



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 21, 2023

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
Government Whip
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP),
Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk	Nancy Robert, Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees	Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk		Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary Programs	Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services	Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Mike Ellis	Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Infrastructure
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Health
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
Joseph Schow	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees
Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Grant Hunter	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Boitchenko
Bouchard
Brar
Hunter
Kasawski
Kayande
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loyola

Boparai
Cyr
de Jonge
Elmeligi
Hoyle
Stephan
Wright, J.
Yao

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten
Boitchenko
Long
Lunty
Metz
Petrovic
Singh
Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman
Dyck
Eremenko
Hunter
Long
Renaud
Shepherd
Sinclair

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen
Gray
Long
Phillips
Rowswell
Sabir
Singh
Yao

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Pitt
Deputy Chair: Mr. Stephan

Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
Petrovic
Sigurdson, L.
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

Arcand-Paul
Ceci
Cyr
Dach
Gray
Johnson
Stephan
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Pancholi
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Ganley
Haji
Lovely
Lunty
McDougall
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 21, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

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

Mr. J.A. Denis Herard
March 28, 1944, to September 6, 2023

The Speaker: J.A. Denis Herard served four terms as the Progressive Conservative Member for Calgary-Egmont from 1993 to 2008. He was the Minister of Advanced Education in 2006. Prior to being elected to this Assembly, Mr. Herard operated a telecommunications and computer software business in Calgary. He was the founding member of the telecommunications management certificate at Mount Royal college, and he later served on the college's telecommunications advisory committee.

A proud francophone supporter and a supporter of the arts, he made many meaningful contributions to Alberta and his community through involvement in organizations such as the Calgary 1988 Winter Olympics telecommunications volunteer committee, the Willow Ridge Community Association, and the Calgary Boys' Choir association. He is a recipient of the 125th anniversary of the Confederation medal and the Alberta centennial medal.

Mr. Herard passed away on September 6, 2023, at the age of 79. In a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask you to remember him each as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, just mere moments ago we paid tribute to former member Denis Herard, and it's my great honour to introduce members of his family. We all know that there is a great debt of gratitude that is paid to the family members of those who have served this Assembly, and we each know the commitment that all of our families make to allow us to serve the public.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, I'd ask them to rise and remain standing as I read their names. It's my pleasure to introduce Denis' son David Herard; Mr. Herard's sister Sylvia and her husband, Roland. I'd also like to introduce Mr. Herard's brother-in-law Firmin; nieces Sheryl and Marilyn; and Marilyn's partner, Bill. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my great pleasure to introduce to all members a former member of the Assembly, the hon. Christine Cusanelli. Ms Cusanelli served as the Member for Calgary-Currie from 2012 to 2015. Along with her duties as an MLA she served as an Executive Council member: the minister of tourism, parks, and recreation, 2012 to 2013. I had the great pleasure of getting to know Ms Cusanelli as she serves as the president of the Alberta Association

of Former MLAs. Ms Cusanelli is joined by her colleague Brad Mitchell, the CEO of the Alberta Real Estate Association. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a school to introduce.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce you to a couple of very large grade 9 classrooms from Richard S. Fowler school in St. Albert. They're seated in the public and the members' galleries. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Margaret Carroll, who is a real estate broker in the wonderful town of High Level and incoming president of the Grande Prairie & Area Association of Realtors. I ask that she rise to receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and introduce both to you and through you some wonderful people from the High Prairie school division: Karin, Lynn, Cory, Murray, and Joy. I just wanted it on the record that I am not a Flames fan; I'm an Oilers fan. But please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce you to 68 members of the Alberta Real Estate Association board. We share the core values of entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, and freedom. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two guests with us today from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council. Orysia Boychuk is the president of UCCAPC, and Alyssa Stoddard is the secretary. I would like to invite them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, as is tradition.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the Official Opposition House Leader rising. I will just say for the record that I feel somewhat slighted for not being notified earlier of such an esteemed guest who I now notice in the gallery.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on Monday, August 28, 2006, I was introduced for the first time in this Assembly by the hon. former member Brian Mason, who joins us in the gallery today. He served for 18 years, 10 months, and four days in this Assembly. He was an Executive Council member, the Minister of Infrastructure and transportation, the Government House Leader, the House leader, and at one time or another has been the critic of everything. As I serve as House leader here in this Assembly, I often think: what would Brian Mason do? Welcome, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hear, hear. I can attest that I also have asked myself the question: what would Brian Mason do? He was the critic of

everything because there were only two of them. Our great pleasure to have you here, sir.

Members' Statements

Hospital Construction

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this week I was very happy to see the opening of the newly expanded ER at the Misericordia hospital, a project first begun and funded by the Alberta NDP government. In 2014 our MLAs launched a petition to highlight the critical need at the Mis and for a new south Edmonton hospital. Two and a half years later in government we announced \$65 million to get that job done. That same year we announced details for a new hospital in south Edmonton, committed \$400 million for planning and design. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then the Minister of Health, said: our government is proud to fix problems ignored by the previous government for far too long.

That, Mr. Speaker, is why in 2015 we immediately moved to build the Calgary cancer centre. Within two years we had shovels in the ground. Now, the UCP called it a "fancy box," but we knew it was long-needed infrastructure to provide the care Albertans deserve. It's slated to open next year.

We also invested \$364 million in the redevelopment of the Norwood CapitalCare, 234 new complex continuing post acute-care beds plus program and clinic space. It opened as the Gene Zwozdesky centre this year.

This is what happens, Mr. Speaker, when you have a government that's focused on delivering health care and a government that's focused on working for Albertans. This is what happens when you have a Health minister like the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who worked with front-line health care workers rather than fighting with them; when you have MLAs like the Member for Edmonton-McClung, who advocate for their constituents. This government delayed the south Edmonton hospital. They have delayed the Red Deer regional hospital. They promised to build them before the election but crickets since. Such a shame. At such a critical time we need more hospitals. We need better health care for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has a record of building hospitals, and I couldn't be more proud to serve with these incredible colleagues and to be standing up for Albertans and our health care workers on the front lines.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I was honoured to join in the commemoration of the Holodomor Memorial Day in the rotunda of the Alberta Legislature. On this day we remember the approximately 10 million people who perished as a result of Joseph Stalin's deliberate mass starvation of the Ukrainian people.

1:40

From 1932 to 1933 Soviet forces removed all food from the country and Ukraine's borders were sealed for two years in one of the greatest acts of genocide the world has ever seen. Sons, daughters, mothers, fathers: all wiped out by a genocidal tyrant.

As the parliamentary secretary for settlement services and Ukrainian evacuees and the MLA for the constituency with the highest Ukrainian-Canadian population in all of Alberta the commemoration of the Holodomor is quite important to me, but my connection to this is far deeper. As many of you may know, I myself

am an Albertan of Ukrainian descent. In fact, one of my ancestors was Ivan Pylypow, who was one of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada, so when I think of Holodomor, I remember the meaning behind the words "holod," for hunger, and "moryty," for slow, cruel death, and that's exactly what it was.

In 2023, so many years after the Holodomor, the Ukrainian people are once again facing a genocidal threat from Russia. While my heart is with those millions of Ukrainians who died at the hands of Joseph Stalin, my thoughts today are also with the Ukrainian people who are staving off a brutal invasion by Stalin's spiritual successor, Vladimir Putin.

I call on all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to join with Ukrainians in Alberta and around the world in remembering the victims of the genocide and mourn with the families that lost so many loved ones. Also, let us stand with the brave and proud Ukrainian people who are today fighting to defend in Ukraine the same rights, freedoms, and democracy that we are so blessed to have here in Alberta.

Slava Ukraini.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a statement.

Sherwood Park Constituency

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The 110th CFL Grey Cup championship game was played on Sunday in Hamilton, Ontario, between the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and the Montreal Alouettes football clubs. It was a stunning game with all the entertaining hallmarks of an instant classic, not the least of which was the remarkable story of Montreal's turnaround season led by their new head coach, Jason Maas of Sherwood Park. On behalf of Sherwood Park and His Majesty's Loyal Opposition I want to congratulate Jason Maas and the Montreal Alouettes for an amazing season and team victory. I hope you will bring the Grey Cup home for a visit with your friends and neighbours in Sherwood Park.

Another great story from our region is the technology being implemented by some of Sherwood Park's biggest employers. The road that leads to a net-zero future in Canada goes to the Alberta Industrial Heartland. The western Canadian sedimentary basins are the world's best geological structures for carbon capture and permanent sequestration. We've already built the Alberta carbon trunk line, the world's largest CO₂ pipeline, and a handful of the world's largest CCS projects here. Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association credits Alberta's petrochemicals incentive program with the recent expansion of the Dow ethylene production facility. Dow plans to expand further in Alberta with the world's first net-zero carbon emissions ethylene cracker and derivative site.

Thanks to thoughtful and robust policy developed by Alberta's NDP, industry, employees, communities, and countless others in the Sherwood Park region are benefiting from the leadership, vision, and foresight shown by this side of the House.

Whether it's global leadership in emissions reduction technology or football coaches, there are so many reasons I am proud to represent Sherwood Park in this Assembly.

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

Real Estate Industry

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The real estate industry has had a significant impact on Alberta's economic strength and continues to foster community growth. Through this sector our economy propels forward, encouraging an environment where businesses and Alberta residents can thrive.

The Alberta Real Estate Association has been an active contributor to the success of the hard-working realtors in Alberta by working with brokers to develop their businesses and by providing brokers with a multiplicity of tools and the necessary resources to succeed within this field.

The AREA plays a significant role with an important industry within our province. Alberta's economy is booming, and people are moving to Alberta faster than ever before. We need to recognize the integral role this industry plays in the livelihoods of new Alberta residents and families. By finding communities and homes for parents to raise their children, the real estate industry is at the beginning of the journey for many new residents in Alberta, and the UCP government will maintain our support for the growth of this important sector.

Recently the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction indicated land titles are now being processed in 16 days, and the modernization of the paper-based system is under way. It should also be noted that more than \$50 billion in real estate transactions happen every year in Alberta. This industry has a significant impact on the economic growth here in our province, and we're committed to maintain this growth by ensuring taxes are low through the passed Bill 1 and proposed Bill 4 and will continue to work towards a more affordable Alberta. The UCP government is committed to reducing unnecessary red tape, which will allow this industry to thrive in our province. We're looking forward to continuing to work together towards a prosperous Alberta.

Once again I want to also recognize the Alberta Real Estate Association guests in the gallery. Thank you for coming today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Ms Hayter: November is Family Violence Prevention Month, and we need help to raise awareness and prevent family violence. We need to take this opportunity to start conversations about this important issue in all aspects of our lives and show those impacted by domestic violence that they are not alone. This month we wear a purple ribbon. Purple has become universally used in almost all nonprofits that support survivors of domestic violence. I wanted to share the importance of it today with you all in the Assembly.

I also would like to speak to someone, that if you're in the middle of a domestic violence crisis, you can go to any shelter near you or call a toll-free number that's 24/7. You can call them at 1.866.331.3933 to find a shelter in your area. You don't need to stay in a shelter to get help from one. I think it speaks volumes that the domestic violence awareness project is calling on us to heal, hold, and centre survivors.

I'm deeply concerned for the women who feel that they have no option but to stay in a violent living situation. We are in a housing and affordability crisis, the results of which have been catastrophic for victims of domestic violence, many of whom have been forced to stay because there is nowhere for them to go. Emergency shelters saw an unprecedented 5,000 calls during July and September in 2023. That's a 13 per cent increase from the same period last year. Sadly, the monthly average of calls has now increased by 58 per cent since pre-COVID. Affordable housing is inaccessible, and the average shelter stay has now increased to 36 days. We are in a dire situation as shelters cannot support the high number of people who require their services. People escaping domestic violence are at an increased risk of returning to those violent living situations when it's hard to find a safe shelter.

I hope that this Assembly hears the calls to action on us to heal, hold, and centre survivors and a plan to make housing more

accessible so people escaping domestic violence have somewhere safe to go.

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

National Addictions Awareness Week

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of National Addictions Awareness Week I'd like to share with you where I was a week ago Monday. My team and I joined Sandra from AAWEAR, a peer-led collective of grassroots chapters located in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, and Lethbridge. On an absolute shoestring budget AAWEAR provides harm reduction supplies, outreach, peer navigation, and drug testing.

My team and I helped Sandra load up two wagons with tarps and blankets, coats and clean socks, water bottles, juice packets, and snacks. We met people who were very likely homeless, living with addiction, and in need of some basic necessities, including a little bit of kindness and dignity. On four different occasions, Mr. Speaker, passersby approached us as we were handing out supplies and giving support. Every one of them thanked us for what we were doing and asked how they could help.

One young woman who had been sleeping rough for several weeks was scheduled to go into detox the next day, but she was really, really nervous. She wasn't scared of abstaining or the awful side effects of withdrawal without medical support; she was scared of the estimated two weeks she'd have to wait to access a treatment space once she was discharged from detox. This is a time when people are most at risk of dying in case they resume drug use.

Just this morning my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I toured Radius clinic. The staff and peer support workers and patients themselves demonstrate a level of care and compassion that is truly next level. But I think we're all capable of that compassion, Mr. Speaker, just as we might all be vulnerable to addiction as a result of trauma, chronic pain, mental illness, or our environment.

In 2020 substance use in Canada, including alcohol and tobacco, cost \$49.1 billion – that's with a "b" – in lost productivity, health care, and our criminal justice system. If Albertans are struggling with substance abuse, I encourage them to contact Alberta Health Services' addiction helpline at 1.866.332.2322.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Government Contracts

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's a new day and this government is attaching a new car to the UCP gravy train. First up, Preston Manning got paid \$250,000 to spend a further \$2 million for a report he thinks should be used as a political weapon against this government's partisan opponents. To the Premier. I know she tried to claim that this was all fine, but come on. Is she truly incapable of seeing the obvious ethical breach here?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we all know that in the COVID crisis the members opposite were proposing that people be sent door to door to do mandatory vaccination, so I can only imagine, if they put a panel together, what they would be saying ought to be done next time.

What happened in this most recent report is that we looked at the evidence. We had a number of people, who Preston Manning put

together, on an advisory panel to make sure that we have the best evidence next time so that we don't make any mistakes.

Ms Notley: Any panel we had would not be doing pre-election campaigning.

But wait, Mr. Speaker, that's not all. On Friday we learned that David Yager, the Premier's biggest donor, received yet another sole-source contract; Shayne Saskiw, a former Wildrose MLA, received four separate sole-source contracts; and the Premier's former campaign manager received two separate sole-source contracts. The public purse is not this Premier's personal private political loot bag. Why is it so hard for her to understand that?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite well knows that there are rules around sole-source contracting, and we have followed every single rule in choosing people who were the very best to give us the advice that we needed.

I think perhaps the member opposite is trying to distract attention away from the fact that the people she takes her marching orders from are in Ottawa, and that is the reason why she never stands up for Alberta. She has not stood with us on the affordability crisis and has not stood with us in calling for an end to the carbon tax.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, let's review the record. The Premier hired her former campaign manager to make pre-election ads on the public dime; she hired her star fundraiser, an oil-servicing company executive, to review standards around oil servicing; and she used \$2 million to authorize a report for partisan purposes, all without public tendering. To the Premier: why does she believe that she is entitled to look past the most basic of ethical principles?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure that if there were any issues, members opposite would have been able to raise them with the Ethics Commissioner. We have followed all of the rules related to our contracting. We will continue to follow all the rules. We know that important work needed to be done to prepare us for a future pandemic. We hired the best person for the job. We also know that there is important work that needs to be done to chart our energy future, and we also hired the best person for the job. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quote, "If only my MLA had access to more gifts, I'm sure they'd be able to fix the housing crisis," end quote, said no one ever. Yet one of the UCP's first priorities after the election was introducing the bill to remove gift limits so they could get more. Does the Premier believe this is what Albertans expected her government to focus on instead of fixing the health care crisis, the affordability crisis, the housing crisis? Pick one; just not the gift crisis.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite well know that there are a lot of obligations that we have to do in the course of our work. Much of it includes going to events so that we can deliver speeches, so that we can meet with stakeholders and bring staff along with us. The limits that were set a number of years ago have not kept pace with what the cost of many of those tickets

are, so we are going to be putting through changes so that we can make sure that we align with what the reality is. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Premier has about 10 seconds remaining in her answer, when I was unable to hear her any longer.

Ms Smith: The members opposite should just remain patient because there will be an order in council where we establish those limits, establish a reporting structure, but we need to bring it in line with what the current expectations are.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier justifies Bill 8, complaining that without it she'd have to leave a corporate suite after just 20 minutes. Meanwhile over 115,000 Calgarians are at risk of homelessness and likely have never been anywhere near a corporate suite. To the Premier: why won't she stop focusing on how long she can hang out in the corporate suite and instead start working on protecting Calgarians' access to, say – I don't know – any suite?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that the members opposite only get their advice from union leaders and their friends in the federal Parliament. In Alberta and on this side of the Chamber we make sure we take our advice from the people actually impacted by our decision, many of whom told me that the members opposite wouldn't even meet with when they were attempting to make policy. We're going to make sure that we are available, that we are listening, and that we will always make the best decisions in the interests of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear who the UCP is focused on, and it's not Albertans. Two million dollars on partisan reports, hundreds of thousands of dollars for sole-source contracts given to close political friends, taking caps off salaries for their friends and insiders, and way more gifts for UCP MLAs. Actions speak louder than words, and Albertans want to know: when will this Premier ever put the brakes on this UCP gravy train and stop it from rolling down the tracks?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think the members on this side and all Albertans are looking forward with great interest to when the leadership race begins on the other side, because 25 per cent of the vote is given to union bosses. So I'm kind of interested in knowing. Maybe I should ask Gil McGowan who the next leader of the NDP is going to be, because he's the one who's controlling the party opposite. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Government Contracts (continued)

Mr. Sabir: Albertans are facing a cost-of-living crisis. I hear from many of my constituents who are worried about the costs that have piled up under this UCP government: rent, car insurance, utilities, you name it. One group, however, not worried about the balance in their bank accounts are friends of the Premier. Can the Premier for the record tell this House how much public money she has funnelled to her friends and political insiders through sole-source contracts?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Premier has been very clear on this. I recognize that the NDP has a vested interest in finding out the answer, but I think what people really want to know is who the next leader of the NDP is going to be, as we on this side of the House watch eagerly to find out who's going to lead the party into

second place going forward. I appreciate that they're interested, but we'll watch eagerly on this side of the House who sits in the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's chair next.

Mr. Sabir: That wasn't an answer.

I can tell the House that more than \$700,000 have gone to this Premier's close friends and former campaign staff, and that's shameful. Her campaign manager received \$142,000. Her former party president got \$130,000. Her friend Preston Manning got over \$250,000. Lots of her pals are now on board the UCP gravy train. Can she explain why her friends keep getting more and more of Albertans' money and why those same Albertans keep getting asked to pay . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, again, thank you for the opportunity to answer the question. Thank you to the member for asking it. As the Premier has already stated, we have followed the process to make sure that these are properly sourced.

We also appreciate . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I think the real question here from our side of the House is: who's going to lead the NDP going forward with a lame-duck opposition leader? It's very frustrating to hear that the members on the opposite side are asking questions not about government policy but, rather, about these things that the Premier has already been clear on.

Mr. Sabir: The Premier would have Albertans believe that the only person capable of reviewing the AER is the top fundraiser for her Wildrose leadership campaign, that the person capable of handling digital strategy is her UCP campaign manager. If these people are really the best people for the job, why didn't the Premier ask them to compete like every other Albertan's company? Why is it one set of rules for her friends and insiders and another for everyone else? Why?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to answer the question and the member opposite for asking it. Again, to repeat, we have followed the process to the letter and recognize that the members opposite are very eager to – they know the process as well as we do on this side of the House. We have followed it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'm really excited. Today our caucus announced five in-person town halls on protecting Albertans' pensions, and there are even more to come. We'll be in Calgary, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Red Deer, Ardrossan, and all over the province looking Albertans in the eyes and hearing what they have to say about pensions, something this government has refused to do. So I'd like to reach out and invite the Premier and the Finance minister to come attend, hear first-hand what Albertans think. Can the Premier tell this House which of our in-person town halls she'll join me at?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's a really interesting week. I've enjoyed it a lot. Yesterday I liked hearing the opposition pretend to care about the province's finances, and now they're telling us they actually do care about engagement. Nothing like the Bighorn sham consultations or the carbon tax that was rammed through on

Albertans and every other Canadian. I suggest that you do your consultation and make sure you give submissions to albertapensionplan.ca. Our engagement is ongoing, and this conversation continues.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I think that answer was none.

While this UCP government is relying on biased surveys, hand-picked callers on telephone town halls, multimillion-dollar ad campaigns based on misinformation, our NDP caucus is genuinely reaching out to people and asking them what they think, and the message we're getting back is loud and clear. The UCP needs to keep their hands off Albertans' CPP. Can the Premier explain to this House why she won't be there in person to listen to some of the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands who care about this?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're totally committed to this ongoing conversation with Albertans. Alberta is very lucky to have people like former minister Jim Dinning and Mary Ritchie, Alberta's first appointment onto the CPPIB, that are willing to do this good work on behalf of all Albertans, have those conversations, find out what questions remain in the minds of Albertans, and continue to take new information from the federal government and others. It's a live conversation. No one is racing towards a conclusion. It's something that's important to every family.

Ms Gray: The Finance minister said last week that his job is to sell this plan to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, for the record the government's job is to actually listen to Albertans, not manipulate them into gambling away their retirement security. How insulting is this? The minister is even using public money to try and convince Albertans this is a good idea, and even then the incredible people of this province are telling the Premier, the minister, and the entire UCP cabinet to take a hike. Last chance. Will any member of this cabinet – the Premier, the minister, anyone – join us in person at these town halls? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there's a telephone town hall put on by Mr. Dinning and the panel tomorrow for central Alberta, which is part of the beauty of their engagement so far, that they're reaching out to every corner of the province: north, south, Calgary, Edmonton. Tomorrow is central. I look forward very much to getting a break here around Christmas and hearing from Mr. Dinning about the feedback he's heard so far, what questions remain, and what the next step should be in this conversation with Albertans.

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

Bill 201

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP voted down Bill 201, telling Albertans it's totally cool to pay a family doctor. The government's true colours are showing, and they aren't pretty. The UCP aren't just okay with privatizing health care; they are promoting it every chance they get. Unlike the UCP, we will always protect public health care. To the minister: was voting down Bill 201 the UCP's version of a vow renewal to private health care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is a ludicrous statement. In fact, we spoke very clearly to Bill 201. In fact, it was redundancy that we do not need. We already have an audit system we go through when there is something that is inappropriate happening. We

continue to investigate. We believe in public health care. We support public health care, and we will defend public health care. We always have and we always will on this side of the House.

Member Brar: Given that there are a number of clinics charging these access fees, which violates the Canada Health Act, and given that protecting Albertans' right to see a family doctor free of charge is a critical part of our job as elected officials, I did the right thing by putting forward Bill 201. Will the minister admit her party turned their backs on Albertans by voting down this critical piece of legislation here?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I will admit no such thing because it's not true. We defend public health care, and we will continue to defend public health care. The member opposite continues to put forward a bill that was redundant. We do that work already. Why would we continue to add more red tape to what's already being done? We support public health care, period.

Member Brar: Given that the Premier seems to love carving up the health care system and giving the pieces to her friends and allies, even the ones who say that cancer treatments aren't essential, and given that every time the UCP does something to fix health care, they make a struggling system and a horrendous crisis much worse, does the minister think that maybe they should just leave the efforts to fix the health care to the people on this side of the House? We have the actual solutions. They have nothing more than chaos and more costs for Albertans.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite left us in a fiscal mess. If we want to talk about health care, they left health care and education in a mess. The members opposite talk about building hospitals. They actually took the Red Deer hospital off the capital priority list. We are actually looking to strengthen health care, build infrastructure where it's needed, unlike the members opposite.

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

MacEwan University School of Business

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every world-class city requires a welcoming downtown and postsecondary institutions that give students the skills and resources they need to succeed. As a resident of Edmonton's capital region I was thrilled to hear about yesterday's announcement at MacEwan University and the impact it will have on our community. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how will yesterday's announcement at MacEwan support our government's work to revitalize downtown Edmonton? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question, Mr. Speaker. Leaders in Edmonton have consistently advocated for investments in projects that will bring more visitors to the downtown core. MacEwan already brings 20,000 people downtown every day. Our \$125 million investment in building a new school of business will support MacEwan's goal of enrolling 30,000 students per year by 2030, making higher learning more accessible and bringing more visitors downtown.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for sharing this encouraging news for downtown Edmonton. Given

that a healthy downtown core requires building a more welcoming environment for students and given that Alberta's government is committed to making investments that improve career and educational opportunities for students, can the Minister of Advanced Education explain how \$125 million in capital funding will benefit MacEwan students? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, this investment not only contributes to Edmonton's downtown but will also improve the student experience. Building a new school of business means providing students with 35,000 more square metres of learning space, 30 classrooms, and additional space to help students connect with businesses and the community. Our government is committed to building the infrastructure students need to succeed, and that's what our \$125 million investment will do.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that Alberta's government is proud to include MLAs representing nearly every rural community in our province and given the importance of ensuring Alberta's economic prosperity leaves no region behind, can the Minister of Advanced Education tell the House why supporting MacEwan and downtown Edmonton helps all Albertans?

2:10

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, downtown cores are the beating hearts of our cities. Every Albertan that goes to an Oilers game took a trip downtown. Every school group visiting the Royal Alberta Museum or touring our Legislature took a trip downtown. A safe and vibrant downtown is where culture, community, and businesses thrive. That's why we made a targeted investment to revitalize downtown Edmonton. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Food Safety in Daycares

Member Batten: When families send their children to daycare, they have a right to be assured that their child will be safe, healthy, and protected. Sadly, this summer that wasn't the case as Alberta experienced a devastating E coli outbreak that infected nearly 500 people, mostly children. Since then this government has failed to be transparent with families about the state of the investigation. There have been zero updates and radio silence to all the families. Can the minister please tell these families why there has been nothing coming from him?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Each and every single day over 150,000 children attend an early childhood centre somewhere here in the province of Alberta, and their safety and well-being is one of my highest priorities. That's why I'm very excited to see the committee that's being chaired by Mr. Hanson. They're going to be coming up with a number of recommendations over the next couple of months. I look forward to seeing those recommendations in the spring and look for ways that we can improve the system.

Member Batten: Given that the centre of this outbreak, Fueling Minds, has been charged with providing food services to daycares

without the correct business licence and given that families have a right to expect that the food that their children are being served is safe, healthy, and legal, has the minister ascertained that every other shared kitchen providing food to daycares is operating with a valid licence and has been properly inspected to ensure that no health issues like the ones from Fueling Minds will ever happen again? Confirm this for the record right here and now, please. Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important question, and, yes, we do take that very seriously. AHS goes in, and they do audits and inspections, and they take that very seriously. We've stepped up the audits and inspections. So, yes, that process is continuing. They're continuing to inspect all of the food safety items, and they will continue to do this. This is part of the public health care system that we, in fact, enjoy here in Alberta.

Member Batten: Given that at the same time this academy, Fueling Brains, was serving food to children from a kitchen that had been flagged with multiple violations of health and safety rules – and other concerns, of course, have since emerged – and given that it was reported today that the CFO of Fueling Minds asked one location in Texas to use a kitchen with a single fridge to feed over 250 children and also suggested that storing food samples in an electrical room was okay, what action has the minister taken to protect children from . . .

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. One of my highest priorities is to ensure that the children of this province have a safe place to attend an early childhood education centre. That's why I said that over 150,000 children attend these facilities right across the entire province. We're continuously working in ways that we can improve the system. We have saved Albertan families over thousands of dollars each and every year, providing safe, inclusive, affordable child care. We'll continue to make improvements to the system and make sure that our children are looked after.

Alberta Energy Regulator Review

Ms Ganley: After receiving \$60,000 to chair a panel focused on Alberta's energy future, a report that was never released, David Yager has now been given another sole-source contract for \$70,000 to conduct a review of the Alberta Energy Regulator. Mr. Yager is a big supporter of the Premier and even served as president of the Wildrose until the Premier crossed the floor and is, according to the government, the only person who could possibly review the AER. What is the scope of Mr. Yager's review, and why was he given a sole-source contract?

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say, first of all, that the NDP has no credibility on this question whatsoever. They sought, when they were in government, all sorts of advice. The major difference of that was we're asking Albertans; they asked people that were non-Albertans to provide that advice. In fact, if you remember, there were literally tens of thousands of Albertans that fled the province because the advice they were receiving, the sole-source contracts they gave were bad for Albertans. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to make sure we get the best

advice from the best people so that we provide Albertans with the best. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that the energy future panel that Mr. Yager chaired looked at issues including the UCP's infamous R-star program, the one that proposed to hand over \$20 billion in public funds to delinquent oil and gas companies to clean up their own mess, and given that the UCP are refusing to release Mr. Yager's first report despite Albertans paying for it, will Mr. Yager's review of the AER be released? If not, what is the UCP hiding?

Mr. Jean: *From Miracle to Menace.* Now, I'm not talking about the NDP, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about David Yager's book. He is an internationally recognized expert. He's a national expert on oil and gas. He's one of the leading contenders in Alberta and has run all sorts of companies. We're going to hire the best people to provide the best advice at the best price for Albertans. We're not going to take any lessons from those folks, who hired non-Albertans and ran this province into the ground.

Ms Ganley: Given that it seems the only prerequisite to get a contract from this government is a direct connection with the Premier and given that the AER performs vital functions that the public is rightly concerned about, especially with the UCP's plan to hand \$20 billion over to companies and insiders to clean up their own well, what on earth could the scope of the review of the AER possibly be that only a party insider could possibly perform it?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, David Yager is a national expert in relation to energy. He is also one of Alberta's most experienced and respected analysts and commentators on energy policy. He has led significant oil services companies in Alberta. He has run HSE at one of Alberta's largest oil field safety companies. He has been the chair of PSAC. It goes on and on. He is an expert. We're not going to hire non-Albertan NDP – I know the member wants to hire people from the mother ship in Ottawa. It just doesn't cut it. It's not happening. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose.

Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Camrose, like many other rural constituencies, is facing a shortage of nurses and hospital staff following the closure of Augustana's nursing program in August 2021. Medical training in rural areas is essential to address staffing needs to give life-saving care. My constituents frequently vocalize their concerns regarding the limited postsecondary medical training and health care support. To the minister of . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. There are limits, and indicating the presence or nonpresence of a member would be breaching them.

Ms Lovely: To the Minister of Advanced Education: what action is our United Conservative government taking to increase the opportunities available in rural areas for prospective nurses and hospital staff?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that very important question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has committed \$6.6 million to create over 400 seats in nursing programs at institutions outside of Edmonton and Calgary. We are also investing more than \$11 million to create over 1,000 seats for nurse

bridging programs to get internationally educated nurses working in our health care system, and more than half of those seats will be at seven rural institutions.

An Hon. Member: You closed down Augustana.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that reduced access to training in rural communities has forced some students to relocate to larger cities for education and given that the University of Calgary is currently operating a successful distance learning program in Wainwright, what is our government doing to ensure affordability and ease of access to postsecondary medical training programs in rural Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, research shows that students trained in rural settings are more likely to remain in rural communities. That's why we invested \$1 million in 2023 to explore ways the University of Lethbridge and Northwestern Polytechnic can contribute to the delivery of medical education, and that's why we committed nearly \$20 million to create 120 new seats in medical programs at Alberta's medical schools. We want to ensure students across our province can stay and work in their home communities.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for your answer. To the Minister of Health: given that the reduction of nurse students in rural areas leads to fewer student support staff in rural hospitals, what initiatives is the Ministry of Health taking to ensure that rural health care centres and hospitals can maintain staffing requirements for day-to-day operations?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are at a critical time when it comes to health care in Alberta, and access remains a priority for Albertans, especially in rural and remote communities. On top of refocusing the health care system, we are taking real action, including introducing a compensation model so nurse practitioners can open their own clinics, optimizing rural recruitment programs, working with the AMA to improve compensation models for rural physicians, and increasing medical program seats at Alberta's postsecondary institutions with a special focus on rural communities.

Affordable Housing in Canmore

Dr. Elmeligi: In 2021 Canmore residents and businesses participated in one of the longest public hearings in Alberta history. For six days citizens spoke overwhelmingly against the proposed Three Sisters Mountain Village development. This led the town council at the time to reject it. In response, TSMV Properties took the decision to a UCP-appointed tribunal, that ruled in favour of the developer. A provincial body forced the town of Canmore to approve an unwanted development. Can the minister please explain to the community of Canmore why the decision made by their elected town council . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member is probably aware, the LPRT made a proper ruling. In fact, the town then took them to court and the town lost, so the hon. member might have an issue with the judge's decision as well as the LPRT decision, but on this side we respect the rule of law. We respect the decisions of the court. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that the town of Canmore is in the midst of a significant housing crisis and businesses struggle to attract or retain workers because of a lack of housing and given that young people frequently live in their vehicles because they can't find an affordable place to live and given that this government has done nothing to build much-needed housing and given that this development also does nothing to address the housing crisis in a meaningful way, can the minister explain to the residents of Canmore how the province can allow a development like this to proceed when it doesn't even address the residents' primary concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I guess the real question is: how can a member of this House stand up and rage about the lack of housing in one question and right before that raged against a project that was going to provide thousands of homes? Which is it? Which is it? It can't be both. Do they want homes or do they not want homes? They should actually decide, because Albertans need to know. On this side we're in favour of more homes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that this development only provides 10 per cent of affordable housing units and everything else is a multimillion-dollar home and given that the wildlife corridor and connectivity science has advanced considerably over the last 30 years and research has clearly demonstrated TSMV will significantly impact an international wildlife corridor and given that my inbox and the Premier's and the minister's are full of over 2,300 e-mails requesting the government buy this land and protect Grizz Corridor, can the minister please explain what the province will do to ensure this corridor functions? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're in favour of economic development. We're in favour of more housing. We're in favour of more affordable housing. This province has very good environmental standards, which I know this government will make sure are enforced. The members opposite need to get on board, because this government is moving forward. We also respect the ruling of the court, unlike the folks across. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, the ongoing war in Ukraine has inflicted immense suffering in Europe, marking one of the worst chapters in its recent history. As a native of Ukraine this issue resonates deeply with me. Dirty Russian oil has been funding Putin's work on Ukraine. In light of this, would the minister of energy please inform the House on the steps being taken by our government in reducing global dependence on Russia's oil and gas in favour of clean, ethical, Canadian energy?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we're speaking to all of our friends around the world to make sure that we have the opportunity to provide them with safe, secure, affordable energy. It's about having discussions with opportunities to create a better world. On this side of the House we are actually leaders on CCUS technology and other technologies to make sure that we have clean energy, something that the NDP did not do during their time of tenure. We're going to reach out to many governments around the world and be receptive to those opportunities that will see economic growth as well as maintaining our great environment.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, given that we have heard calls from our partners and allies around the world such as Germany, Japan, South Korea asking us to increase the production of Canadian energy and further given that the Liberal-NDP alliance continues to try to limit our production of this vital energy, would the same minister please inform the House what steps this government is taking to stand up to Ottawa and make sure our allies overseas don't freeze in the dark?

Mr. Jean: Well, it's true, Mr. Speaker. That side of the House takes their instructions from the mother ship, from their bosses Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau. It is true that our Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, told the Germans no, and he's told many people no in relation to our energy here in Alberta. We want to provide the oil to the world: oil, energy, natural gas. We know for sure that more Alberta energy means lowering emissions right across the world. We're opening up that opportunity by creating many meetings, many opportunities to speak. We have the hydrogen conference here in Edmonton. That's one of the largest in North America.

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

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are obvious reasons not to support Putin's war in Ukraine by purchasing Russia's oil and further given that Canadian liquefied natural gas represents a cleaner form of energy compared to Russia's oil, would the same minister please inform the House on why countries around the world should rely on Canadian energy as a trusted choice to power their electrical grids and heat their homes?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that many people in the world right now are suffering from energy poverty. In fact, about 9 million people a year die as a result of not enough energy. While the opposition party and our Liberal Prime Minister want to block our energy from getting to the world, we are doing everything we can to make sure that our clean, affordable energy can get to the world because more Alberta energy means fewer emissions, and it means more energy security for the world. The world wants our energy. We're going to deliver it.

Health System Reform

Member Boparai: After four years of failing on health care, the UCP are trying to clean up their mess through a proposed restructuring of AHS. The president of the Alberta Medical Association expressed concerns regarding the UCP's plan. He's worried that the most vulnerable Albertans may get left behind. Similarly, the president of the United Nurses of Alberta said that the UCP's plan is only going to make the problem worse. Does this government think that creating new problems will make the old problems go away?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we've heard loud and clear from Albertans that the current system centred around AHS is

fragmented and unco-ordinated. We're looking to refocus the system on priority areas so that we can become more efficient, more timely, provide better service to Albertans. In fact, I have pages and pages of quotes from individuals who said that we need to do something differently, and they're supportive of the direction we're going in.

Member Boparai: Given that the Minister of Health said that the current system is not working and confessed that the average Albertan still can't get in to see a family doctor when they need to and given that a former UCP MLA recently stated that Albertans are waiting too long for an ambulance, waiting too long to find a family doctor, it's clear that the Conservative politicians know that our health care system is broken, including the Minister of Health. Why did this government promise it would end the chaos in health care in 90 days over a year ago?

2:30

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I can quote the mayor of Sylvan Lake, who said: "I'm greatly concerned about the challenges our health care system is currently facing, as they have a significant daily impact on the lives of our residents, from enduring long wait times to experiencing frequent closures of our ambulatory care facility and struggling with a shortage of available family doctors. These issues directly affect the well-being and access to quality health care for the residents of Sylvan Lake. It's clear that a dramatic shift is necessary to bring about the changes needed for a more effective health care system. I wholeheartedly commend the minister for her willingness to think outside of the box."

Member Boparai: Given that the UCP botched their attempt to privatize lab services, resulting in a costly setback to our health care system, and given that the UCP has failed to provide every Albertan with access to a family doctor, with Alberta's population growth far outpacing growth in new doctors, and given that emergency room wait times are still over seven hours in parts of the province, the facts stand. The UCP broke our health care system. Why should we trust their chaotic plan to fix it?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta supports the decision by the minister and Alberta Health to restructure health care oversight in this province. The health care system in Alberta is in crisis, and new ideas and approaches are required to address current need and to support Albertans into the future. The proposed changes have the potential to position Alberta as a leader in primary care, continuing care, emergency and acute-care, and surgical services across all sectors, integrating mental health support. These are bold enhancements that, if done well, will lead to improved access, improved health outcomes, and improvement to the bottom line. Dr. Susan Prendergast, president of the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for St. Albert is next.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. St. Albert has the fourth-highest living wage in the province at \$23.80 an hour. People are working two, sometimes three jobs just to cover everyday costs. Now, one can't help but wonder: does the UCP reside in an alternate universe? Are they blissfully unaware of the struggles facing hard-working Albertans, or is their attention so focused on themselves in removing gift limits that they're willing to ignore Albertans who are forced to work multiple jobs just to put food on the table?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the significant pressures that Albertans are facing under increased cost of living and significant hikes in interest rates. We also know that the minimum wage and changes to the minimum wage will affect workers, their ability to obtain jobs, things like automation. It has to be done carefully and in recognition of the other choices that government has made to make life affordable: the highest personal base exemptions in the country; we have no sales tax here, so Albertans keep more of what they earn; and we're about to lower income taxes.

Ms Renaud: Given that AISH recipients have always budgeted every cent and now they just sink further into poverty every month while disability workers continue to fight for a decent wage and given that the cost-of-living crisis is growing under this government's watch, how can the minister sit around and ignore the cost-of-living crisis that Albertans are living through? Do they not know that they're responsible for more than just themselves and their gifts and their tickets and their gift?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the challenges that Albertans and families are facing. That's why we came forward with one of the most ambitious affordability support programs in the country. That included affordability payments for families, seniors, children. That included electricity rebates. We continue to suspend the fuel tax while our federal counterparts continue to put a carbon tax on home heating and gas. And we're going to continue to do more. As I mentioned in my last answer, we're about to reduce income tax for all Albertans, a commitment we made in the last election.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Given that far too many Albertans are struggling with affordable housing nightmares, empty dinner plates, and dangerous living situations right now – right now – and given that the Premier's biggest concern is making sure she and her friends can spend more than 20 minutes in private suites at sporting events, why does this government have a fixation on their time being wined and dined in luxury boxes when everyday Albertans can't afford rent, bus passes, food, extracurriculars for their kids? We want an answer, not rhetoric.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the members opposite are starting to care about the ability for families to put food on the table. Maybe they should have thought about that when they increased taxes, increased regulation, and were antienergy, antibusiness, and caused us to lose tens of billions. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Jones: Their policy decisions caused Alberta to lose tens of billions of investment and 180,000 jobs, and I can tell you that there's no support in the world that is going to help 180,000 people who no longer have employment. So we're not going to take lessons from them on job creation or supporting families because that's what we do every day here and that's what we're going to continue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

AUC Electricity Generation Inquiry

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the most investor-friendly province in Canada when it comes to renewables. In 2022 75 per cent of renewable investment happened here, but there are some major growing pains, and a hard decision was made to put a pause on approvals for an inquiry. The Alberta Utilities Commission recently released the first four reports of this inquiry, including two on reclamation. Could the Minister of Affordability and Utilities tell this House what recommendations these reports made?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, thank you for this important question. Despite what the opposition would have you believe, the reports identified a myriad of regulatory and policy deficits that went unaddressed by the NDP while they courted this industry to come to Alberta. The reports by Dr. Colin Mackie and Ecoventure highlight the risk to landowners and municipalities at the end of life of these projects, that can run into the hundreds of millions of dollars, and who will be on the hook to pay these massive bills for reclamation. These are serious items that our government is addressing and will continue to address. That's how you create investor . . .

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

Mr. Rowswell: Given that Alberta is Canada's agricultural heartland and that this is part of who we are and one of the province's largest industries and given that most of these wind and solar projects are being installed far away from the bright lights of Calgary and Edmonton, often where we grow wheat and canola and raise our cattle, could the Minister of Affordability and Utilities tell us what this report recommended on agricultural impacts? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the member, for this important question. The report from Tannas Conservation underscores just how important it is to consider the impacts of renewable projects on agricultural land, which has long been the heartbeat of Alberta and is even more critical now with increasing food demands and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

An Hon. Member: You're not going to get your question.

The Speaker: Hey. Order.

The hon. minister is the one with the call.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture has long been the heartbeat of Alberta and even more critical now with the increasing food demands and the growing population. We are actively reviewing these recommendations around modelling, the use of technology, and reclamation. These are things our government is taking seriously that the opposition government never did. We are listening to rural Albertans.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that in a recent story in the *Globe and Mail* I read about how these first four reports are rebuilding the confidence of rural municipalities in Alberta and how we are charting a future with renewable electricity, could the Minister of Affordability and Utilities share with us what he has learned so far

and the importance of the inquiry to ensure Alberta's electricity future? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to point out that investment has increased over the time that we put this pause on, and it shows the critical nature of this inquiry. Most of these projects are being constructed in rural Alberta, and that's why when people like Paul McLauchlin, president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta, told the *Globe and Mail* last week that these are conversations that we should have had five to eight years ago, when the NDP was in power and they pushed through the... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, would I be able to start that answer from the beginning?

The Speaker: Did they start from the beginning today?

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Five to eight years ago is when the NDP were in power, and they pushed through an early exit from coal and enticed an industry that we were in no way prepared to integrate into our grid.

The Speaker: This concludes the time allotted for your question; I can assure you of that.

My inclination is to not go to move to question 15 in light of the significant amount of interjections and lack of decorum, but in this case I will allow question 15.

2:40

Continuing Care System

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard heartbreaking stories from hundreds of Albertans about the poor care their loved ones are receiving in Alberta's continuing care system. Residents are not helped to get up and eat breakfast until late in the morning. They are not given basic hygiene support for showering, sometimes only having a shower once in two weeks. When asking for assistance to go to the bathroom, the overworked staff are often too busy to help them. Can the minister explain why seniors' care is being so neglected by the UCP?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we are dedicated as a province to being able to keep care of all of the people that built our province. That's why our province spends about \$9 billion a year investing in seniors, and we will continue to do that. We have a lot of work when it comes to continuing care. The NDP made a mess when they were in charge of the health care system. That hon. member, when she was the minister of seniors, absolutely devastated the system, and that's why we're working closely with the Minister of Health to rejig our health system to be able to make sure that those who built our province will be kept care of. Help is on the way.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we all know that staff shortages are a chronic issue in Alberta's continuing care facilities and given that the minister should know this as the facility-based continuing care review completed back in 2021 clearly identifies staff shortages as a significant issue and it's now 2023 and nothing has changed and given that I hear repeatedly from providers about their staffing challenges and increasing costs, the minister is not doing enough to support these providers and the seniors they serve. Why?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We know how important seniors are. Government has invested nearly \$1 billion over three years to begin transformation of the continuing care system, including supporting initiatives that will shift care to the community, enhance workforce capacity, increase choice and innovation, and improve the quality of care within the continuing care sector. We are committed to our seniors, and we're going to make sure that they get the care they deserve because they built this province, they've helped build it, and they deserve better than they're getting.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that I've heard repeatedly from providers that the funding to support seniors in continuing care is too low and given that the costs of providing care are more than the UCP allocates and given that Albertans are looking for a direct answer to this very simple question that impacts so many providers, seniors, and their families, can the minister please tell us what it costs to care for a resident in Alberta specifically? Please clarify for Albertans why the UCP has failed to be transparent about this government's complex and secretive funding model.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it's a model that we've inherited from the members opposite. In fact, we are actually going to make sure that we make improvements. Besides the \$1 billion we have an additional \$310 million over three years which is being invested in the continuing care capital program, which supports four program streams that will modernize continuing care facilities, develop innovative small homes, provide culturally appropriate care for Indigenous peoples, and add new spaces in priority communities having the greatest need. We need more.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East, the Deputy Speaker, and the Chair of Committees.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 I can advise the Assembly that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petition for the St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023, which was presented to the Assembly on November 20, 2023, and that the petition complies with standing orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr1, St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by myself.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Haji: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Vital Signs report. It's an annual report that's written by the Edmonton Community

Foundation and the Edmonton Social Planning Council. It focuses on food security, and this is the 10th year. I'll be tabling five copies of that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I should just note that the green sheets, the replacement pages for your standing orders, have been prepared and are located on your desk. The actual changes to the standing orders will be distributed to you at a later date.

Now Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate November 9: Mr. Ip]

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

Member Boparai: [Remarks in Punjabi] Khalsa belongs to God. Victory belongs to God.

Mr. Speaker, I rise here today with deep gratitude for the opportunity to address this esteemed government body and the incredible constituents of Calgary-Falconridge, which consists of Castleridge, Falconridge, Whitehorn, Temple, Coral Springs, Taradale, and Homestead. It's truly an honour to represent such a diverse riding that holds a special place in Treaty 7 territory.

My grandmother Sardarni Manjit Kaur Boparai, like many matriarchs in our lives, instilled religious and social values that have stayed with me till this day. She would share stories of those who fought for social justice in her community, like Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who fearlessly stood up and sacrificed his entire family for social justice for all. These stories sparked my interest in politics and have brought me here before you today.

I was born and raised in the historic village of Ghundani Kalan in Punjab to a family of hard-working farmers. My father, Sardar Balwinder Singh Boparai, a farmer and small-business man, instilled the values of hard work and determination in all of us. My mother, Kuljinder Kaur Boparai, played an integral role in who I am today by continually repeating the importance of empathy and compassion. My youngest brother, Manveer Singh Boparai, means the world to me. We have faced many challenges together, and his maturity and support have been invaluable.

I will always stand for justice, human rights, and for those who are marginalized in our society. In 2011, due to the rising cost in B.C., my family made a brave decision to move to Calgary. Upon our arrival I worked tirelessly at two jobs, just like many of my fellow constituents who share the immigrant experience. This first-hand experience has given me a deep understanding of the challenges that many Albertans are facing in the pursuit of a better economic future for their families.

In 2016 and '17 I had the honour of serving as the president of the Dashmesh Culture Centre and chairman of Khalsa School Calgary. It was during this time that I truly delved into Alberta politics and saw how certain policies can uplift marginalized communities by allowing them to gain access to vital services. Witnessing the positive consequences of properly funded critical

services first-hand was eye opening. I saw how these adjustments could positively affect our communities and the impact they had on the quality of health care services available to working-class families. My own family faced the possibility of tragedy when my wife, Sukhwinder Kaur Boparai, battled significant health issues, and it highlighted the importance of not allowing political ideology to overshadow the well-being of families going through similarly unbearable experiences. Our family is blessed that she made a full recovery, and her hard work and generosity with the volunteers during the campaign is why I stand before you today.

2:50

As the proud father of my daughter, Gurnoor Kaur Boparai, and son, Anhad Singh Boparai, I see these values of fighting for justice, human rights, and supporting the marginalized reflected in them. My daughter suffers from a significant health problem, and she has been bullied in the past because of it. My son and daughter, through their experiences, have learned the importance of standing up for those who are experiencing injustice. They are an inspiration to me, and their courage reinforces the importance of building a better future for our families and communities.

In fact, my family history aligns with the very essence of the party I represent today. Like the original members of the Alberta NDP, my roots trace back to a family of hard-working farmers, who dedicated themselves to providing for their loved ones and supporting their community.

Together let's work towards ensuring that every Albertan receives the support they need. As former President Barack Obama once said: if a child cannot get a better education, even though he is not my child, that matters to me; if a senior has to choose between a prescription or rent, even though that's not my grandparent, that matters to me. Let's keep these words in our hearts as we strive to create a better future for all. Now more than ever it's so important that we keep championing the values that have shaped our party and province.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I am so proud to be part of a caucus that's breaking new ground, and being the first baptized Sikh elected to the Legislative Assembly is a huge honour for me.

Let's focus on strengthening our public health care and education system and tackling the challenges of an ever-changing global economy. The future of our province is in our hands, and every single member of this Assembly plays a critical role in getting the policies right for a better future for Albertans. I can't wait to work with all of you to address these challenges head-on. Join me in focusing on the issues that truly matter to Albertans.

Today I stand here feeling so humbled by the trust the people of Calgary-Falconridge have placed in me. I am committed to representing their interests, fighting for their needs, and working towards a brighter future for everyone. Let's build on the legacy of our predecessors and create a path for progress, prosperity, and equality together. [Remarks in Punjabi] Give me this boon. May I never ever shirk from doing good deeds. That I shall not fear when I go into combat. And with determination I will be victorious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and all of my amazing colleagues and constituents, for your unwavering support. Let's embark on this journey together, knowing that our collective efforts will shape the future of our amazing province. [Remarks in Punjabi]

Khalsa belongs to God. Victory belongs to God. [As submitted]

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: One thing I would like to bring is a friendly reminder to all that when we speak in languages other than English, it is expected that the member will provide written translation. Thank you very much for providing that for us.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5

Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned November 8: Mr. Schmidt speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you wish to speak? You have one minute left.

Mr. Schmidt: One minute.

An Hon. Member: How many times have you apologized?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the members opposite calling for an apology. I think they are the ones who should be apologizing for bringing in this bill, that fires up the gravy train.

As I said in my previous remarks, what happened to university presidents' pay under the previous PC government was absolutely outrageous and obscene, Mr. Speaker. There is no excuse for presidents of the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary or any other university earning more than a million dollars a year, and that's exactly what this bill will do.

I urge all members to vote against this bill, vote against the gravy train that the government is trying to fire up again, and vote in favour of policies that will support students by making postsecondary education more affordable. We don't need to shovel more money into university presidents' pockets; we need to put more money into the students at universities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a privilege and a pleasure to be in here, first off, and to hear the great dialogue that comes from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar since he was the former Education minister at one time. He brings a unique perspective into the House. I've often said that I don't do wackadoo woke, and I don't speak freaky-deaky socialist. So every once in a while, when he gets up here, it's hard to discern what's actually fact and fiction.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill 5 today, I'm honoured to speak to it. It's also known as the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. The proposed act introduces a new, flexible governance model compensation system that aids to address several pivotal aspects of public-sector employment. We've been consulting on this for a while. It's going to take a while, once it's put in place, to go through all the items. But, really, it's to fix a bunch of items that are out there that need to be touched up. This new model will streamline and simplify the government's direction for non-union compensation across Alberta's public sector. The new model will also maintain strong fiscal oversight. Again, the member opposite is not a fan of that, but we are over on this side, and hopefully this will take care of it through Bill 5 here.

If passed – and I'm encouraging all the members opposite as well to vote with us on this – the public-sector amendment act will primarily change the compensation governance structure for non-union employees and entities that are presently governed by the reform of agencies, boards, and commissions compensation

regulation, which include Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health, postsecondary institutions – of course, that's excluding independent academic institutions – some public agencies such as the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission, Alberta Innovates, Alberta Pensions Services Corporation, Alberta Special Areas Board, Travel Alberta, and the Workers' Compensation Board, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 5 would ensure that strong government oversight and fairness continues in these entities, and they would work with our government to develop compensation plans for their organizations, so, again, working with them to come up with those models. The change in this legislation, if passed, is meant to alleviate the challenges that many public-sector employees have been facing for so many years, including recruiting and retaining staff, as current regulations and legislations do not account for things such as inflation and evolving labour market conditions.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have some phenomenal institutions and phenomenal organizations, and without these amendments that will be coming forward through Bill 5, that are meant to correct, it's tough to rob Peter to pay Paul. You want these institutions to do well. You want to make sure that they're meeting their mandates, and if we keep, you know, going to the lowest common denominator – we want to make sure that they have an ability to bring in the best people possible. This legislation, if passed, enables these previously mentioned changes. Government staff have consulted with the affected entities and will continue to do so, if the legislation is passed, to inform the details of replacement of the compensation model. This collaborative process will be ongoing, and the changes will take years to implement.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I can speak full well as a proud father of four, one of which is already at the University of Alberta; another one has been preaccepted in engineering. A pretty proud Papa. I had a chance to go over and meet with a bunch of the folks, the deans and associate deans, over at the U of A in the engineering department. We had a chance to talk about all the good things that they're up to over there.

These, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about in Bill 5, would meet with that narrative that they're looking for. They're looking to get really good programs in place. They're looking to have the best people possible so that we can not only teach our new students and our university students going through; we can inspire them, and moreover we can be more collaborative in that process. It's one thing to present the material to them. It's another thing to have people that really are fired up, the ones that really are innovative, the ones that I believe Bill 5 will help address, to make sure that the right people are there for years to come so, again, that we can maintain a very strong province and make sure that the next crop of kids coming through the education system remain strong and free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. I want to begin, actually, by thanking my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who gives a very fulsome understanding of how ridiculous this piece of legislation is and does it in his usually very animated way, that draws a very clear picture for Albertans of what's actually being done here by the government.

3:00

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. This bill has been put forward by this government in their First Session of the 31st Legislature; this is a priority bill for them. That's what happens in that First Session. They're going to bring forward the things that are the most important to them. What we see that is most important to this government is clearly making sure that the elite few can make more money and that the Premier and her colleagues can get free tickets to hockey games. That actually seems to be the priority. I believe 25 per cent of the legislation that's been brought forward this session is actually about the gravy train. That's what it's really about. It's about making sure that those who already earn enormous salaries can get a little bit more.

This is actually the very thing that we have had – well, if any of these members will remember their Progressive Conservative ancestors, they had become pretty corrupt by the end of 2015. Most of those members typically would have been members of the Wildrose Party and would have had some pretty sharp criticisms about those PC governments. In fact, I believe many of these members actually did.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, indeed, I'm sure.

About that gravy train. About how they were padding their own pockets and getting their friends big salaries and perks. I believe there were stories of some of these executives who are getting, you know, rounds of golf and getting these elaborate perks that most average Albertans were not enjoying and certainly not experiencing. In fact, not only did those members, when they were part of a party called the Wildrose Party, speak out against that kind of entitlement but Albertans did. They spoke very clearly and said they were sick of it, and what happened, Mr. Speaker, is that when the NDP government came in place, they actually heard that loud and clear. Not only did they hear that, but they were the ones who were voicing those concerns on behalf of many Albertans for a long period of time. They brought in some restrictions onto those very, very cushy government salaries. They brought in what this bill is seeking to repeal, which is the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act.

That was actually an incredible measure to not only save dollars for the public purse but to signal that we understood what average people cared about. Average people don't need rounds of golf. They're not looking for free tickets to a hockey game. Right now average people, average Albertans are just trying to be able to afford groceries, pay for electricity costs, pay their rent, and pay their tuition. That's what they care about.

Now, here we go a few years later, and all of these – it's amazing how when it comes to Conservative governments, the power corrupts them absolutely. All of a sudden they are forgetting their Wildrose roots. All of a sudden they have no problem bringing back those incredibly cushy, cushy salaries for executives. Many of my colleagues – I've had the pleasure of listening to them in this House, Mr. Speaker, and they've gotten the opportunity to talk about some of those excessive salaries. They've talked about million-dollar salaries in the case of some postsecondary institution leaders. We've talked about well into \$500,000, \$600,000. These are the salaries that this government is saying are not high enough to recruit the people that are needed for those positions.

First of all, I actually agree that postsecondary institutions – we do have some fantastic institutions in this province. I'm very proud of them myself. Not only are they fantastic, but I think they're so fantastic that all students should be able to attend them. Students who want to: they should be able to afford them. But this

government is not concerned about those average students, who simply want to be able to afford tuition. No. They're concerned about those executives. They're concerned about those individuals and those institutions who are making \$500,000 to \$1 million, that they need to make more. I can't think of something that's more out of line with what Albertans' priorities are right now.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland got up, and he talked about how they consulted widely with those affected institutions. Yeah. I'm sure that if you talk to people who are making these big salaries and say, "Would you like to make a little bit more?" I'm sure they would say yes. You know what? I'm pretty sure that we could have guessed what the answer of that consultation would have been.

But did they consult with average Albertans? Did they consult with average Albertans about what they think about increasing the salaries for all these people who are already making very, very big salaries? Did they consult with average Albertans? No, they did not. They are actually more concerned about making sure that they can take care of their good friends.

I thought it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, when I was listening to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland go through some of the organizations that would benefit from this removal of these caps on salaries and compensation, that he mentioned AHS. Interesting because, again, I do believe many members over on that side railed against the AHS executives, the ones that they fired. The CEO of AHS, Dr. Verna Yiu, who led this province through a very challenging time through the pandemic: fired unceremoniously, like that, and complained about how much she was making in severance. I remember those complaints from these members over here, but now they don't seem to have a problem because now they get to put in their own people that they want to appoint into those positions. Perhaps, I'm sure, Lyle Oberg has no problem with AHS making a bit more if it's going to benefit him or this government's friends.

I also note that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland mentioned Alberta Innovates. Yeah. It's a great organization, does incredible work to attract investment in Alberta. You know who just recently got hired by Alberta Innovates? I do believe it was a former member for Sherwood Park, Jordan Walker. It's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, about how many former members of the UCP caucus land pretty cushy jobs within government and government agencies. These are the very people who deride government all the time and critique it and talk about how they've got this great private-sector experience, yet many of their members, when they lose their seats or leave government, end up right back in cushy jobs within government. So I guess perhaps somebody like former MLA Jordan Walker is probably going to get a nice boost, and he can thank his friends for that.

But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, governing is about choices. It's about: what do we prioritize? We've already talked about the fact that this government seems to prioritize cushy increases in salary for their friends and already wealthy executives. We know that they are pretty concerned about the Premier's ability to attend expensive hockey games and not get her tickets comped – heaven forbid she should be asked to pay for them herself – but what they're not concerned about and what they don't seem to be prioritizing are the costs that most individual Albertans are experiencing and that have increased significantly under this government.

To me it's quite a surprise, Mr. Speaker. This is my second term in this Legislature, and I cannot believe that this government – this is their second term – is still complaining about things. Apparently, they are the most helpless government ever that's ever been in

power in this province because nothing is their responsibility and everything is everybody else's fault.

The reality is that over the last four years the high electricity costs that we are paying in Alberta – which, by the way, are an extreme outlier compared to every other province in this country. Our electricity prices in this province went up 128 per cent compared to the next leading province with something like 17 per cent. That's the Alberta advantage that this government has to take responsibility for because it happened under their watch. Why did it happen, Mr. Speaker? Not for any of the made up reasons that they like to throw around that are, again, somebody else's fault.

We all know because we actually have it. Well, thank goodness *Hansard* exists and video transcripts of this Legislature exist and we saw their former minister of energy, Sonya Savage, stand up and say: "Yeah. We're letting the power purchasing agreements expire. We're going to move forward. We're going to abandon all efforts to move to a capacity market, and we're going to move directly to a solely energy-only market." What happened, Mr. Speaker? What happened is that energy prices, electricity prices in this province, far more than any other province in this country, skyrocketed.

So when this government spends millions of our dollars on campaign ads in Ontario and on Toronto TTC buses talking about skyrocketing electricity prices, they're doing that there, Mr. Speaker, but they're not taking responsibility for what they've done here. They're worried about what's going to happen sometime in the future, 2035, when they are responsible for skyrocketing electricity prices right here in Alberta right now. But they don't seem to be prioritizing that. They don't seem to be talking about that.

They're not talking about increasing rent costs and that, based on 2021 information, Alberta now has the third-highest rent in Canada after Ontario and B.C. We've all heard the stories. We all have friends and family in Ontario and B.C. We hear about the enormous costs of rent and purchasing a house, and we've always felt rather smug, I think, in Alberta about the fact that we don't face that here. It's true; we've had affordable housing, much more affordable housing compared to those provinces and particularly the big cities like Toronto and Vancouver, for some time.

I know it was a decision that my husband and I made about where we wanted to finally make sure we were going to raise our family. We did know it was much more affordable in Alberta, but that was 20 years ago. That is not the case. That is not what many Albertans are feeling right now. Right now what they're feeling is that home ownership is out of reach. The advantage that we had in terms of affordable housing and being able to buy a home when you're a young person: that's gone, Mr. Speaker. That's drifting away so fast, and this government is not doing anything about it.

3:10

We know that, for example, seniors, who are often on fixed incomes, are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and utilities, and 14 per cent are spending over half of their income on rent and utilities. These are the same individuals who this government now wants to play with their pension. This government wants to say, on a bed of false promises about numbers that have been debunked across the road: don't worry; we can get you more for your pension. They're selling, quite honestly, a pack of fiction, Mr. Speaker, to seniors. These are the same seniors who are struggling to pay for their rent and costs right now. These are the things that should be the priority of this government. Instead, what we get is: we're having a hard time recruiting more of those fancy executives and getting them to stay here.

You know who else we have a hard time recruiting and retaining in this province? Early childhood educators. They make an average

income of \$19 per hour. That's how much they make. I don't hear this government talking about how to significantly increase their pay so that they can afford to live. You know who else earns practically nothing in this province, Mr. Speaker? EAs. EAs earn an average salary of under \$40,000. Their salary is closer to \$34,000 for an average EA, \$26,000 for an EA who's serving special-needs students. Yet every single one of these members – I'm certain of it – has heard from parents and teachers and advocates in their communities talking about how there are not enough EAs in their classrooms.

Even the Minister of Education has stood up and talked about how our classrooms are not just bigger; they are more complex. From special-needs students to students with language-learning needs, every single classroom is more complex, and every single school board I've talked to has said that we need more EAs. And it's not just money to hire EAs; it's that EAs don't get paid enough, so how do you recruit somebody who is critical to making sure that every single child has the ability to have access to a great education? It's not only the kids who have learning needs, Mr. Speaker, but also those other students who are in a classroom now of 30 or 40 more classmates than they had before. They have bigger class sizes, they have more complex students, and they can't find EAs.

I question all the rural MLAs here. If they talk to their school boards, they're going to say: we can't even find people in our community who want to work as an EA. You know why, Mr. Speaker? Because they get paid below the poverty line, and we're asking these mostly women to go into these classrooms where it's incredibly challenging and they're stretched too thin and they know they're not delivering the quality of support and services to the kids that they know they deserve. Where is the call from this government to make sure that those EAs are getting paid more money to be able to recruit them and retain them? [interjection] I'll accept an intervention from my colleague.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud for her thoughtful remarks on the problems that she's heard from constituents about the trouble attracting and retaining educational assistants and those people who are in the front-line education work that is so desperately needed. I'm just wondering how many times she's heard from Albertans that a school board needs more associate superintendents or that the superintendent or that the associate superintendents need raises so that their kids can get – and what kind of effect that would have on their education. Has she heard from Albertans whether or not superintendents are struggling to pay the rent or that paying them more will result in better educational outcomes for students in her constituency?

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the member for the question. I really appreciate that.

You know, it's funny. When I talk to school superintendents, which I've talked to many, you know what their prime concern is? I've not heard one of them ask for an increase in their salary. What they've asked for is increased supports so that they can deliver the quality of education to the students that are in their responsibility and their care that they deserve. That's what they talk about. They talk about building more schools. They talk about making sure that they can get a funding model that actually funds every single student that walks through the door of their school. They talk about making sure that there are supports to implement or revise or that they are engaged on new curriculum development. That's what they talk about. They don't say: I need a better salary or more money. They're actually focused on their students, and that's what this government should be focused on as well. Instead, what we're

hearing is that they're worried about the executives. I heard that member from across the way, you know, talk about how important our great, quality postsecondary education system is in Alberta, and I am very proud of the institutions we have here. But that's why students need to be able to afford to go to those postsecondary institutions, not only because they deserve it, because everybody deserves, actually, access to education and higher education if they so choose or trades or whatever they want to pursue after finishing school.

I'll give way to my colleague.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, through you, Mr. Speaker. This topic of conversation reminds me of enrolment actually declining in a lot of the early childhood education postsecondary programs as well as educational assistant training programs, and I imagine one of the reasons is because it costs thousands of dollars. I think it's about \$7,000 to attend most of these programs, and then, of course, when you're done, you make below the poverty line, so I imagine the burden of carrying additional student debt and responsibility on a number of these folks – and then from the province deaf ears when it comes to increasing compensation for those who are needed in these programs to, once they complete, go into educational environments, including daycares, day homes, and schools, to provide those educational supports. I'm wondering if maybe my colleague can elaborate a little bit more on some of the pressures that she is hearing from folks who work in those areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to my colleague. I appreciate that.

You know, of course, I think that across the board in so many programs students are struggling to pay, to afford the tuition that they need in order to be able to get the employment that they want, to be active in the workforce. But it's also, of course, that they are also experiencing the rising cost of living. So it's the rising tuition. I mean, I know my colleague the Member for Edmonton-South as the critic for Advanced Education has spoken passionately about the experiences and the stories she's hearing from postsecondary students who are sleeping in their cars because they can't afford rent. We're hearing stories about wait-lists to get student loans, so they're not even sure if they can stay in their programs. These are the things that should be the priority of this government.

It is absolutely absurd to me that a caucus that has spoken out – many of their members historically, or at least the roots of the party that they came from, critiqued the bloat and entitlement of PC governments for so long, yet once back in power, they do exactly the same thing, Mr. Speaker. I simply don't understand how they can stand up with a straight face and say: our priority right now is making sure that those who are making extraordinarily high incomes can make more. This is about choices, this is about priorities, and this government once again has proven that their priorities are completely off with Albertans.

I have not received one single e-mail, and I can kind of bet that most of – actually, I would even say that the members from the government caucus haven't received a single e-mail from a constituent saying: I really, really, really wish that the CEO of AHS or Alberta Innovates or any postsecondary institution needs to make more money. If those are the only people that they're listening to – and it seems to be that those are the only people they're listening to – this is how we end up with a government that is out of touch with its constituents and out of touch with Albertans.

I just find it remarkable, the repeated hypocrisy of those who, once in those positions, completely turn against their principles, that they apparently held so dear when they were members of the

Wildrose Party or whatever caucus they were part of before, and how very few of them will stand up and speak out against that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 5? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 5 speaks about the removal of salary restraints on ABCs; agencies, boards, commissions, and committees. The timing of this bill is mind-blowing. It is because it's a time when we're talking about affordability, and not only affordability, but we're talking about affordability in crisis. In Edmonton-Decore, that I represent, I've talked to a number of residents, constituents in my riding that span different industries as far as their jobs are concerned, and I looked into the income they make and the cost of living that they face today.

3:20

This bill, interestingly, talks about outside of those who are facing the challenges the most but instead ignores those populations that are having difficulty sometimes with living costs but addresses other priorities that I don't hear the most, whether it is in the hallways in the apartments that I walk into, where I go to knock on doors and talk to people, whether it is in community halls where I engage with people, or whether it is in the constituency office where people come and speak to issues that are important.

A few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, I tabled the Vital Signs Report, which is a report that is produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council and the Edmonton Community Foundation. It's a report that goes in depth into issues that are affecting our communities, particularly those who live in the capital region. This is the 10th year that I read this report. Every year they focus on specific areas, and this year it was about the food insecurity that people face. Instead of talking about that – a couple of weeks ago I was at Edmonton's Food Bank. We have heard the report, that was also tabled here, speaking to the food insecurity that Edmontonians face. All those speak to the challenges of the people who elected us and asked us to make decisions that will affect positively on their well-being and their lives. The expectation is that we pay attention to those and come up with legislation or instruments that will help address those issues.

Bill 5 doesn't speak to the EAs that are struggling alongside their teachers, where there are EAs to help the overloaded class sizes. Those are the ones who will require and need our attention, Mr. Speaker. This bill doesn't reflect that. I've engaged teachers in Edmonton-Decore, visited 10 schools, spoken to educators. What they are bringing up to our attention or what they talk to me about is more about the support that they need in their schools.

Last weekend I had a great coffee chat with my constituents. I have spoken with a constituent who works in a daycare, who is a widow with five children, who makes an annual income of \$33,000, Mr. Speaker. When I asked how much she pays on the rent, the amount she referenced comes to \$14,400, almost half of what she makes.

These are Edmontonians. These are Albertans. These are people who elected us, who expect us to look into their living conditions, Mr. Speaker, and come up with solutions that will address the challenges that they face. A single mom of four or five children who pays such an amount of money: what remains is \$20,000 or less to make sure that she covers the rest of her living expenses. Such a category of populations does not reflect in Bill 5, and as a representative I don't hear a lot about the ABCs' living conditions being parallel to what I am hearing from ordinary constituents of Edmonton-Decore.

Those are some of the issues that we need to deal with in this House, Mr. Speaker, and when we are bringing bills in the first session after an election, you expect bills that are a priority for our veterans. You expect bills that will make a difference in the lives of those who are in need. Bill 5 is not something that I heard, and Bill 5 doesn't address the housing crisis that we face, the level of homelessness, that historically we haven't seen in this province, that is seen in every single report that comes out. The housing affordability issues that we are experiencing, that are historically high, are not reflected in this bill.

And let's talk about, apart from the affordability, what are some of the other things that we need in this House to discuss, debate, deliberate, and come up with ways of addressing by using the opportunity that Albertans have given us and the instruments that we are given to make changes in the lives of those who we represent in the House, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Hoffman: Can I interject? Through you, Mr. Speaker, an interjection? Thank you very much.

Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. As we're here debating the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, I'm reflecting on the fact that in the maiden speech we definitely heard about some of the public-sector experience that the hon. member had, and I would say that the vast majority of people who work in the public service are not the types of folks who are going to be impacted by the big salary increases that are being proposed in this legislation. I wonder if the member can take an opportunity to reflect on some of the important work that he provided as a member of the public service to those vulnerable folks that he's talking about and others in the community who rely on essential services. If there was a bill that was related to public-sector employers or, rather, the public sector at large, what are some areas that the government could have taken this opportunity to address that would make a real, meaningful difference for the folks in Edmonton-Decore and throughout the province?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Haji: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Mr. Speaker, I have worked in the public sector for about seven years, in the non-unionized management cadre of the public sector, and I have also worked in the nonprofit sector, where it's a different area where you are able to serve on the front line and walk with those who are facing the challenges life poses. In my lived experience of both, I will say that our priorities should be those who are in need at this point in time.

3:30

Speaking to my experience of last Saturday, Mr. Speaker, when I was talking to a constituent who is a single mom and who pays half of her income on rent, it took me to talk to the housing delivery entity in Edmonton, and I asked: how many people are on the wait-list? We have about 4,000 in Edmonton alone who are waiting for social housing. We should be talking about that. We should be paying attention to such a population that are in need of a roof over their head, but Bill 5 doesn't, and the government's priorities, looking into the number of bills that have been presented to this House, do not demonstrate a priority for those Albertans who are in such need.

Go ahead.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Decore for recognizing my intervention. He's talked about the difficulty for his constituents in paying the rent in Edmonton-Decore, saying that half of their income has gone to rent. You know, I was looking through the current regulation as the

member was speaking, and I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Decore could comment on the difficulty that he thinks maybe the Alberta Securities Commission CEO and chair has in paying his or her rent when he earns \$499,920; or maybe the independent system operator CEO, who also earns \$499,920; or the Alberta Energy Regulator, who is a close personal friend of the members opposite, who earns \$396,720; or the CEO of Alberta Innovates, who earns \$396,720; or the CEO, the chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission, who earns \$396,720; or the president of the Workers' Compensation Board, who earns \$396,000. How difficult is it for those people to pay the rent? I'd like to hear the member's thoughts.

Mr. Haji: Well, thank you, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think I was closely paying attention to the other side of those and how much they are making. To be frank, I thank you for the information. I haven't looked into that, but the median income of men over the age of 15 in Edmonton-Decore is \$43,000, actually 10 per cent of some of the numbers that you just mentioned. For the women in Edmonton-Decore the median income is \$34,000, which is exactly the amount that I referenced for the constituents that I spoke with on Saturday. That shows it's exactly 10 per cent of the numbers that the member referenced when you look into the median income of the residents in Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Speaker, if somebody is making \$34,000 as an income a year, what will be their rent wage? That exactly means that, like, 90 hours of your pay go to your rent during the month, which means that more than two weeks' working hours income are geared towards your rent. The remaining is what you will be spending for the rest of your living expenses, which puts it into a situation where we have to see people who are needing housing, we have to see people in homeless conditions, and we have to see people who are in such a crisis, especially in a province like Alberta. That is the challenge that people face, and I spoke about that yesterday here.

In addition to that, with the increasing number of immigrants coming, which is something that we need in this province, the need for language training that they require, which we talked about yesterday – the wait-list, where they cannot access and they cannot economically participate. We talked about in this House the student loans that are on the wait-list, and I have earlier talked about the number of people that are on the wait-list for housing. I wonder why the bills that the government has tabled in this House don't see these populations that are in need. [interjection]

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, you know, to my friend the Member for Edmonton-Decore, when a government makes decisions that I do not understand, I ask myself: what is the problem this government is trying to solve? This Legislature has now been sitting for, I think, 10 days, and this UCP government has introduced eight bills that will change the laws of Alberta, and I'm having trouble figuring out how their top legislative priorities became these eight bills.

I don't even understand how most of the government's bills became their top priorities, and Bill 5 is, for sure, the most perplexing for me. It removes salary restraints for Alberta's various agencies, boards, and commissions, or ABCs as we call them. It gives all the power and discretion on compensation for people appointed to ABCs to cabinet and the Premier. The bill will repeal the legislative protections that were in place to prevent the excesses, largesse, the gifting, and the cronyism that was common under previous Conservative governments. What is the problem that this government is trying to solve with Bill 5? That is what I ask, and it's not difficult to be cynical when I arrive at the answer. This government will be unrestrained.

Mr. Haji: Thank you to the Member for Sherwood Park. In my view, it's a loss of priorities of what we have been elected for and the problems we have been elected to tackle in the House, Mr. Speaker. As I was talking about earlier, we're seeing inaccessibility to family physicians. We are seeing growing wait-lists for services that are so necessary. We are seeing increasing pressure on Albertans, but we are not seeing solutions to those pressure points that we see when we talk to constituents. We don't see solutions to those pressure points that we see when we pick up the calls from the constituents who are calling our constituency offices. These are some of the issues that Bill 5 doesn't address.

I've served in the public sector, Mr. Speaker. I have worked in agencies and commissions within the public sector. It is not an area where I've heard that the remuneration is the major problem that our services are facing, so I don't see the priorities in Bill 5 that the government sees.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 5? The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the honour and privilege of attending the University of Alberta. I graduated in the year 2012. I know that some of the members opposite might not be shocked that I have quite a youthful vitality to myself, because I do. I am quite young in this Legislature, and I am honoured to be here.

3:40

In that time, though, I was witness to and experienced the existence of the overpayment of the president at the time, Indira Samarasekera. At the time many students were struggling, similar to today. We are seeing these reverberations of decisions in this House affecting those very folks that are going to be training and leading our province in the future.

To say that we were shocked as students that the president was making this money, living lavishly, experiencing such wealth when many of us were barely making ends meet, I mean, I only have to tell you – and I'm sure members opposite knew exactly at the time – that even at that time we could barely even afford a jug of beer at the local campus pub.

Mr. Nally: You didn't have a carbon tax then, either.

Member Arcand-Paul: We didn't have a carbon tax, either, but you know what? We also had a Conservative government, and we've been living with Conservative government after Conservative government. And you know what? We struggled the entire time. So I'd like to remind that minister, who likes to make a comment, about how this affordability crisis that we're all living through is not being addressed by this government. We are living day . . .

Ms Hoffman: If I could.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yes, please.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to have an opportunity to engage in this important debate. I want to recognize that my friend and colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Henday actually grew up in the riding of Morinville-St. Albert for, I believe, at least a good chunk of his life. I'm hoping that maybe he can touch in this part of the debate today on some of the opportunities that he experienced and also on maybe some of the hardships that bills that are in this place that relate to the public sector might be able to address, that would address the real needs

of real families living in Edmonton-West Henday, living in Morinville-St. Albert, living anywhere in this province, again, the prioritization of making sure that those who are making high, six-figure salaries make even more under the current government, you know, a little bit more or maybe a lot more, going back to a situation where it would totally enable the experiences of a president at a university here making over a million dollars, if those reflect the priorities of his constituents.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for that really helpful intervention. So \$13,800: that's a lot of money. We would say that, right? What that number represents was when the then Premier, a Conservative Premier, might I add, Alison Redford, brought President Samarasekera to China on a trip: \$13,000. But back home in Morinville-St. Albert, in my First Nation of Alexander, which is now represented by the member opposite – beautiful land, beautiful territory – people are still struggling; \$13,000 is something that people don't have out there.

We live very difficult lives under Conservative governments because they choose to put profits over people every single day. We are struggling. We have folks living in Edmonton-West Henday that are in tents. We have seen an increase in folks experiencing houselessness or living rough on the streets. We drive in our communities and we see the amount of struggle happening with folks trying to just get by.

I heard of some of my constituents who struggled with only being able to eat rice for weeks on end because they could not afford to pay their insurance bills, that have skyrocketed under the UCP, let alone any Conservative government. They are struggling to make their rents because this government is not addressing affordable housing in a robust way. They're also struggling to put food on the table. They have to eat just rice.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, who, once again, grew up in the riding of Morinville-St. Albert, has many deep relations in that community, knows a lot of the struggles that a lot of folks in these communities are experiencing. I would hope that all members of this place would take the time to reflect on the wisdom that he's imparting on us. Certainly, there's an opportunity for members from both sides of this Chamber to engage in debate. I think that's been demonstrated today, Mr. Speaker. As we continue to engage in debate on Bill 5, I think that there's an opportunity for us to learn from one another, and I remind all members of this Chamber that we have an opportunity to demonstrate the kind of workplace we'd like to have for all of us.

Mr. Nally: What about the carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Through you, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Morinville-St. Albert is not showing the kind of respect that I would expect us to see in this riding. [interjection] The member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche is similarly not showing the same level of respect.

Sorry, *Hansard*. I'm sure you're having to deal with a lot of the crosstalk right now.

Again to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, please continue to tell us about the experiences of the folks you're representing.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you for that intervention.

I would like to turn this Chamber's minds to a quote that now Premier Danielle Smith made in 2014 about then Conservative Premier Alison Redford. "So she's breaking the rules, and then she's acting like a victim when she gets caught. I don't think

Albertans want to see her play the victim. They want to see her pay the money back.” That was a quote in relation to the Premier at the time, the Conservative Premier, might I add, who was living quite lavishly on public dollars.

Ms Hoffman: The sky palace.

Member Arcand-Paul: The sky palace. Again, a sky palace that has been restricted to – let’s leave it at that – the government of the day.

I would also like to mention that what they’re doing right now is changing the rules, so then that way they can allow what their predecessor couldn’t do. They’re in the place – I see another intervention from the Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you very much, from God’s country. When you were talking about the sky palace, it did make me think of the Netherlands, where the members of the Legislature there – you might be familiar with the Netherlands. They have a well-engineered system of dikes that keep the ocean at bay so they can farm. It is actually required that the members of their Legislature have to live in the lowlands. You have to live as your constituents do. You have to live with your constituents. I just think that Bill 5 is counter to that.

Yes, there need to be checks and balances. We don’t take the limits off. If we need to adjust for inflation, let’s adjust for inflation. But I think: let’s live as our constituents do, and let’s keep this Bill 5 out of the way or change it because it’s not helping us live as our constituents do.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you to my colleague the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for the intervention.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans and folks from Edmonton-West Henday or even folks from Morinville-St. Albert, which I still have a deep connection to today, are still having these conversations that they can’t make ends meet. We are still living with an affordability crisis that is not being dealt with other than the other side arguing about the carbon tax, and it’s not helpful. It is not assisting the actual needs of everyday Albertans.

We are talking with Albertans every single day, and we are hearing that they want real, concrete solutions to this crisis. Yet what they want to do is continue to give more money to folks that don’t need it, that are already getting a good salary, but through legislation that we had brought in 2016 to make these changes, these exorbitant pay and salaries and bonuses that these heads of public sector were getting – it is unfair, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans today are struggling to make their ends meet because of poor decisions like this.

Mr. Nally: It’s the carbon tax.

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah, I can hear the members opposite yelling every single day that it’s the carbon tax, it’s the carbon tax, but Albertans are talking about other things . . .

Ms Hoffman: Like their rent, groceries.

Member Arcand-Paul: . . . about their rent, about their groceries, about harm reduction strategies, about their family members that are dying because of the opioid drug poisoning epidemic. We are in so many different crises.

In my work back on my nation we saw this first-hand. We declared a housing crisis. We declared an opioid crisis. We declared crisis after crisis because no government has been dealing with this.

I agree that the Trudeau government has not solved our questions, but we need somber, solemn, and good leadership, and we’re not getting that from this government. We’re not getting that from this bill. This is an unfortunate situation in which we find ourselves, that people, everyday Albertans, are struggling.

3:50

We are sitting down with them at our town halls. We are choosing to meet with them in person, to actually have these conversations that this government refuses to do. I asked the ministers: who have they been consulting with on this piece of legislation? We know there’s not a whole heck of a lot because they don’t know how to consult. They don’t know what the obligations are on them, and they frequently have to be taught what the law is.

I am so disappointed, as many Albertans are, that we sit in this hon. Chamber, yet the back and forth that we have is all about the mistakes that other people are making and not the mistakes that they are making. We have an obligation as His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition to call them into question, yet they are not providing real responses; they are not providing real answers.

When it comes to Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, we are going back to much of the same thing that the Conservative governments of days gone by have put in place. Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan who was very proud to go to an institution like the University of Alberta, that received multiple cuts under the Conservative government and continues to get multiple cuts under the former UCP government – the students are going to be struggling. I didn’t see a future in Alberta when I graduated from the university because there were no job opportunities. Because of the Conservative government at the time there were exorbitant fees and bonuses and salaries that were going to the public sector under the universities.

Also, you know, I didn’t see myself reflected in the government of the day because – let’s face it – it was still a whole bunch of old White boys that were in this space. We also heard the president at the time trying to defend that. We see that still reflected. As an Indigenous person . . . [interjections] I can hear the members opposite screaming about this because they know I’m right. They know I’m right.

Where we’re at today is that in Alberta we can see ourselves in the Legislature. We can see more folks of colour that are reflected in this space, that, you know, have not been in these spaces where they are benefiting from these huge exorbitant salaries or this gravy train that the UCP is moving forward with.

So, yeah, there is a carbon tax, and there was a carbon tax when we were government. But you know what? People still got some money whenever their taxes came back. Right now we have a situation where the Conservative government of the day is trying to load up their buddies on these boards, on these public agencies, to get bonuses and salaries and to keep that gravy train flowing.

Mr. Speaker, I did move away from Alberta to go to law school. I did. And you know what? I came back because I saw the good work that Premier Notley was doing at the time and the work . . .

Mr. Jean: Objection.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Referring to Members by Name

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, you know, first of all, the member made an error. The NDP brought in the carbon tax. But that’s a point to debate.

More than that, he's used the name of our current Premier once and of the Leader of the Opposition once, and that's inappropriate. If he wants to talk about how the NDP brought in the carbon tax and when they brought it in and how much it's caused hardships and how they accelerated the shutdown of coal and how people open their electricity bills and see that it's huge bills, the biggest bills they've ever paid, and that's thanks to the NDP, if they want to talk about that and have that debate about how the NDP brought us to this mess and how we had 180,000 people flee the province to go to other provinces and now we've had 92,000 in the last six months of last year come in and we've had a record number of people, 200,000, in two years, if they want to talk about the 4.6 million record people that we have in Alberta because people see that Alberta is the place to be because we have a Conservative government, that's a debate, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to have that debate.

The Acting Speaker: The Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I find it quite interesting that one of the more seasoned members of the government would stand up and try to call a point of order without actually referencing any standing order within the orders, which already speaks to the fact that it's not a point of order.

On top of that, though, I also think it's quite rich for the member opposite to continuously stand up and try to debate issues that have been debated in this Chamber repeatedly already. I appreciate that the government is not happy that Albertans are not happy with this piece of legislation, that they know that it doesn't speak to the matters of the day, that it doesn't speak to the cost of living and to the concerns that many Albertans are facing in today's world. We continuously hear the members within the government side getting louder and louder and trying to disrupt debate as much as they possibly can.

But, again, at this point the hon. member has not referenced a section under the standing orders as a point of order, so I don't think it's a point of order because there is no reference to an actual standing order.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. I'm prepared to rule. I don't find a point of order for the very reasons that the Opposition Deputy House Leader has mentioned. What I will say is that the use of proper names of members within this Chamber is frowned upon and should not be used and should be stayed away from specifically for the reason of the disorder that it can create.

I will encourage the Member for Edmonton-West Henday to continue with his speech and recognize that the use of proper names is not in order.

Member Arcand-Paul: I know you did not ask for an apology, Mr. Speaker, but I will give you my apology for doing that as this is my first time rising in the House for debate on Bill 5.

Debate Continued

Member Arcand-Paul: I want to round out the time that I have remaining just talking about the lived realities of everyday folks. I don't come from money. My family is poor. We grew up on the rez. We experienced extreme poverty. So opportunities like this in the public sector did not ever exist for us. We did not have the opportunities to benefit from these gravy trains because we did not have the education. We did not have the experience.

I am very honoured that I have the education that I have, that my parents stressed the need for university education for me, and I'm

very honoured that I get to sit here today not very far from where my ancestor entered into treaty for us to all live here together.

But what we also agreed to do was to live equally and not above one another. Right now what this bill does is create a class division, a class warfare, from folks who are struggling to make ends meet to those that have prestigious positions and will get hundreds of thousands of dollars at the government's will to benefit their supporters, to benefit their friends, to benefit some of those MLAs that are no longer in this Chamber, that some on this side of the House have replaced.

We are in a position now where we have to have this conversation about where people are benefiting and where people are not. I heard the members opposite mention that they do like rice, and I'll relay that message back to my constituents who are only surviving on that right now because they are not able to make ends meet, just like every other Albertan in this province that is really struggling. I'm so looking forward to what their response is, and I will deliver it to the members opposite directly so then that way they know how hurtful those remarks can be to people who cannot afford everyday essentials on top of the bills that continue to rise in price and the CPP that they're planning to take away from them with this gamble of their everyday earned pension dollars.

I would now like to move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Bill 3

Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 8: Mr. Singh]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has two minutes left to speak if he wishes.

If not, we will ask for any others who wish to speak with regard to Bill 3. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. The opioid addiction crisis is an epidemic that nobody in Alberta is sheltered from. Whether you're in the province's largest cities or smallest towns, each is sadly seeing increased rates of those suffering from a deadly disease of addiction. We are all seeing the tent cities that are popping up, the discarded needles in the playgrounds, the open-air drug use that our children are exposed to, and the gun violence, crime, and gang activities that are generally following these illegal drug usage activities. The sheer amount of pain and suffering that families are experiencing during this addiction crisis breaks my heart.

Sadly, this is something that I'm very familiar with in my riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Regrettably, the crime rankings within my constituency reflect a concern and a real reality. All communities within my region are being affected – that's Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Elk Point, St. Paul – and have suddenly ranked within the top 30 for violent crime on a nation-wide crime severity index, significantly surpassing the national average. Cold Lake alone has seen an overwhelming 33 per cent increase in violent crime in 2022 alone. For nonviolent crime, through the CSI, Bonnyville ranks ninth in the whole of Canada, closely followed by St. Paul at 11th. Elk Point holds the 23rd position while Cold Lake secures the 31st spot. In terms of overall crime both Bonnyville and St. Paul rank 13th and 14th respectively in the entire country. Elk Point and Cold Lake also feature prominently within the top 25 communities for overall crime in Canada. This marks an unprecedented and unreasonable rise in crime in communities

where residents used to be able to leave their homes and cars unlocked.

It's very easy to argue that there are particular manufacturers, distributors, consultants that have contributed disproportionately to this epidemic, arguably the worst of which can be traced back to Purdue Pharma. This began in the late 1990s with an overprescribing of opioid medications for acute and chronic pain, using extreme misinterpretations and misrepresentations. This includes matters related to the harmful effects and the addictive nature of medicines and medications that patients were not warned about properly, particularly over the long term. Thousands of lives have been lost to this epidemic, and the toll that this has placed on the health care system and our society as a whole is almost impossible to fully quantify.

Though we recognize that a nation-wide settlement has been reached with Purdue to ensure that they are held accountable for their actions and help clean up the mess that we are in now, there are many others that still have not been brought to justice, including more than 40 other manufacturers and distributors. Consultants like McKinsey and Canada Company are also being pursued to ensure that they are held accountable for the role that they have played in this crisis.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. Bill 3, if passed by this House, would seek to strengthen Alberta's case against the responsible companies. Alberta has joined both British Columbia and Saskatchewan, which have already amended their legislations in advance of the upcoming certification hearings in a B.C. class-action lawsuit.

You can't put a value on the life of a loved one for their family and friends, but you can quantify the cost to our health care system, the economy which an otherwise happy and healthy person came out of, which this crisis has done far too many times in damages. If this Chamber votes to pass Bill 3, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government will seek not only to recover these costs but to reinvest them into our mental health and addiction system to allow us to continue to expand the programs and services that we currently offer.

The UCP government is investing significantly to fight this epidemic, which includes 10,000 new beds, publicly funded addiction treatment spaces, since 2019; being the first province to eliminate the \$40-a-day user fees on them, that many patients could not afford; and construction of 11 recovery communities, with the first two opening this year in Red Deer and Lethbridge, and four others to be built in direct partnership with First Nations communities that include the Blood Tribe, Siksika, Tsuut'ina, and Enoch Cree nations. The Alberta government has also invested in the virtual opioid dependency program, which allows for same-day access to much-needed – much-needed – treatment. These treatment-oriented services save lives, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, it is the only alternative option for those suffering from addictions; other than that being death.

Mr. Speaker, there is no such thing as a safe supply of fentanyl and heroin. These highly addictive narcotics are very potent, with even great pharmaceutical companies' so-called clean supplies of these drugs still very, very deadly. This government is leading North America in offering recovery options for those who need it, and I know we will continue to work in the years to come. Albertans depend on us.

I am optimistic, Mr. Speaker, that if we look at the precedent set by the House's unanimous support of the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act in 2019, which Bill 3 makes important revisions to, we can show those responsible for beginning

and worsening this opioid epidemic that we are all on a united front and working together to bring Albertans out of this crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to Bill 3?

If not, I am prepared to call the question.

The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, the opportunity to close debate.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all the members for their speeches and contributions to second reading of Bill 3. It's an opportunity for us as a Legislature and Chamber to debate the scope and intent of the legislation, as we all know. Happily, in spite of differences we saw across the aisle, I think there's unanimity that we ought to be moving forward with this bill, with its scope, its purpose, and intent. As far as I'm concerned, that intent is very clear. We need to make sure that we exact to the full extent of the law punitive damages when we see individuals, organizations continuing to purvey harm to our communities any way we can. There is no safe supply, as we heard the previous speaker say. The truth is that an increase in supply of dangerous pharmaceutical-grade opioids will lead to an increase in addiction. It's a correlation that is undeniable. The evidence bears that out. Sadly, we may see that again in the future.

For our part, in Alberta we will do what we can to make sure it's clear that that kind of action is not welcome here in our jurisdiction, which is why we must move forward with Bill 3. I encourage everyone to vote for it, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

4:10

Bill 7
Engineering and Geoscience Professions
Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mrs. Sawhney]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 7 provides an exemption to the use of the, quote, unquote, software engineer title from protected status. Bill 7 will create an exemption in the province's Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act allowing individuals in some software development roles to use the title of software engineer. Job titles including, quote, unquote, engineer and the profession in general have been independently regulated by APEGA, but the new legislation will make an exemption for software engineers and similar tech industry titles as determined by the minister. There are valid concerns that the bill in its current form removes the ability of APEGA to investigate improper use of the title.

On this side of the House we are committed to diversifying our economy. We are committed to growing the tech industry in this province. We believe and understand the need for flexibility and mobility to compete with other jurisdictions in the world when it comes to attracting talent to this province. Software engineering is a nationally and internationally recognized discipline, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize and acknowledge that, and we understand that the global transformation of the industry is something that we need to keep in mind as we are a competitive player when it comes to talent attraction, retention, and flexibility.

There are at least 14 accredited software engineering programs at all the postsecondary institutions in the country, and the number of tech

companies in Alberta has tripled to 3,000 from just over a thousand since 2019. Edmonton hosts more than 52,000 technology workers, and Calgary hosts 31,000 technology workers. So we understand the need for creating an opportunity and retaining those who are in the province when it comes to the industry of tech and innovation.

The tech sector also, Mr. Speaker, represents an estimated \$5 billion annual contribution to the province's GDP, and 20,000 new hires is what is projected by 2030. However, addressing the issue of the use of "software engineer" is necessary to support the growth of tech in Alberta and the jobs that it will bring, including the subsector of software engineering. We recognize that Bill 7 addresses some level of the issue facing the tech industry around the use of the term "software engineer." However, the bill has now created a possibility that the scope – while we understand the purpose, the bill will create, in this current status, that the scope of the exemption could go beyond its purpose and intent.

Two key factors to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the scope are the public interest and public safety, very important pieces, especially when we are seeing the evolution and evolving growth of technology. Another factor to keep in mind is that as a province we are the first to undertake such a change, which means that we also have to keep in mind in terms of what will be the implications of the public trust and public safety. We need to keep in mind that we have the highest professional standards in engineering as a province, and Bill 7, if it passes, has the potential to compromise some of these standards that we have been known for by providing this exemption without measures to address the ramifications that the exemptions could bring.

Potential ways of addressing this include, Mr. Speaker, more consultation and study, particularly on the impacts given that this will kind of set a precedent across the country. All other provinces in Canada are unified in taking the opposite direction of Bill 7, which means keeping the current protection of title. I want us to keep in mind that the integrity of professional designations such as the title "engineer" is crucial for maintaining public trust. Regulatory bodies like APEGA's role in setting and enforcing standards is so important, and Bill 7's exemption may undermine the quality control necessary to ensuring the public safety and maintaining the public trust.

We should support initiatives that will attract talent, retain talent, enhance the skills, qualification of professions. The serious question that we have is the impact that the bill will have on the current level of trust, the impact the bill will have on public safety and the public's trust in the institutions and the regulations and laws that we have in place. We look forward, Mr. Speaker, to working with the minister to minimize these risks while still providing tech companies the clarity needed, while providing the tech companies the environment that will attract them, while ensuring the tech companies the mobility that is needed. We are ready and prepared to work with the minister in ensuring that the existing regulations and standards that we have in place are maintained and not compromised as well.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are ready to move forward with the bill and make sure that we strengthen the bill as we feel that it's not strong enough to address issues that could arise when it comes to public trust and public safety.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers for Bill 7?

There's an opportunity to close debate. You can waive to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Horner]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any wishing to speak to Bill 2? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act. You know, this bill and the proposed changes to the Alberta pension have been a pretty hot topic not only in my constituency but across the province. It's something that we've debated repeatedly in question period every day, really a lot. So I think what's great about this bill is that it gives us an opportunity to share some perspectives away from that heated discussion in question period and to really get into what some of the issues might be with this particular bill.

I've kind of broken my thoughts down into a few categories here. The first thing I wanted to talk about is just really retirement security. The Banff-Kananaskis riding is full of people who work very hard to make a living on a landscape that is sometimes difficult. You know, whether we're talking about cattle ranchers or farmers to small businesses or medium-sized businesses, my riding is filled with people who work really hard in markets that are sometimes not predictable. We just heard last week the Minister of Tourism and Sport saying how the Alberta economy and the tourism sector have recovered since the pandemic. That might be true in a lot of parts of the province, but it isn't true for Banff-Kananaskis, Mr. Speaker. The tourism sector is still recovering, with a lack of international travel.

I'm sharing this because retirement security therefore becomes critical for people in Banff-Kananaskis and in Alberta to feel that their hard work will pay off, that all of their years of working hard in unpredictable markets and in challenging situations and in challenging weather will pay off with retirement security. That retirement security is provided by the Canada pension plan and has been provided by the Canada pension plan for a long time, and it is that sentiment that causes people in my riding to literally stop me in the street and say: please don't let the government take away our Canada pension. There is a genuine fear and concern amongst people in my riding that creating an Alberta pension plan will affect their retirement security and change their ability to live comfortably in retirement. That's hard because we all work very hard. We're all working hard right now here in this House, and I would like to know that when it comes time for me to retire, the Canada pension plan will be there to support my retirement.

Constituents in my riding are concerned about that. They have a lot of questions about how this change would affect them, how it would be applied, how long it will take, and how much it will cost. But the primary question that I get asked by my constituents is: why? Why are we doing this? Why are we exploring this ridiculous idea of taking something that's working and creating something that we don't know if it will work? If we have the certainty of a Canada pension plan, why do we want to fix something that's not broken? I'm only saying this because I'm conveying to you and to all members of this House, through you, Mr. Speaker, what I am hearing from my constituents. This is what people are telling me when I'm walking down the street.

This bill, Bill 2, proposes that there be a referendum for changes to the pension, but it doesn't guarantee a referendum, and it doesn't protect our pensions over the long term. It's actually a little redundant with Bill 1 from this session already because it talks about referendums, but it still doesn't guarantee the transparency of how the question will be developed, if it will be debated in the

House, and who will be developing the question. And that's important because as we saw with the last referendum around daylight savings, how a question is phrased or framed becomes very important in how people choose to answer it.

Something as important and critical as our pensions should not be something that we take lightly, and it should be something that all members in this House have an opportunity to discuss. But it should also be something that all Albertans have an opportunity to engage in and participate in.

With that, I just want to take a little moment to talk about public consultation versus public engagement. People in this House won't know this about me . . . [interjection] Hi. I defer to my colleague for the intervention.

The Acting Speaker: I hate to interject, but this is the first speech after the motion.

Ms Hoffman: My bad. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: So no interventions at this time.

Dr. Elmeligi: No? Okay. Fine. I won't, then.

Mr. Williams: We didn't know this about you.

Dr. Elmeligi: You didn't know? Thank you very much.

I have experience in my life prior to being an MLA in conducting public engagement and consultation with multiple stakeholders. It's part of why I chose to run for the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis. I know how complicated and complex a proper consultation process is, but I also have seen how valuable that can be in truly effectively engaging communities in conversation.

There's a difference between engagement and consultation. Engagement is a process whereby you gather people and you tell them your fabulous idea. You may or may not ask them questions about what they think about it, and you may or may not take their input to influence the content of your idea. Consultation, on the other hand, is an opportunity for you to suggest that you may have an idea to people and to gather input and perspective which then influences the content of that idea.

What we are seeing the government do right now around pensions is not consultation. It is barely engagement. Something this important requires meaningful and effective dialogue with Albertans in a way that they feel consulted, not engaged. Albertans should feel that their input informs the decision, not that they are being talked to but that they are participating in the conversation and in the decision-making. This government sometimes has a pattern of taking an attitude of, "Don't worry about it; we got it," and this whole pension conversation reminds me of that. Phone-in town halls, no meetings in person giving Albertans an opportunity to look MLAs and ministers in the eye and voice their concerns. That is required when we're talking about something like pensions. So the fact that this bill doesn't actually provide any opportunity for the referendum question to be discussed in this House through a motion is a significant gap. It doesn't give an opportunity for Albertans to be effectively consulted on what they will be asked.

4:30

The other important difference between engagement and consultation is the education and the knowledge provided to people to help them make the decision that best works for them. Consultation is usually a back-and-forth conversation, and in that conversation thorough background information is provided. In regard to pensions that background information needs to be nonpartisan, nonbiased, and it needs to be . . .

Ms Sweet: Factual.

Dr. Elmeligi: There you go. I was going to say accurate, but factual also works.

It shouldn't be something that we end up debating in question period around what the number is or how much money will be transferred because we should be able to have confidence in those numbers from the get-go. The reality is that we don't, so it turns into a big discussion about who said what and who said this.

At the end of the day, what we're talking about is people's retirement security. My mom is a retired Albertan, and she has worked in this province her whole, entire life. I as her daughter am concerned if her retirement security is at risk, mostly because that probably means she'll be living in my basement for once instead of the other way around, not that that's too bad. I mean, I would love to have my mom in my basement. She's pretty great. But we need to be able to ensure that Albertans have that security and that their parents have that security because this is what's important here.

This is another example of the provincial government trying to push a decision on Albertans that they're not ready for and that they don't want. Earlier today in question period I asked a question about a housing development in the town of Canmore. In question period you can't really get into the details, but the fact of the matter is that the Three Sisters Mountain development stands to double the population of the community of Canmore. This comes with a range of impacts that the local community is very concerned about, and that is why the town council rejected the ASP from the Three Sisters development. But when the town council rejected that ASP, a provincial body stepped in and said: no, you must accept this. And that was the thing that the town of Canmore appealed and lost.

The point of the matter is that this is another example of the province stepping in and telling Albertans what it needs, but Albertans are telling you loud and clear that what they need is a Canada pension plan, and that's what we have. We're not listening. We're not listening to the needs of Albertans when it comes to this massive development in Canmore, and we're not listening to the needs of Albertans when it comes to a Canada pension plan either. That is what we are here to do. We are elected by Albertans to stand in this room and represent the needs of our constituents. Sometimes we get a little lost in the fray, I think, of the heated discussion and the moment of time, but we need to remember that we are representing. I represent the 44,000-plus people that live in the Banff-Kananaskis riding. That is always my number one priority. When I have older people – I don't want to call them elderly but just older than me, let's say – stopping me in the street . . .

Ms Hoffman: Young people.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. Young people who are retired.

. . . with literal fear in their eyes, I am concerned.

There are many questions I also have about how this bill would be applied and its timing. What happens when people move provinces, Mr. Speaker, which they do all the time? I myself have lived in British Columbia for a while, but I came back to Alberta because this is my place. What would happen if I left Alberta in the twilight years of my career, maybe in the last five years? Now I'd be making a Canada pension again. Would I get an Alberta pension? Would I be starting a new pension? What happens if it's the other way around and I live in Canada and I move to Alberta for a few years and back? When I do finally retire, do I end up with two pensions?

It's confusing. If I'm confused, you better believe that Albertans are confused, which takes us back to the difference between engagement and consultation. Consultation involves the provision

of background information so that people can make their own choices. If Albertans felt like they had sufficient information, they wouldn't be stopping me in the street with fear in their eyes asking me to stop this conversion from a Canada pension to an Alberta pension because they would know already what decision they wanted to make.

But the reality is that they don't because the information provision has been bad. Rather than having adequate background information for Albertans to be able to make their own decisions, this government has chosen to spend \$7.5 million on convincing Albertans that this is the right thing to do. Rather than having adequate public consultation, this government has chosen to have an online survey that doesn't even ask people if they want to leave the pension. Rather than having adequate consultation, this government has chosen to do a series of telephone town halls where people don't even have the opportunity to look an MLA in the eye and share their concerns. I can tell you that when I'm stopped in the street by my constituents who voice concern about this, it's looking in their eyes that has convinced me that they don't want this change.

We expect legislators to be forward thinking. We expect legislators to have a vision of what they're aiming for. This bill does not do that. This bill says that contribution rates cannot be higher than they are right now. Does that mean that if a pensioner right now makes \$1,300 a month, a pensioner in 2075 will also get \$1,300 a month? How will inflation affect that? That answer is not in this bill either. What about people who move provinces? What about families and children? What about grandparents who are raising their grandkids? None of the answers are contained in this bill.

I come from a riding where tourism is a cornerstone of our economy. Tourism as an industry is very forward thinking. It's all about creating a vision and creating what you want your community to be and then creating the services and the products that make it that. I come from a constituency full of people who are forward thinking. This bill does not represent their ability and their potential to look ahead to the future.

In so doing, I also have questions about the timing of this bill. It's very interesting to me that we are debating and talking about an Alberta Pension Protection Act when we haven't even completed the consultation – “consultation” in air quotes – around the pension. We're kind of putting the cart before the horse here. We're asking Albertans: what do you think about an Alberta pension plan? They're very clearly saying that they hate the idea. But aside from that, we're now also debating a bill about how to create an Alberta pension plan. We haven't even finished the conversation with Albertans about whether or not they want to do this.

It really raises concerns for me as: what are we doing here? Like, we are wasting taxpayer dollars. We are wasting taxpayer time every moment that we talk about a bill where the public consultation isn't even completed. I'm standing here literally wasting time talking about a bill that could be moot if Albertans decide that they don't want this. Oh, wait, quick fact check: Albertans don't want this. They have said that time and time again, and they keep saying it every time we have a town hall, every time people stop me in the street. They don't want this. I really don't know why we're here talking about it. I'd way rather be talking about things that are important to my riding, like housing or housing. Did I mention housing?

4:40

Part 2 of this bill creates parameters of what an Alberta pension plan needs to have and rules on initial transfer of funds in establishment of the APP, but we haven't even decided that we're going to have an APP. So the fact that we're putting a bill on the

floor open for debate really suggests to Albertans that the result of this consultation – this consultation – doesn't matter because we're already putting in the legal framework to make it so, and that means that this is another example of why Albertans cannot trust the UCP.

Ms Sweet: It's going to cost more, too.

Dr. Elmeligi: It's going to cost more money, it's going to take more time, and we don't even want it.

Over time there have been multiple examples of things that have happened that have demonstrated that we can't trust this government to honour the priorities of Albertans. We've talked a lot today about gravy trains – choo-choo – and all kinds of things that really suggest that this government wants to prioritize their friends and donors and connections above the needs of Albertans. The fact that we are debating a bill prior to public consultation being completed is another example of this government choosing to prioritize its own needs over the needs and wants of Albertans.

Should this bill move further through this process? There are some required amendments that we will most clearly discuss at that time, but we definitely need to see a clarification in when referendums will be held. We need to require that a draft Alberta pension plan will be shared prior to a referendum so that Albertans know what the referendum question is and they know what they are choosing.

We need to make sure that education is provided to Albertans that is nonpartisan, that when it is provided it is thorough and whole and scientifically based, and we need to make sure that Albertans understand that information so that they are prepared to make the decision that best serves them.

We need to make sure that the referendum question is brought to the House as a motion. It needs to be discussed in here. Developing a referendum question is difficult. The words matter. How people interpret it matters. All of that will change how they vote. If we don't have the opportunity to discuss it here in this House, we are missing an opportunity to make sure that the question is clear and asks what we want it to ask and will be interpreted by Albertans accordingly.

In closing, I find this bill disappointing. I think it's really disappointing to have a conversation before public consultation is completed, especially on a topic that Albertans have been very clear on not wanting.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and add my voice against the Alberta Pension Protection Act. We've heard repeatedly that this bill is just part of a conversation that the government wants to have, that the government is just asking questions to the people of Alberta about whether or not creating their own pension plan is a good idea. These are the kind of questions that are being asked that remind me of an old episode of *Parks and Recreation* where Leslie Knope, the main character in the show, was trying to secure funding for a park, but it ended up putting a local animal shelter out of business. Her political opponent was on a talk show on the show saying: “I'm not saying that Leslie Knope is a dog murderer per se. I'm just asking questions like: is Leslie Knope a dog murderer?” These are the kind of bad-faith questions that are driving this bill. The government isn't sincere when it asks the question: is an Alberta pension plan a good idea?

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, on Standing Order 23(i), imputing false motives. The government is sincere, for sure. These are our motives, and in this House we expect to be respected for our motives as we respect the opposition.

The Acting Speaker: The Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure exactly what statement the hon. Deputy Government House Leader was trying to reference in regard to what the member actually said. I didn't hear a reference in that sense, but what I will speak to is the fact that it has been very clear and Albertans have been very clear that they do not want to leave the CPP. Because of that and the fact that this government continues to keep pushing the agenda of leaving the CPP, the hon. member is just highlighting the fact that that's what Albertans believe. It's not to indicate any type of direction in regard to what the Government House Leader might think, but what I can say is that Albertans have been very clear; they don't believe they should be leaving the CPP.

It's just a matter of debate whether the government will acknowledge what Albertans have been telling them, but clearly the opposition has been doing town halls across the province in person and not on the phone. That's all the hon. member was trying to highlight.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I will rule on this. I don't believe this is a point of order. It is a matter of debate. What I will say is that in this House we have the opportunity to debate, and our words need to be chosen carefully to ensure that we are not in a position of using abusive or insulting language to any other member or imputing false motives. I will just put that out there as a word of caution. As we move forward, in order to be able to have constructive debate, we need to honour each other in this House.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that ruling. I hope that all members would agree that I always choose my words very carefully and would never dare to speak ill of another member or try to ruin decorum here in this House.

The point that I was making was that the government is not sincere in its stated excuse of bringing this bill forward, that they just want to have a conversation. As my friend from Edmonton-Manning pointed out in arguing this point of order, members of the party opposite have been trying to have this conversation for over 20 years. In 2001 a number of the members of the so-called Calgary school of political science department at the University of Calgary signed the firewall letter that was addressed to Ralph Klein, that said: oh, it would be a really good idea to have an Alberta pension plan. Ralph Klein at that time said no. One of the signatories to the letter, one Prime Minister Stephen Harper, when Prime Minister of Canada and actually in the position of allowing Alberta to set up an Alberta pension plan, didn't want to have the conversation anymore.

The government's own Fair Deal Panel went and toured around the province. I suspect that the intent of that was just to give Drew Barnes something to do to keep him out of the hair of the Premier at the time. But during the Fair Deal Panel the people that attended those hearings said that they didn't want to have an Alberta pension

plan. The vast majority of people who showed up to the Fair Deal Panel said that an Alberta pension plan was a bad idea. Now that the minister has started advertising an Alberta pension plan, the people of Alberta have continued to say: we do not want to have this conversation.

It seems the only time that this government is content to let the issue rest is during an election campaign, Mr. Speaker, because when asked if an Alberta pension plan was in the cards, the Premier said no; that was the furthest thing from her mind. The now minister of agriculture was at a candidates forum and asked directly if he was going to create an Alberta pension plan. He said no, that that discussion was off the table. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod was also asked at an all-candidates forum about whether or not she would support an Alberta pension plan. She told those people no. As soon as the votes were counted, this government went right back to work having the conversation about an Alberta pension plan that Albertans have repeatedly said for over 20 years that they do not want to have.

I'm beginning to wonder, Mr. Speaker, when the government of Alberta will start listening to Albertans. They're certainly not doing it through the town halls. They're not attended or overseen by any member of the government. The Minister of Finance was asked today whether or not he would attend a town hall. He politely declined. Instead, they've brought Jim Dinning back from the political crypt to yell at people over the telephone who dare to express the opinion that they do not want to see an Alberta pension plan introduced.

Oh, I see my friend from Edmonton-Manning has an intervention.

4:50

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member. I just have a couple of thoughts. I always appreciate when we're able to go down history lane around decisions that have been made historically through the political landscape of Alberta. I appreciate you talking about the firewall papers and some of those comments in regard to that part of the history.

Do you also remember, hon. member, in about 2012-2013, I think it was, when Redford decided to also go after and create Bill 9 and Bill 10 around the public pension plan and getting rid of diversifications but also going after private pension plans and the outcry from many people across Alberta in regard to staying away from not only the public pension plans and how they were set up but also the private pension plans and how those were set up? What had to happen? There had to be rallies, there had to be consultations at committees, yet we haven't seen any of that from this government. Just wondering if you have any thoughts or want to go down memory lane with me a bit on that.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Manning for reminding us of the Alison Redford government's attempt to meddle with the local authorities pension plan and the public service pension plan. I am a member of the public service pension plan, and I was deeply concerned when Alison Redford and her then minister, I believe it was Doug Horner – yeah. I don't know what it is with people named Horner and their dedication to meddling with the Alberta pensions, but it seems to be a family trait, Mr. Speaker, shall we say.

But the people of Alberta who enrolled in the plan pushed back against the government's attempt to meddle with their pensions successfully, Mr. Speaker, and I have every confidence that the people of Alberta will stand up and successfully defend their Canada pension plan as well.

I want to get back to this issue of not listening to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, because my inbox has been flooded with e-mails from the

citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar who do not want the government to touch the Canada pension plan. Since the government won't listen to Albertans face to face in town halls or in any other kind of public forum, I'm left to share their thoughts here as their representative in the Legislature. I have a number of e-mails that I'd like to share with the members just so that they know that I'm representing them in their views on this matter. Karen writes, and she says:

[Hello],

I encourage you to argue strenuously against the UCP's plan to remove [Alberta] from the Canada Pension Plan and start [an] Alberta Pension Plan.

One doesn't need to be a certified economist to know that it is financially irresponsible to do this. Alberta would end up with a smaller pool of invested money than . . . we would be in if we stay as part of the CPP and . . . it simply cannot make more money than the CPP for me or any other Albertan even if the return on the investment is ever so slightly higher. It is basic math and basic investment principles.

Also, the UCP claim of how much money Alberta is entitled to 'take' from the CPP are undoubtedly flawed and inflated and are therefore misleading in terms of a starting point. The UCP are politicizing a basic retirement plan and that is simply wrong – not surprising, but wrong. They are messing with my investments and my financial situation. It is not appropriate and no one has asked them to do this.

Of course, I know that you already know all of this but I wanted to officially add my voice to the list of those who are annoyed by this newest fantasy of the UCP. Carry on with your good work.

I appreciate Karen's compliments, Mr. Speaker. Not something that I get a lot of around here.

I got a letter from Christine, who wrote:

I am writing to ask for your support in registering and conveying my objection to the creation of an Alberta Pension Plan.

The Canada Pension Plan is the retirement plan that I paid into during the course of my employment and through which I expect to receive the benefits to which I am entitled. To date, every step of the way has gone smoothly – paying premiums when I was employed, applying for CPP and OAS as I approached retirement and, commencing in November, 2017, receiving the monthly payments of my CPP and OAS benefits.

I also was responsible for payroll in a number of my positions and encountered no difficulties in the administrative process.

CPP is a reliable and stable programme. Therefore, I can see no reason to abandon CPP for an untested and unsubstantiated Alberta Pension Plan.

Furthermore, I am strongly opposed to even the slightest possibility of causing inconvenience or harm to any of my fellow Canadian citizens.

Thank you for your consideration.

Oh, I see my friend from Edmonton-Glenora would like to add her thoughts.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Through you, Mr. Speaker, let me put on the record my appreciation for the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the work that he does and the thought that he brings to his engagement and debate, participation in the daily Routine, and his service to the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar. There is no more appropriate way to recognize his awesomeness than to do it through a neutral third party such as yourself, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to say that officially.

I really appreciate highlighting some of these voices because the number one thing I hear in my community when I'm walking down the street, when I'm engaging with folks officially at my office or otherwise is how frustrated they are that they don't have a chance

to just say no to the current survey that's being asked. It really feels like it's performative, like: do you want us to take your pension this way or this other way?

Definitely, I'd say that folks are frustrated, so I appreciate that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is highlighting those voices from his constituency.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Glenora for her thoughts. I know that she is also hearing a lot of complaints about the government's refusal to take no for an answer on the issue of an Alberta pension plan, as have a number of my constituents.

In fact, Jenna wrote to me as well as the Premier, and she said:

I've read the ridiculous report you linked [to] in the reply.

The plan is based on several foolish ideas.

- Alberta is a "young province" if you ignore the fact that we are all born and grow old at relatively the same rate across Canada. Your report ignorantly forgets that people grow up, go to school, and work elsewhere in Canada before moving to Alberta for a high paying job at the end of their career. Many working Albertans retire outside of Alberta. Your report's logic is flawed and the math is flawed.
- Call me when you've managed to actually figure out how to grow the Heritage Fund and then we can talk about changes to [the] CPP.

Perhaps a little bit of advice that the Minister of Finance might be willing to take.

- Call me when you've recovered the massive losses to teacher's pensions through UCP bungling.

That's something that I've heard a lot of, Mr. Speaker, that this move towards an Alberta pension plan scares a lot of people given what the government has done to teachers' pensions over the past few years.

I'm a new parent. If you try to touch the CPP, you'll have Alberta locked into a costly legal battle. Many young people will leave the province for more stable situations and better futures for their families. Your "young province" will disappear. You know it's already been happening for a few years now.

Cheers.

That was from Jenna.

Inez and Leif wrote to me and said:

I am not in favour of the money grab of my pension for the UCP coffers! The survey requesting my input does not allow for input of any kind except agreeing with their biased survey! As my families' representative in the [Legislature], please make my views known to the UCP since there does not seem to be any other way to tell them that I, nor any one person in my circle is remotely interested in the UCP grabbing our pension money from the CPP. Not now, not ever! Thank you.

That was from Inez and Lief.

This one was an anonymous e-mail.

Good afternoon,

I just completed the survey, and I'm both unsurprised and disgusted to find that nowhere in that survey was I even asked if I want to switch to [Alberta pension plan].

I don't. CPP is fine and we all know [the Premier] is just pulling this [stuff] . . .

I'm editing there.

. . . to appease the rural right-wing vote. Please bring this up the next time you meet with the Legion of Doom.

Their words, not mine, Mr. Speaker. I would never use that kind of inflammatory language in the House, as you well know.

5:00

Finally, another anonymous letter addressed:

Please add my voice against a provincial pension plan.

The basis on which it is proposed uses completely unrealistic figures and assumptions. I resent my tax dollars being wasted on studies, surveys and advertising for this proposal.

The survey on the proposed APP the UCP government has put forth is extremely misleading – it says it will give Albertans a choice; this survey offers no choice at all on the basic premise.

The voices in favor (UCP) seem to have no common sense/understanding [about] how/what Albertans pay for CPP. All Canadians pay the same rate. The fact that at the moment we may have a younger work force with better pay has nothing to do with fairness. As in Quebec and their pension plan, that may change over time. Quebec workers are currently paying a higher contribution rate.

I would caution that if the UCP rams this through, they will quickly try and take over the fund under AIMCO. We've had experience of this with ATRF. Fortunately, ATRF was able to maintain ultimate control in investments. AIMCO, in my opinion, is not overly well-managed. This is highlighted in the [return on investment] for 2022, a difficult year to be sure. AIMCO had a ROI of -3.4% while ATRF had a ROI of -1.8%.

This government is again demonstrating a very political, short-sighted policy.

Please ask the UCP to stop wasting my taxpayer money on pursuing the idea of an Alberta Pension Plan or, at the very least, hold a referendum now with a clear question - 'Do you want the UCP government to pursue an independent APP?' Yes or no.

That's just a small selection of – oh, I see my friend from Sherwood Park would like to add to the debate.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Those letters have reminded me of the employers in the Alberta Industrial Heartland. You know, for me, at its heart this bill is not about getting more for Albertans or righting some historic wrong. It's about undermining Albertans' sense of their connection to our country of Canada.

I look to these employers in the Alberta Industrial Heartland who have also sent me letters much like you've received. These amazing businesses in the constituency of Sherwood Park have not requested an Alberta pension plan. It will make recruitment to their businesses more challenging, businesses like Imperial, Suncor, Pembina, AltaSteel, Shell, Air Products, Dow, Nutrium, Keyera.

None of these Alberta companies have shown any interest in an independent Alberta pension plan, not in their role as important job creators nor in their role as public companies that are trying to attract investment from large funds, so I'm glad you brought those letters up. They reminded me of some other constituents that we have to look to.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I thank the Member for Sherwood Park for his thoughtful intervention. I think it just goes to show, Mr. Speaker, that neither current recipients of the CPP nor people who are paying into it either as employees or employers are interested in having this conversation.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage any Albertan who is concerned about a government that refuses to listen to their voices, that continues to force an Alberta pension plan onto people who do not want it, to attend our town halls. We are holding a number of in-person – shock: in-person – town halls where actual members of the Legislature will be present to hear concerns from the public about the government's plan to withdraw from the Canada pension plan. I know that we have town halls planned for St. Albert and Ardrossan, and we've got town halls planned for Calgary and other points around Alberta.

I encourage Albertans who are concerned about this government's plan to take us out of the Canada pension plan to come to our town halls because we are listening, Mr. Speaker, and

we are fighting for Albertans' retirement security, and they know that we are on the same side when it comes to defending Albertans' pensions and their retirement security.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers for the bill? The Member for Calgary-Currie has risen.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, we're back from constituency week, where we all returned to our wonderful corners of this province to engage with our constituents and catch up a little bit on what we've missed and catch them up on where we spent the last two weeks and what we've been talking about. I did what I think probably many members here did. We had organized a bit of a meet and greet, a meet-your-MLA to bring them up to speed on what I've been doing for the last six months and, in particular, some of the legislation that was brought forward in the last two weeks.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Without a doubt, we made sure that we were informing people about some of the government bills and the private members' bills that had been introduced, including Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act. As objectively as I could, I tried to describe the content, the salient points of this bill, largely around the fact that it was meant to assure Albertans that should there be an Alberta pension plan, there would be contributions not greater than the CPP's as of the effective date, nor would the benefits be any lower.

Mr. Speaker, the collective guffaw from the room was a significant indication of just how poorly this bill misses the mark when it comes to the actual conversation that Albertans are looking to have. Those are twofold. One, how on earth could this government make that kind of a promise? And, two, what about the most fundamental question, which is: before we start to presuppose how an Alberta pension plan is actually going to be managed, why isn't the government asking me whether I want it in the first place?

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I had no answer, nor do I think this government has an answer, either. Even the head of their engagement panel, Jim "I Have No Complaints about CPP" Dinning, would say the same thing. The claim for why we are embarking on an incredibly costly, distracting, resource-intensive bill and exercise, even the individual who's at the helm of that consultation – I use that term loosely. Even the person at the helm of some of those consultation conversations is dubious about why, in fact, we're doing it if he himself has no particular complaints.

Bill 2 and, in turn, this entire conversation about an Alberta pension plan is a gimmick. It is a distraction. So you can imagine that it was really disappointing and frustrating to have to stand in front of a room with 60 constituents, in the riding of Calgary-Currie, of all political stripes, I will add, of all demographics, of all income backgrounds, and simply have no answer to their question. I couldn't even point them in a direction where they could find answers to those questions because this government has not been forthcoming with some of those responses.

Some of the questions that I heard at our event last week, in addition to a lot of the e-mail correspondence that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar similarly referred to. One, who's asking for this? Who is asking for an Alberta pension plan? I had no idea. I have no idea. This has been a pet project for two decades that I think have already been alluded to. I don't need to unpack the history of this endeavour once again, but it certainly... [interjection] Yes.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Similar to what you have heard through your constituency engagement, whether it is in person or on the phone, I have had similar experiences over the last number of weeks. Basically, in addition to the e-mails, I was hearing constituents expressing their concerns, particularly those who are over the age of 55. As they get closer to their retirement plans, questions have been around: why anxiety at this point in time in my life? Why do I have to deal with this uncertainty at this point in time? I wonder if you have had similar experiences on that.

5:10

Member Eremenko: Indeed. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his comments. Indeed, on top of everything else, when we consider the kinds of anxieties about simply putting food on the table, making ends meet, trying to do a little something special for the upcoming holiday season, and rather than focusing on some of those pieces – our family, spending time together with our loved ones – we have to embark on presupposed and predetermined surveys where I really am dubious about the consideration for the actual response. Absolutely. Who's asking for this? I have to say that I don't know. Anybody outside of this caucus? I'm really unsure.

Another question that I get a lot is: how can I trust the numbers? We've all seen the report from LifeWorks. We all know those really quite outlandish figures that have been put forward and have heard quite unanimously from numerous other sources that these numbers are completely inflated. We know, of course, that if other provinces used the same calculation to claim their own entitlement, we would be using several times the value of the Canada pension plan in its entirety. So one really does have to wonder about how accurate those calculations, in fact, are. How can I trust the numbers? I say that you can't. They're not objective, Mr. Speaker.

How on earth can Albertans be expected to go and participate in a referendum, participate in a process that is about democracy when they don't have some of the fundamental information that they need to make a smart and informed decision? I think it does beg the question about the level of trust that Albertans have in this government altogether when the numbers that they are choosing to vouch for have been so terribly criticized and scrutinized and determined that they are, in fact, likely not correct at all.

The other question, too, is: why now? That alludes to my colleague's questions about: of all the other things that Albertans have to be thinking about right now, of all the other very big tasks and the job before each and every one of us in this Chamber, why now? We have some very big challenges before us, and I think we are all here; we were all elected by the constituents of our areas to come into this Chamber every day and to make the hard decisions.

Is that an intervention across the aisle?

Mr. McDougall: Oh, sorry.

Member Eremenko: No? Okay.

Why now? Again, I don't know why now, either. It does raise some very big questions about why this is in fact moving forward when Albertans have made very, very clear that this is not something that they are interested in. I am listening to my constituents. People on this side of the Chamber are listening, loud and clear, that this is not something that Albertans are looking for. They are looking for housing. They are looking for supports to address skyrocketing electricity bills. They are looking for responses that will help them keep in their homes despite absolutely phenomenal increases to rent and utilities and insurance prices.

Now, this does lead to a big question about the effectiveness of the referendum process and what I would suggest are some pretty

significant gaps in what has been put forward if we were to go down that route though Bill 2 does not in fact legislate that as a requirement. One is the objectivity of the information with which people are going to be making this decision. Now, I want to allude to a specific piece here. In other jurisdictions outside of Alberta – Alberta is the only province where this is not required. In other jurisdictions referendums require nonpartisan educational information be provided on an issue itself by arm's-length organizations like Elections Alberta. I mean, they would be very likely the agency that would deliver and provide that information in a truly objective, third-party, trustworthy way. How can Albertans trust that the information that they are being provided is in fact true, is in fact objective, and does not have concerns around political interference or a presupposed outcome of the referendum?

Similarly, around the question of the referendum, how again can we trust that it is in fact being asked in good faith without presupposing an outcome? Is the referendum binding? That is an important question. Really, the Premier herself has talked about how this is, in fact, a two-part question: do you want an Alberta pension plan, and what would the actual makeup of that pension plan be? We're not asking the first question in a way that actually informs us as members in this Chamber whether or not we have the green light to proceed.

The last question that I have, that I think a lot of Albertans are asking about, is: where was this during the campaign? Where was it during the campaign? We stood on the doorsteps, as I know everybody in this room, as I hope everyone did in this room multiple times, and had questions about the issues that mattered to Albertans, those kitchen-table concerns of our . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: I was just hoping, Janet – I'm sorry. Member for Calgary-Currie. I am so sorry, Mr. Speaker, for being so rude by using the first name in the House, but this is the first time I rise to give an intervention. I'm learning the ropes.

The Speaker: Something I would never do.

Ms Hayter: I apologize.

To the Member for Calgary-Currie: I'm hoping that you could elaborate more about what you did hear on the doorsteps while you were out, you know, April, May, and the two years prior, possibly, as to what your constituents were talking about with the Canada pension plan.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much. Very happy to. Absolutely. We door-knocked, gosh, and we canvassed Calgary-Currie about three times over, Mr. Speaker, so there were many very good and challenging conversations about the issues that were before us. It will come as no surprise that a lot of the issues that we heard about on the doors concerned health care, concerned affordability, concerned good education in classrooms that were adequately staffed to respond to class complexity and to the needs of individual kids, right? I have two kids of my own, and I know many people in this Chamber are parents themselves, and we simply want what's best for our kids. These were the kinds of bread-and-butter issues that I know all members in this Chamber heard about.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, there were no conversations on the door that said: "You know what? That CPP is really providing me too much retirement security. I'd really like to explore how the government can pull out of the CPP. Gosh, I am just dreading the fact that the CPP is one of the most well-respected, effective, well-run retirement pension/savings plans in the world. We should really

look at fixing that.” That is not a conversation that I had with anyone in Calgary-Currie.

What I heard was that people are looking for a government that they can trust. They are looking for accountability. They are looking for conversations of substance. They are looking for evidence-based decision-making on issues that matter to themselves, to their families, and to their communities. Pulling out of the Canada pension plan was not one of those issues.

Perhaps other people in the House heard the Premier doing a radio interview last week. I’ll prepare. Now, I know this was on CBC.

An Hon. Member: No. Oh, no.

5:20

Member Eremenko: I know.

I know that the Premier would perhaps prefer to talk to Tucker Carlson rather than our public broadcaster. There was a lot to unpack in that conversation, but one of them, that I think actually gets to the heart of the matter, is that the Premier – now, I’m quoting her directly – referred to this conversation about pulling out of the CPP and forming an Alberta pension plan as a communication tool. It’s a communication tool to let the rest of the country know what the province deserves. It’s not because it’s actually better for Albertans. It’s not because it’s what Albertans are actually asking for. It’s a 7 and a half million dollar communication tool to let Ottawa know what they already know.

There’s nothing new to unpack here, Mr. Speaker. This is an incredibly expensive communication tool that is not actually going to address the issues that Albertans need to have addressed today: issues around access to a family doctor, issues around adequately staffed emergency rooms and emergency departments in cities and small communities so that they actually keep their doors open on the weekends. They’re talking about education. They’re talking about housing affordability and affordable housing. This is not it. It is simply a terribly expensive mismanagement of taxpayers’ dollars when we have other things, more important things, to be talking about.

It’s a multimillion-dollar communication exercise to establish what the rest of the country already knows. It destabilizes our economy and the confidence that people have in the conversations that take place in this Chamber and on the other side as government and how we all behave as members out in the community and out in our constituency. It gambles with financial security at a time when people have nothing left to gamble with, and that feels terribly unfair for the constituents of this good province. It creates a level of stress and anxiety that people don’t need more of. We all know the incredible strain that families have been put through for the last three years, particularly folks who are a little bit older, who are approaching retirement or who are just coming into retirement, where they’re not sure about how to support their families, where they’re not sure about how they’re going to keep their homes, how they’re going to afford skyrocketing prescription bills and housing costs. And now we add to the pile-on of the stress and the anxiety.

In closing, I just want to reference a couple of constituents that I’ve heard of in particular who have expressed tremendous concern about the formation of an Alberta pension plan and how it undermines the retirement security that they so desperately need to count on. Sheila is a lovely constituent in our riding. She is looking at a 40 per cent increase to her rental property, and she’s needing to find a new place to live. Sheila is in her early 70s, and the Canada pension plan is all that she’s got. This is all that she has to count on. I want you to think about Sheila when we’re talking about Bill 2, when you’re completing these surveys.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, at its heart Bill 2 is not about getting more for Albertans. It’s not about righting some historic wrong. It’s about undermining an Albertan sense of connection with and to our country, Canada.

What would withdrawing from the Alberta pension plan mean to Albertans? The United Conservative Party government, shortly after taking office in 2019, created a panel to consider whether Albertans are getting a fair deal as part of Canada. One of its assignments was whether Alberta should withdraw from the Canada pension plan and create its own pension plan, taking our portion of assets and liabilities from the Canada pension plan and running a pension plan for Alberta workers. The panel recommended that the government develop a comprehensive plan to create an Alberta pension plan and withdraw from the Canada pension plan and, subsequently, provide Albertans the opportunity via a referendum to vote for or against withdrawing from the Canada pension plan and creating the Alberta pension plan.

Unsurprisingly, given that it was one of the panel’s assigned tasks, the government accepted the recommendation with support for further analysis by the appropriate ministries. The UCP’s apparent determination to carry on down this road makes it vital for Albertans to consider: what would we gain, what would we lose, and what are the risks?

The CPP is governed jointly by federal and provincial governments. Changes must be approved by two-thirds of the provinces, representing two-thirds of the population. Quebec has had its own Quebec pension plan from the start. In 1997 the governments, including Alberta, agreed on a package of amendments to the CPP legislation that put the plan on a path to long-term stability and sustainability.

Among the chief features, contribution rates rose gradually to 9.9 per cent of eligible salaries – that’s 9.9 per cent – up to a maximum of \$61,600. Contributions in excess of that amount required to pay pensions were put in an investment fund. The main purpose was to stabilize contribution rates when the baby boom cohort began retiring to keep them steady thereafter.

To manage the fund, the independent CPP Investment Board, with a mandate to invest solely in the interest of planned beneficiaries, was established. The board members are selected by a committee composed of nominees from the federal and provincial governments. This appointment method and a number of other safeguards ensure that the CPP Investment Board can invest strictly in accordance with its mandate and without political interference.

Actuarial valuations of the plan are performed every three years by the Chief Actuary of Canada. The funding objective is to keep contribution rates steady over the long term. Projections testing stability are made over as many as 75 years into the future. To ensure high professional standards, the actuarial report is reviewed by an independent panel of actuaries appointed by the Chief Actuary of Great Britain.

As a fail safe the legislation requires that if contributions become inadequate and the federal and provincial governments fail to agree on rate increases, rates will increase automatically, and inflation adjustments will be suspended until long-term funding stability is restored.

The reforms of the CPP have worked as the government intended. A large fund has been built up, contributions still slightly exceed annual benefits, and the current rates could be adequate for 75 years. The CPP’s last actuarial report, as of December 31, 2018, estimates that current contribution rates can remain stable for at least 40 years.

Meanwhile the CPP Investment Board has built up a fund of over half a trillion dollars investing in a widely diversified portfolio of Canadian and international investments. Its average rate of return has been over 10 per cent a year. In 2016 governments agreed to increase the percentage of preretirement earnings the CPP would replace over time to 33 per cent from 25 per cent and increase the earnings level eligible for pension coverage.

The pension enhancements will be fully funded; that is, the contribution made by workers and their employers plus investment earnings. They will fund their own enhancements. A portion of the pension, the base benefit, that is calculated according to the original formula, will continue to be funded as per the 1997 reforms.

The remainder of my statement will concentrate on the base benefit as it will continue to provide most of the pension. Canadians who move within the country can rely on the CPP as a secure source of retirement income. It is universal, stable, portable, well managed, has inflation-protected benefits, and is well regarded internationally. Why would Albertans pull out now?

Let's look at the arguments. Is it unfair?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. Kasawski: I was waiting for that.

The alleged unfairness about Albertans contributing disproportionately is argued based on the balance derived by deducting aggregate annual benefits from annual contributions. The calculation ignores several aspects of the CPP. All Canadians and their employers make contributions and receive pensions at the same rate. CPP is not a regional or individual income redistribution scheme. Higher total contributions come from Alberta relative to its share of the total population because Alberta has a higher percentage of working-age population with a higher participation rate who make higher wages than the Canadian average. Even in 2019, after our recent downturn but before the pandemic, average employment income in Canada was \$47,300, and in Alberta it was \$55,300.

5:30

Mr. Nally: You're welcome.

Mr. Kasawski: If you didn't hear, that was before you got elected.

The labour force participation rate in Canada as of May 2021 was 65.3 per cent, and in Alberta it was 69.5 per cent in the labour force. As a result, a larger percentage of Albertans are earning and building higher CPP pensions than residents of other provinces.

As for the lower aggregate pension payments sometimes a handful of opposing factors can lead to a nonintuitive net result. As Albertans have a long history of higher average wages, individual average pensions would tend to be higher, but for now this factor is off-set by the smaller proportion of the population that is on pension. We can account for that by worker mobility as well as retiree mobility. Many of Alberta's workers come for a few years to work and then leave. Many, even lifelong Albertans, retire elsewhere; thus, the CPP pensions are attributed to other jurisdictions in the balance calculation. Most importantly, however, this simple balance calculation is contrary to what the CPP legislation says about how the assets and liabilities would be calculated and transferred to any province that withdraws and sets up its own plan.

Oh, Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you have an intervention.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, through you, Mr. Speaker. I can't help but reflect on some of the people I've met over the last year, and many of them I met through the campaign experience, and I spent a good amount of time with my friend the MLA for

Sherwood Park during that experience. I would say that probably a significant number of the volunteers were of retirement age and, because they had the ability to have some financial security, were able to find ways to volunteer their skills and service to other members of their community. I even recall one of them having moved to Sherwood Park after retiring because they wanted to be closer to their grandchildren. I like that we live in a country where we have those opportunities to be aligned with the folks we love geographically as well as through our volunteer activities.

I was wondering if maybe the Member for Sherwood Park, if time permits, might want to incorporate some of those stories of the volunteers on his campaign.

Thank you.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I'll ponder that.

The prospect of lower contribution rates. That simple calculation, however, has led some people to claim that Albertans could have an equivalent pension plan for lower contribution rates. The Fraser Institute suggested that it could be as low as 5.85 per cent compared with the current 9.9 per cent of that \$61,300. A small reduction might be possible in the short term, but that would likely leave future Albertans, our children, facing higher unfunded liabilities.

First, it's important to recognize that the current contributions to CPP are significantly higher than would be necessary to pay for newly earned benefits because they are deliberately set to whittle down the unfunded liability so that contributions can remain stable. This is called the steady state rate. Even the baby boom generation, as they move into retirement – the oldest baby boomers turned 75 in 2021, but those born in the peak birth rate years are now just reaching retirement. In fact, they are higher than the 2018 actual report found would be necessary to maintain steady contributions. The rates for the base plan are currently 9.9 per cent of salary – half by employers, half by employees – whereas the minimum steady state rate would be 9.75 per cent. The Canadian pension plan collects a little bit extra and puts it into a supplement fund.

The long-term stability of CPP's contribution rates for the base benefit depend on steadily growing employment earnings base. This is particularly relevant for Albertans given our heavy dependence on volatile commodity prices. Two realities of setting a low contribution rate in the largely pay-as-you-go financing method would combine to produce negative shocks during a prolonged downturn. The first is that lower contribution rates automatically result in less of a contribution toward the unfunded liability. Like any debt for repayment, which – repayments do not entirely cover the accumulating interest. It grows even faster due to its compounding. Second is that if those contribution rates became unsustainable, they might have to increase by a large percentage given that the unfunded liability would be supported by a flat or even declining earnings base. If the required rates were deemed unfeasible, benefits would have to be cut.

We are better protected as part of a larger, diversified whole. Currently the total Canadian labour force is estimated by Statistics Canada to be 20.4 million. Subtracting Quebec's labour force of about 4.5 million, the labour force to which CPP applies is a total of almost 16 million. Of those, about 2.5 million are Albertans, or about 16 per cent. The stresses of the Quebec pension plan are illustrative. Quebec, with a labour force less than a quarter of the size of Canada as a whole, has been under some strain in offering the same benefits for the same contribution rates as the rest of Canada.

Thanks to a birth rate that dropped precipitously just after their plan was launched and an economy weakened by its constant ambition for sovereignty, Quebec's contribution rates for the base

plan, which is essentially identical to the CPP's, are nearly a whole percentage point higher, almost 11 per cent of that 61,300.

Ms Pancholi: Will the member give way?

Thank you very much to the Member for Sherwood Park. I think he's voicing a lot of the concerns and providing the factual information that Albertans deserve to know when it comes to the pension.

I know the member was just talking about, you know, we all know Alberta is a relatively young province. It has been for some time in the sense that we have a younger population that, of course, certainly contributes to CPP just like every other Canadian and receives the same benefits at the same rate as any other Canadian. But what we know is that, really, Albertans tend to be comprised of a lot of people who move into Alberta from other provinces, and many Albertans move out and retire in other provinces. The portability of the CPP is one of its greatest strengths, particularly for a province like Alberta, where we see a lot of that intermigration between provinces.

I know the member was just speaking a little bit about, you know, what happens in Quebec, where they've gone their own way, and what lessons can be learned for Alberta in terms of actually seeing lower contributions and greater benefits, which is, of course, what this government is promising. I wonder if you could speak to that.

Mr. Kasawski: Sure. Thank you. That leads to my next point about assets and liabilities upon withdrawal. No province has attempted to withdraw from CPP. Quebec set up its own plan day one. How withdrawal requests would be treated by the federal and other provincial governments is hard to know. Although CPP has over \$500 billion in assets, its liabilities are much higher because the base plan is not designed to be a fully funded plan.

The Chief Actuary in the 2018 actuarial valuation report estimated CPP's liability if no further contributions or benefit credits were made, known as the closed group estimate – this would likely be how Alberta's share of the liabilities would be calculated. The total at the time was \$1.2 trillion. Net assets at the time were \$370 billion for an unfunded liability of about almost \$900 billion, a funded ratio of about 30 per cent.

The Canada pension plan legislation permits a province to withdraw from the plan if it sets up an equivalent plan. Under the CPP legislation an Alberta plan would inherit liabilities for all the benefits workers earned while working in Alberta since 1966. Because so many Canadians have moved into and out of Alberta since then, determining Alberta's liability would be not easy, maybe even messy. There is no detailed formula in the CPP legislation for determining Alberta's share of the total liability. A likely way of determining it would be to use the same proportion of the portion of total contributions and related pension credits attributed to Alberta workers over the years. The total contributions are in respect of all those who have CPP credits for any period worked in Alberta, not just those currently working in Alberta.

5:40

We have no way of knowing what the proportion would be. As an example, 16 per cent is roughly the proportion of Canadians, excluding the Quebec labour force, living in Alberta now. On that basis, the liability assumed would be more than \$200 billion based on the 2018 figures.

Alberta would also get a share of assets of the CPP fund pro rata based on all contributions made by workers and their employers while working in Alberta. The net investment income of those assets would also be shifted to the Alberta plan. Some have

suggested that it could be about \$40 billion through that number though it is not verifiable.

In summary, liabilities and the unfunded liabilities assumed by APP would be considerably larger than proponents of an APP seem to have contemplated. Proponents of Alberta's withdrawal from CPP have suggested that Alberta could persuade the federal and other provincial governments to strike a better deal than what would result from a legal requirement outlined above in transferring assets and liabilities. This would require an amendment of the CPP legislation that would require agreement of two-thirds of the provinces, representing two-thirds of the population, and the federal government. It is unlikely the provinces or the federal government would agree to make a better deal for the province leaving the CPP.

In conclusion, there are many other concerns and potential disadvantages. A duplicate bureaucracy would have to be set up to replace the one currently in place in the government of Canada to administer the contributions. The Fraser Institute claims that the CPP has higher administrative costs than comparable pension plans and the APP might have lower administrative costs; its studies are not persuasive.

The federal government has 59 reciprocal social security agreements with other countries so that Canadians working abroad or foreign workers working in Canada do not have to suffer from other double coverage and taxation or lack of coverage. All of these agreements would have to be renegotiated to avoid hurting Alberta's mobile workforce.

There are many unknowns to such monumental change. Once done, it cannot be undone. The potential disadvantage and risk to Albertans of establishing the Alberta pension plan are significant while the case for the move seems to hinge mainly on capturing a short-term advantage and possibly using investments for riskier assets in the service of province building.

Albertans could lose a lot; it's not clear what they would gain. Over the years CPP has been reformed, strengthened, and expanded. By all accounts it is working well. Why would we walk away from that? Why would we leave the national plan?

The Speaker: That concludes the time allotted for those particular remarks.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It must be quite hard to remember all of the new people's constituencies, and I appreciate ...

Mr. Schmidt: They haven't changed in the last 10 years.

Ms Hayter: Well, I appreciate that he used my constituency name and not my first name. And thank you to the Member for Sherwood Park for such an educational summary there of, you know, the risks of leaving the Canadian pension plan and how it's going to impact all Albertans. I appreciate that, to you.

I wanted to share a letter from one of my constituents, named Dean, from Dalhousie, that he'd sent to the Premier on November 10 and that he'd shared with me. I'd actually planned to table it tomorrow, so this is a great, opportune moment to share it. It says:

Dear Ms. Smith.

Dear Premier. Once again I apologize to the House. I will reflect heavily on the use of first names in here. But I'm quoting. I am quoting what the constituent wrote. Oh, my gosh, he's going to kick me out. Anyways,

I am writing to express my opposition to the idea of an Alberta Pension Plan, separate from the Canada Pension Plan. In the interest of brevity, I [am writing] in point form.

Oh, I wish he'd written in longer form. Anyways,

- The lifeworks study was based on a flawed, invented formula which resulted in an erroneous conclusion that Alberta and Ontario alone are entitled to more than the total current value of the fund.
- I have zero confidence in the Alberta government's ability to manage an independent fund without political interference and mismanagement. One need only look to the Heritage trust fund and AIMco as examples of failures in this regard.
- I am offended at the \$7 million expense of tax dollars to advertise and sell this idea to Albertans. The consultations and promotions are clearly an advertising campaign.
- I am a Canadian first and Albertan Second. I don't mind if, for the short term, it may appear that Albertans are younger and therefore paying more into the plan. Someday [though] this may well change and our population will age. We are part of the bigger fund in order to hedge our bets. I have no desire to take [our] Pension funds and risk sharing away from my fellow Canadians.

Sincerely, Dean,
who lives in Dalhousie.

You know, when I got this letter, I had time to as well think about my own experiences over the last four years door-knocking in my home riding of Calgary-Edgemont and just what constituents were saying to me on the doors. And like my fellow colleague the MLA for Calgary-Currie . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont has the call. Please proceed.

Ms Hayter: Thank you. You know, I never heard once on the doorsteps: I'd like to leave the Canadian pension plan. I never once heard that. What I did hear was: I need to elect you to make sure that they keep their hands off my pension. Albertans in Calgary-Edgemont were not expecting to have their pension gambled away by the UCP.

I still remember knocking on a door and it was a woman who was about my age, and she shared a house with a mother who is the same age as my own mother, and they said to me: they're not going to touch our CPP; you're lying to us. And I was quite upset because I was looking at this older lady, and I was afraid for her. I was looking at her security, her financial security, and I was looking at this woman my age who was taking care of her elderly mother and wondering: how are they going to afford to live in Alberta if they lose their CPP? What are they going to depend on to help, you know, feed them, clothe them, and house them? It was a tearful conversation because I had said to them: I'm afraid that if you vote this way, you are going to lose your CPP . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. To the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud: I would love to.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you to the Member for Calgary-Edgemont. Actually, I wanted to pick up on something. You were telling actually just a very authentic story that I know I've heard as well. That question of during the election – and I know that you spent actually four years door-knocking in your constituency, but leading up to the election, you know, that fear that the UCP was going to somehow try to pull Alberta out of the Canada pension plan was very real and palpable, and I certainly heard it as well.

You know, I wonder if you heard, as I did, the members from across the way who denied outwardly during the campaign that they

would be at all talking about pulling out of the Canada pension plan. Perhaps the member's constituents had heard comments from the Premier, who said quite clearly that the Alberta pension plan and pulling out of CPP was not on her agenda, was not her government's priority, and, now that we know that was clearly always part of the plan, how your constituents feel.

Ms Hayter: Thank you for that reflection, to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Yes. Actually, they would say, "This isn't going to happen; they're not going to pull us out of the CPP" and since then have said, "Oh, look, we should have done that." While door-knocking on the doorsteps, the constituents of Calgary-Edgemont would say to me: but we're hearing that we're not, that they're not going to do that.

You know, they were out campaigning. They were assuring that they were not going to take us out of the CPP. They were telling their constituents: that's not going to happen. And here we are talking about it, and it's happening. So it's a bit of, I think, a blind-side, because I think that if you were planning on actually following through and if you were wanting to truly believe that this was a great idea for Albertans, you would be very up front and say: hey, as soon as we get in, we're going to claw back your CPP and gamble with your money.

5:50

I'm quite excited that in January, near the end, the Member for Calgary-Foothills and myself will be hosting a town hall and inviting all of the constituents of, you know, the Calgary northwest area, so not only the Calgary-Edgemont and Calgary-Foothills ridings, but we're going to be reaching out to Calgary-Varsity and to Calgary-Bow and Calgary-Klein and all the areas that are in northwest and asking them to come and talk to us. We want to hear from residents of the northwest quadrant and anybody else in Calgary that would like to come and chat with us and hear. We want to hear from you. Actually, if any of you would like to join us, you know, we can always invite you to come and also hear from the people. [interjection] Yes.

Mr. Stephan: Invite me to come to Red Deer. I'll come now.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you. My colleague from Calgary-Edgemont has some really great points this evening, and I really want to explore a little bit more this idea of trust and how trust is earned through communication with our constituents. Of everybody on this side of the House – I don't know about the other side of the House; I'm sure you all door-knocked a lot – I will just say that my colleague from Calgary-Edgemont, I think, has knocked on more doors than any of us. She literally was door-knocking the day after the election, so she was door-knocking for four years. If anybody knows the importance of that one-to-one connection with constituents, I believe that it is my colleague from Calgary-Edgemont. I just wondered if you could share with us the importance of connection and building trust, because ultimately this issue comes down to trust in government as well. [interjections]

The Speaker: Just prior to the . . . [interjection] Order. Order. Order. If members would like to have private conversations, they're welcome to do so in either of the lounges. There's the peace lounge behind me. I encourage you to take those conversations there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Sorry. I'm just reflecting on the fact that the back area is actually called the peace lounge. That was the first time I've heard that, so thank you for sharing that with me.

I think, as well, that goes into the reflection from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis around trust. I think it's when you talk to people, when you have honest conversations, and you're forthcoming with your values and your beliefs and you're forthcoming with your plans on what you want to do for Alberta and your . . .

Mr. Nally: You mean like farm and safety legislation?

Ms Hayter: You know, I heard earlier one of you actually take up the invite to come and join us, and I really do . . . [interjection] Oh. Yes, to the member.

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just ask the Member for Calgary-Edgemont. As someone who grew up with a single mother, I know how difficult it is to make ends meet. When we're talking about the pension and seniors that might be single, on their own, have you heard from some of your constituents, or any other Albertan that is living on their own, that does not have the support? What kind of evidence-based understanding would you have, knowing that you're raising children, and if you have dependants as a senior that only has CPP to rely on, what kind of benefit would be being taken away should they not have the CPP and the APP, whatever the plan is for, if that's going to affect them, if you think that that's something that you're hearing on the doors?

Ms Hayter: Wow. You guys are giving me lots of thoughts. Still answering everybody's questions.

I just want to, as I was going to say before the intervention, strongly encourage all sides to come and join us at our town halls and hear what constituents are saying. I think that would go into what Banff-Kananaskis' MLA was saying about, you know, building those relationships, because I think that when we actually have those conversations with people and are face to face, it gives them that opportunity to trust and know that we are listening and hearing them.

To your point I would say that door-knocking, yes, there were many women or elderly that were living on their own that were saying to me: I'm already having to choose between paying for my bills or feeding myself. Nobody should have to live like that in Alberta or anywhere in the world, where they have to make those choices. We're gambling; I think it's a gamble to pull out of the Canadian pension plan and have that uncertainty when people budget based on their Canadian pension plan. They look at: this is what I'm getting; this is how I'm going to eat; this is how I'm going to do it. But with our affordability crisis it's going to be very dangerous for our seniors.

So I'm very concerned about everybody and not just the people in Calgary-Edgemont. That was probably the biggest thing that came up on the doors, the Canadian pension plan, whether it was during the election, whether it was prior to the election. Calgary-Edgemont, I can say, you know, the constituents that I talked to do not want to leave the Canadian pension plan. I have yet to have anybody e-mail me to my Assembly e-mail or even on the doors to say to me: hey, this is a great idea; I'd like to do this.

I'd heard from another constituent, Bob, up in the community of Edgemont, and – oh, my goodness; my computer is not working. He, as well, is saying: I don't want to leave the Canadian pension plan for an Alberta pension plan. You know, he said to the UCP: you promised not to touch our CPP; you promised to do that. Sorry. I'm having troubles with my thing here. I'm just having issues with my laptop and trying to touchscreen it. I'm very sorry.

You Promised Not [to] Touch Our . . . Pensions

During the election you said, "Look, no one is touching anybody's pension. Pensions belong to pensioners. It belongs to Albertans and no one is going to be touching their pension. That's another example of . . . disinformation that the NDP keeps running because . . .

Oh, hang on.

And then 4 months later, [a report was released] (more on that later) proposing to withdraw from the CPP. There is no way to sugar coat this. You lied to Albertans. Had you campaigned on leaving the CPP for an APP, most pundits agree that Albertans would not have elected the UCP.

The majority of Albertans want to remain in the CPP. [A] . . . poll surveyed 1,985 Canadians, including 500 Albertans, from September 28 to October 5 of this year, and found that [50]% of Albertans felt leaving the CPP was a bad or very bad idea. Only 19% of Albertans felt it was a good or very good idea.

It is my CPP. Not yours, not Alberta's, not the Federal Government's, Mine. I paid into it . . . [It doesn't mean that] because Albertans have told you [that you are their choice to be government means that they want to leave the CPP] and you still persist [on] pursuing an APP. It makes one wonder what your true motivation [is for doing this] . . .

Like many Albertans, I am concerned that under an APP the UCP would squander the funds intended to pay our retirement pensions by using those funds to further [their] own economic agenda and investing in pet projects.

That was another e-mail. It's not one of the form e-mails. The two e-mails . . .

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	253
In Memoriam	
Mr. J.A. Denis Herard, March 28, 1944, to September 6, 2023.....	253
Introduction of Visitors	253
Introduction of Guests	253
Members' Statements	
Hospital Construction.....	254
Holodomor Memorial Day	254
Sherwood Park Constituency.....	254
Real Estate Industry.....	254
Family Violence Prevention Month.....	255
National Addictions Awareness Week	255
Oral Question Period	
Government Contracts.....	255, 256
Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments	256
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	257
Bill 201	257
MacEwan University School of Business.....	258
Food Safety in Daycares.....	258
Alberta Energy Regulator Review	259
Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta.....	259
Affordable Housing in Canmore	260
Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry.....	260
Health System Reform.....	261
Government Policies and Cost of Living.....	261
AUC Electricity Generation Inquiry.....	262
Continuing Care System.....	263
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	263
Notices of Motions	263
Tabling Returns and Reports	263
Orders of the Day	264
Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech	264
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 5 Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023	265
Bill 3 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023	272
Bill 7 Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023	273
Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act	274

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

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca