ancestors became bound to each other, quote, for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. End quote. Put another way, in perpetuity, as long as we share this territory that my ancestors have called home and which we now recognize as our current home together.

In recognizing the territories that we find ourselves on wherever we are in this province, we recognize the magnitude of the relationships that exist on the territory. These relationships have existed well beyond the existence of Canada on these lands. We have stories of trade, treaty, intermarriage, war, and, yes, even peace on these territories between the nations that have overlapping traditional territories, including where we find ourselves today.

In recognizing the territory, it is lovely to acknowledge the treaty of the area where you find yourself in this province, but that is just a start. There are five treaties that make up the entire province, but only three of the treaties have First Nations citizens therein. Those three are treaties 6, 7, and 8. The other two treaty territories that extend into the province's borders are treaties 4 and 10, which must be acknowledged because they are often forgotten as treaty land in the province although cities such as Medicine Hat recognize that they are found in Treaty 4 territory. However, acknowledging treaty has the unintended consequence of including the settler signatories to treaty, especially when we don't identify the nations that have called these lands as a relative since time immemorial.

For the purposes of this motion I will first recognize the territory in which we find ourselves here at the Legislature. This is Treaty 6 territory. It is shared with the Nehiyaw, Isga, Niitsitapi, Nakawē, Dene, Haudenosaunee, and the Métis.

I must be very clear, however, that I am Nehiyaw if you don't know that already. As such, I carry the world views of the Nehiyawak, that were taught to me by my kookums and my mushums. I recognize that some of the delineations of territory that I discussed are based on these teachings. With that in mind, I will start with my people, Nehiyawak, who have marked this land with our blood, sweat, and tears up to present day. The Nehiyawak can

be translated as the mighty Cree Nation in Alberta, which finds itself extended all the way from the Rocky Mountains onward to the Alberta and Saskatchewan border, as far south as the Red Deer River and as far north as the 60th parallel.

Keep in mind that the Cree territory is much, much larger than this across our beautiful country, but if you ask some of our Niitsitapi sisters or brothers, known as the Blackfoot in English, as far south as the Battle River or Red Deer River might be a bit of a stretch, but I assure you we still recognize each other's encroachments onto our territories in a very playful way even today.

Niitsitapi and Nehiyaw have had a long and fascinating history on these territories, so much so that I've been told by one elder that the reason that there's always so much bad weather out by the Battle River is because there's so much bloodshed and so much tension that still exists there just north of Ponoka and south of Lacombe. This was because of those wars. However, those days are behind us, and we now find the common foe of colonialism, which has attempted to eradicate both of our nations through law and policy. Now we can make jokes and laugh about the ancient bad blood and focus on the issues that really matter and require our best and brightest to work on for the benefit of the babies yet to be born.

The Niitsitapi also claim much of this area as their traditional territory up to the North Saskatchewan River, but if you ask my Niitsitapi sister, they claim north of the river, too, but I digress. Their territory includes the balance of the province south of the North Saskatchewan River. This territory has also been shared with our family of the Isga, Nakawē, Haudenosaunee, and the Métis.

At one time each of these nations formed the mighty Nehiyaw Pwat, or in English what was known as the Iron Confederacy on these territories. This grouping was a powerful connection that brought our families together to share this territory and organize when non-Indigenous folks arrived.

This relationship, although historians have stated has disappeared, I'd argue has never stopped. You need only look at the tribal councils that are in place today, including the Yellowhead Tribal Council, a busy and active organization that finds its home in my riding. It is made up of Cree, Isga, Nakawē, and Haudenosaunee people that call these lands home today, brought together in the same sacred way, with a pipe ceremony. You see, the relationships that are formed by our sacred ceremonies are solemn and long lasting because that is our deepest commitment to each other.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, I bring up the past because it helps us understand our mutual future and where we are going together. Treaty is a helpful guide for us, as everything we do in this House and in our personal and professional lives should be guided by this relationship, as was intended when our ancestors came together to live here. But there has been report after report and recommendation after recommendation from panels – a fact which is not lost on me is that Indigenous peoples are the most studied people in this country – but things do not ever seem to get better despite all of these studies.

Some of the most recent reports include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the work done prior to the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has referenced, but we must also recognize the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited folks final report and Calls for Justice, specifically Call for Justice 15.2, which calls for every person in this country to acknowledge the land which we live on both historically and today.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous peoples call this beautiful province home and have done so well before Alberta even had the honour of calling itself a province. By recognizing the history of this province, we must also recognize the nations that have called this place home since time immemorial. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also made the important point that land acknowledgements are not a panacea for reconciliation, but at a minimum they should declare traditional territories, honour treaty, reflect reconciliation, but most importantly, respect those nations who have called this place home since time immemorial. Yes, there will be many opinions on this small act of reconciliation, but we must lead by example. We must show the world that Alberta is a place that recognizes its history even when it might be dark and work to right the wrongs of the past.

I urge the members of the House to be on the right side of history and demonstrate to Albertans that we respect the original peoples of the land and restore territorial acknowledgments in a robust way that acknowledges not only treaty but also the nations which have called this territory home since time immemorial.

[Remarks in Cree], Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for bringing the motion forward, and also thank you to our member for the heartfelt response on the amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of the amended motion. It speaks to the important recognition of the Indigenous people in Alberta as well as all across the country. Land acknowledgements are an important way to pay respects to those with whom we share these lands and to recognize those who have acted as stewards of the land for many years. It's also important to practise and acknowledge and bring awareness to Indigenous presence in everyday life now and into the future. Recognizing and paying respect to the lands that we share is an important step along the path toward reconciliation, and our government is committed toward walking that path alongside Indigenous peoples.

Mr. Speaker, the word "reconciliation" gets thrown around a lot these days, and rightfully so. But what does it really mean? Well, my good friend Wilton Littlechild always calls me up and says: "Minister, what's your action? What is your reconcili-action?" That's why you hear me use that word a lot, and I think it's an excellent depiction of what this government is doing. This government is taking action. Alberta's government is making strides in many ways towards reconciliation with Indigenous people all across the province.

As the Minister of Indigenous Relations I like to identify two sorts. Two categories is what I call them. One is economic reconciliation, vital to bringing Indigenous participation into the economy, creating jobs, and generating revenue and prosperity. It's important that Indigenous leaders and communities have a seat at the table when it comes to economic development. Then we have what I like to call cultural reconciliation, which covers many of the social aspects and issues surrounding and infecting Indigenous communities across Alberta.

When it comes to economic reconciliation, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is leading the country. Last week I was in Ottawa with all of the leaders from all of the provinces, and Alberta by itself is doing more than the rest of the country combined. We're doing an amazing job, and I'm so proud of what this government is doing. We're paving the way and setting a real example for what true economic reconciliation means, and we have a number of initiatives in place to advance this. These include the programs like what was spoken to earlier by my colleague, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities

Corporation, which is a multibillion-dollar loan guarantee program that provides Indigenous communities with a chance to gain equity in major projects happening in our province. Since its launch it has backed more than \$500 million in investments, benefiting nearly 30 Indigenous and Métis communities in Alberta. The AIOC is addressing long-standing barriers to major Indigenous investment by reducing the cost of borrowing and increasing the amounts that can be borrowed. In early 2022 Alberta's government expanded its mandate to include major agriculture, telecommunication, and transportation projects and related infrastructure.

Just recently this government announced the doubling of the AIOC's loan capacity limit, from \$1 billion to \$2 billion, with another increase to \$3 billion for the upcoming fiscal year. With this increase, Alberta's government is positioning the AIOC for future success and signalling to industry what we're doing here. We want to give the ability to support an even larger investment if a low-risk deal with significant potential benefits happens to arise. We are signalling to industry that Alberta is the place for prosperity, and we want to ensure that Indigenous communities have a seat at that table.

Another great initiative we have in place to advance economic reconciliation is the Aboriginal business investment fund. This is a grant program that helps community-owned Indigenous businesses create jobs and improve social and economic outcomes by funding capital costs for economic development projects. Since 2020 the Aboriginal investment fund has helped create nearly 400 full-time jobs for Indigenous people in their communities, and I was so pleased to increase the funding there by 50 per cent, from \$5 million to 7 and a half million dollars per year. In Budget 2023 ABF grants, between \$150,000 and \$750,000 per project, can cover up to 100 per cent of eligible costs, and it is really proving to be a game changer in communities across the province.

Mr. Speaker, economic reconciliation is a vital step towards a brighter, more prosperous future for Indigenous people in Alberta, and I'm very pleased with the work this government has been doing to advance this. I always say that when Indigenous people succeed, we all succeed.

As I mentioned earlier, the other side of reconciliation that this government is taking meaningful action on is through cultural and social initiatives. These programs and initiatives have a lot of transformational meaning, impact for Indigenous people all across the province. One of the most important issues we are addressing is the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited plus people. This is an ongoing tragedy that is affecting Indigenous people across the country, and this government recognizes how vitally important this work is and that it must continue.

Alberta's government is working diligently to address and prevent violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited plus people and to increase their safety and economic security. Ministries across our government are collaborating with the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirited people, which is providing advice to help address this important issue. Members of the Premier's council have lived experience as service providers and family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people. Appointees bring diverse First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives from urban and rural communities across Alberta, and I'm thrilled with the important work that the council has done so far. I look forward to even a brighter future for Indigenous women and girls. Everyone in this province deserves to live a life safe from violence, and this work is helping to bring that to fruition.

This year Alberta's government also created the new community support fund, which provides grants for Indigenous-led initiatives that address or prevent violence and increase safety and economic security for Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited plus people. This program will provide \$4 million in annual grant funding. I'm looking forward to the positive change it'll create.

I would also like to acknowledge the beautiful Treaty 6 medallion, Mr. Speaker, that is right here on the Legislature Grounds. Within 10 feet of this sculpture is where the actual adhesion was signed for Indigenous peoples and the Crown. It is a great opportunity to continue building on reconciliation and education to Albertans and visitors from all around the world.

Mr. Speaker, all of these initiatives, programs, and projects are just a few of the examples of the excellent work this government is doing to advance reconciliation on all fronts, and in the spirit of reconciliation it's only right and proper that we recognize those who have looked over and cared for this land. It's our hope that this act of doing a land acknowledgement will continue to retain a high level of value and meaning. In other words, we don't want the act of land acknowledgement to become simply performative in nature, and I've actually heard that from some of the elders. It's the recommendation I'm making to the Assembly through this amended motion, not because I don't believe it's worth doing every day but precisely because I'd like to preserve the worthiness of the act itself.

So I humbly and respectfully submit that the weekly land acknowledgements will help ensure we show our desire for reconciliation and respect and appreciation for the Indigenous people. That's what we're here for. As well, we're also ensuring the act maintains some level of novelty rather than simply becoming a box to check.

I appreciate the debate between both sides of the House on this motion today. Mr. Speaker, reconciliation remains a top priority across this government, and my hope is that we can provide meaningful land acknowledgements once per week in this House to continue walking this path towards reconciliation together.

Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. Pursuant to Standing Order 8(3) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has five minutes to close debate.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Here we go. [Remarks in Cree] I'm grateful, Mr. Speaker, for such thoughtful responses to the land acknowledgement from both sides of the room. It's such a strong reminder of the mutual appreciation, the respect, and love that we have for Indigenous people and Indigenous culture.

It is good practice for this Assembly to make space for a land acknowledgement. It is respectful. It is important to pay our respects to the land and Indigenous people before we set about our weekly duties of protecting the environment and making

responsible choices for the land and our citizens. Incorporating a land acknowledgement reminds us of our duty to sustain this land for future generations. We must always work to protect and improve our collective commitment to upholding and protecting the lands and the watersheds.

A land acknowledgement is a start, and it can remind us to do this. When I spoke earlier of the power of a land acknowledgement, I said that they have a power to move us closer emotionally and to really, truly appreciate the land in our hearts and minds. Affection can move mountains; it has to protect them. Moving from reciting a land acknowledgement or listening respectfully to a land acknowledgement is true heart work for all of us. It could lead to meaningful policy and legislative action that protects the land, or it could lead us all in our own lives away from the floor of this Assembly to the land, to the river, to the water which nourishes each of us and grounds us so we can be our best selves in this place.

I walk my dog along the south bank of the river valley. I know we're supposed to walk our dogs for the dogs, but really it's for me. I love the bush as much as he does; it grounds me. I am happy and I am at peace when I'm out there. I hardly get stressed when he chases a beaver for hours or a porcupine and gets quilled or a magpie or a squirrel. What I am in awe of is how remarkably beautiful this region, this territory is.

Right now, since the time of change, the sun doesn't quite reach as high as it used to, and it's often shadier and it's cooler, more damp where we walk, but then the path will creep up the bank, and I will come into the full sun. I like to stop and give reflection and feel the warmth of the sun and be reminded of this work and listen to the whispers, the creaking of the leafless birch trees. I love the land, and I love that I'm a Nehiyaw Iskwew, that this is my homeland, and that we're going to acknowledge and recognize this beautiful place.

Land acknowledgements do four things: they practise respect, they declare ancestral territory, they honour and respect treaty, and they reflect the spirit of reconciliation. Reconciliation work will be ongoing and critical for all Albertans to coexist in a peaceful Alberta, where our relationships to each other, to the land, and to all of our citizens is of value, and it's difficult work that each of us must do in treaty territory. All of our work matters – this work matters – but let's not forget what sustains and nourishes each and every single one of us, and that is the land. [Remarks in Cree]

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a wonderful conclusion to a very productive evening. Congratulations to all the members who spoke very eloquently on the motion put before this Assembly. Given that we have just a few moments left, I would like to motion for an adjournment until tomorrow, November 21, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	221
In Memoriam	
Mr. Neville Sydney Roper, March 5, 1922, to August 28, 2023	221
Introduction of Visitors	221
Introduction of Guests	221
Members' Statements	
Women's Entrepreneurship Day.....	222
Transgender Day of Remembrance	222
Federal Impact Assessment Act Court Ruling.....	222
National Child Day.....	223
Craft Breweries.....	231
Support for Immigrants	232
Oral Question Period	
Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Report.....	223
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	224, 230
AHS Board Chair	225
Renewable Energy Project Approvals	225
Misericordia Community Hospital	226
Postsecondary Student Financial Aid	226
Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments	227
Gull Lake Water Level	227
Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans	228
Bail System	229
Alberta Foundation for the Arts.....	229
Statement by the Speaker	
Anniversary of Oral Question Period Live Streaming	231
Presenting Petitions	232
Tabling Returns and Reports	232
Tablings to the Clerk	232
Orders of the Day	234
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 201 Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023	234
Division	236
Bill 202 Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023.....	237
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Indigenous Land Acknowledgement	246

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