



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 22, 2023

Day 11

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

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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)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
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(UC)
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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)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 22, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two visitors visiting us today, and I have asked my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to introduce one of them. I will introduce the second. Typically speaking, visitors are introduced by the Speaker, but the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a close working relationship with this very special guest, so I thought I would allow her to do that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour to rise and introduce Joan Emard-Wanner and Speaker Robert “Bob” Wanner. As many of you know, I served in the Speaker’s office with Speaker Bob from 2015 to 2019, and without his friendship and his encouragement over the years, outside of the House and inside the House, I don’t think I’d be standing here today. So thank you both, to Joan for supporting us through the work that we did but also to Speaker Bob for being here today. I ask you to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Also joining us today is a familiar face here and around the Legislature, the former member for Strathmore-Brooks Mr. Derek Fildebrandt.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has an introduction.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you some very special guests visiting us today, some members from the Stollery children’s hospital, who many of us had the chance to meet earlier today in their Stollery day at the Legislature. It’s one of my favourite events of the year, and I relish the opportunity to introduce them today. Please stand as I call your names. We have Cecily, Candice, baby Lena Kalyn, Brant; Daxton, Aryn, Brad, Amelia, Naomi, and Claire Abercrombie; Aubrey and Kirstie Schatz; Ben and Jake, Erica, Cory, Maya, and Arianna Thomas; and Okimasis and Sakawiskwew Cardinal. I’d ask you to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from the Chiropractic Association of Alberta and the College of Chiropractors of Alberta. I want to thank each of you for joining us today and for your continuous dedicated

support to chiropractors in the province. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader. Does the Government House Leader have an introduction?

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly a visitor sitting in the members’ gallery, Kyle Kent. Kyle is the nephew of one of my staffers and a student at Grant MacEwan working towards a double major: English and political science. Kyle, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m proud and honoured to introduce 13 of Alberta’s finest student leaders and representatives from the Alberta Students Executive Council. I would like to ask them all to rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you the mayor of Drayton Valley, Nancy Dodds. We are truly fortunate to have such a dedicated, passionate leader in our riding. Please rise to receive a warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to introduce to you and through you some real-life superheroes: the Thomas family – Cory, Erica, Maya, Ben, Jake, and Arianna – and the Abercrombie family and Daxton. Ben has been an oncology patient through 2019, Jake has and will continue to have multiple surgeries because he was basically born without a right ear, and Dax is a dialysis patient. Please rise and receive the hero’s welcome you all deserve.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly I have the honour to introduce representatives from St. Joseph’s College today. In the gallery are Dr. Shawn Flynn, president of St. Joseph’s College at the University of Alberta; Dr. Matthew Kostecky, vice-president academic and dean at St. Joseph’s College; and also Kaitlin Flynn. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly my guests Hali Kaur, Mae Malone, Benita Pedersen, Prithvi Kahlon, and Kai Malbeuf who are joining us from the young conservatives of Alberta. I’d like them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia. Calgary-Acadia, you have an introduction?

Ms Pitt: Airdrie-East does.

The Speaker: Yeah. We’ll get to you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Gurjit Singh Sidhu, chairman of the Dashmesh Culture Centre; and Baljinder S. Gill, president of the Dashmesh Culture Centre. Dashmesh Culture Centre is one of the largest Sikh gurdwaras in North America. I ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you Karl Pinno. Karl Pinno is an economist, a professor at the University of Calgary and UBC, ex-economist with the CERI organization on energy, an adviser to me on economics and energy issues. Can you please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House?

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you and to all members of this Assembly a great constituent for the riding of Airdrie-East and a good friend of mine and a chiropractor, Dr. Jacqueline Boyd, and her husband, who couldn't be here today, Dr. Paul Bajor. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Justin Bumstead. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The chief government whip.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and the rest of the Assembly Mr. Radhe Gupta, who is known for his philanthropic work and contributions to the community. Mr. Gupta is the founder of the Rohit Group and has been instrumental in building the India Centre here in Edmonton. Presently, Mr. Gupta contributes most of his time to promoting charities, helping women and needs of centres for newcomers and works on mentoring the next generation. Please rise and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Renewable Energy Development

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home for leaders who built the renewables sector. Their work creates jobs, attracts investment, increases municipal revenue, helps farmers make extra income through renewable leases, and lowers power prices that skyrocketed under the UCP. Alberta prospers when the government and industry work together.

But something is lost on this government. It is working overtime to undermine renewables. It imposed the renewables moratorium, ignored public service advice, blamed others as electricity prices hit a record high. The Premier attacked renewables on national news, shared ideas from the past and inaccurate information about blackouts and turbine reclamation. The AUC's new expert reports contradict her claims, expert reports that her own minister boasted about just yesterday.

In 2023 the world is enhancing grid reliability by advancing a mix of solutions like wind, solar, geothermal, hydrogen, abated gas, storage, energy efficiency, and interties. The Premier chooses to ignore new tech and champions outdated ideas, painting a vision for Alberta from the last century. Why is that? Telling investors that

we will have blackouts shakes investor confidence in our ability to provide reliable energy.

As this government undermines renewables, the U.S. is attracting billions of dollars in electrification. We need diversified tech to build a reliable, affordable, low-emissions grid. We need leadership. Albertans deserve a government that would lead us to the future.

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

1:40 Federal Plastics Regulation Court Ruling

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal court has agreed with what Alberta has been saying for years. The federal order declaring plastics as toxic was unreasonable and unconstitutional. This sends a clear message that Canada is still governed by a Constitution and that Alberta will defend our constitutional rights from federal overreach.

This unilateral federal plastics ban is completely misguided and ridiculous. This legislation led to the banning of safe, compostable, nonplastic bags created out of the entrepreneurial spirit of a Calgary-based company. The Liberal-NDP government's failed environmental approach is falling apart before our eyes, and this is the second time a federal court has indicted the federal government for playing around in provincial jurisdiction. Mr. Speaker, in this case Ottawa has been told clearly once again that their unilateral plastics ban, like Bill C-69, is unconstitutional, but the feds are saying that they're pushing forward, ignoring the Constitution, disregarding the courts, and will keep fighting to push their ridiculous agenda.

Clearly, Ottawa's heavy-handed approach has gone too far, but we have shown that we can stand up to their policies and we can win. Instead of appealing this decision, they should work with us to manage plastics and reduce waste while creating a stronger economy. Mr. Speaker, Ottawa must immediately delete plastic manufactured items from schedule 1 of the current Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Rather than recognizing real low-emissions innovation, their sweeping ban will punish innovative solutions and hinder locally driven progress. Alberta will not accept Ottawa-knows-best legislation that puts our jobs and economy at risk while not helping the environment. It is time for the federal government to start respecting the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude with our short, seven-word response to Ottawa. We will see Minister Guilbeault in court.

National Housing Day

Member Loyola: Today is National Housing Day, a day for all of us to reflect on how we can improve access to safe and affordable housing. Today I strongly encourage this government to deeply reflect on their role because they have been letting Albertans down, and everyday Albertans need real action.

Our province is in a housing crisis, and our government is ignoring their role in that crisis. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans are worried about their living situation, and the UCP has turned their back on them. There are over 115,000 people at high risk of homelessness in Calgary alone, with 84,000 households not being able to afford their current housing situation. At this rate it is expected that 100,000 households will be in need of affordable housing by 2026 unless the government acts now and takes the necessary measures to prevent this.

In Edmonton the number of people experiencing homelessness has doubled under the UCP's watch, and this government can't even keep their promise to create more shelter spaces before winter.

Municipalities have been desperate to address the housing crisis in their jurisdictions, but they do not have a partner in this provincial government. What they are given instead are ministers threatening to get away in the action of municipalities and the actions they are taking. This is not productive and showcases a government focused on securing bloated contracts and gifts for them and their insiders rather than the most important issue facing Albertans today, affordable housing.

Housing affects everyone from those experiencing homelessness to Albertans worried about steep rents and mortgage increases, unsure how they'll cover the bills. But this government is showing they are not interested in governing for all Albertans.

Chiropractic Care

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to welcome members from the Chiropractic Association of Alberta. Attending with them today is also the College of Chiropractors of Alberta. Chiropractic is a health discipline firmly grounded in science and evidence-based research that integrates clinical care with best practices, education, and outcome for spine, muscle, nerve, and joint conditions.

In Alberta the Institute of Health Economics reviewed the impact of low back pain on health care in 2020. The report found that the burden of low back pain on health care use is severe and worsening. Patient claims from physician visits related to low back pain increased from 1.8 million to 4.5 million. Similarly, prescriptions for low back pain also increased from 2.5 million to 6.3 million.

With 700,000 lower back pain health care visits in Alberta annually, this care accounts for \$54 million spent annually. According to a recent study a large majority of Albertans working with family physicians and specialists for low back pain wait in surgical queues for evaluation despite evidence that approximately 95 per cent of surgical referrals for primary care do not require surgery. The result is waiting up to two years for surgical evaluation, causing delayed help and increased potential risk of chronic pain and opioid-use disorders.

Chiropractors are committed to helping Albertans' well-being, especially the aging population, with nonpharmaceutical solutions. They have a role to play in primary health care providing care for spine, muscle, nerve, and joint conditions and relieving pressure on the health care system. Chiropractors are committed to being part of team-based care with other allied health care professions and Alberta doctors. I encourage my other fellow members to think about the impact of chiropractic care as an integral part of primary health care today.

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

AHS Board Chair

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When someone tells you who they are, believe them. When they show you again and again and again, listen to them. This UCP government has been showing us exactly who they are and what they believe in when it comes to health care. We have a Premier who has spent decades fine-tuning a plan to force Albertans to pay out of pocket to see a family doctor, a Premier who wants to create a payment relationship between doctors and patients, a Premier who questions why doctor visits are even covered by medicare, and this week the UCP voted down a bill that would have ensured that no Albertan ever had to pay to see a doctor.

Now they've doubled down on their strategy of undermining public health care with the appointment of Lyle Oberg to lead Alberta Health Services. For those who don't know, Lyle Oberg has

been a face of private health care in Canada for decades. As an MLA in this Chamber he mused about making Albertans pay for procedures that he didn't think were essential, procedures like screening mammograms and ultrasounds for pregnant women, and he was just getting started. As a minister he called for people to have the opportunity to pay for health care outside the public system, thus robbing the public system of precious care providers. While he was an adviser to the Premier during her Wildrose days, he was hard at work trying to create Canada's first private, for-profit hospital. This is who the Premier put in charge of Albertans' health care.

On this side of the House we stand up for public health care. We stand with front-line health care workers. We stand up for the families impacted by the UCP crisis in health care. We stand for everyday Albertans on this side of the House. When will the UCP start?

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill Pr.1

St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, being Bill Pr.1, St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023.

St. Joseph's College has a long and proud history serving Albertans and beyond for almost 100 years. Over 2,600 students are enrolled in approximately 70 courses annually. St. Joe's, as it is affectionately called, offers liberal arts education in the Catholic tradition. This new legislation will create St. Joseph's College's own academic program in conjunction with their current academic affiliate model. If this legislation is passed, St. Joe's will begin by offering a diploma in liberal arts.

As the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, the constituency where the college is located, I'm so honoured to sponsor this bill on their behalf. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr.1 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Energy Regulator Review

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier defended a second sole-source contract to her biggest political donor, claiming he was the best guy for the job; trouble is the rules say that he has to be the only guy for the job. To the Premier: is she really trying to say that in the province of Alberta, the oil and gas capital of Canada, the only qualified person to review the AER also happened to be her top donor?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We follow the same rules that the NDP did when they were in government. The rules haven't changed since 2014. In 2016 we know the NDP awarded a \$500,000 sole-source contract to a former B.C. NDP MLA to support a legal case. Were there no good lawyers in Alberta at the time? The fact of the matter is that we have a process where there are criteria where you can have a sole-source contract. They are put online. They are

done to be able to get specialized knowledge as well as to expedite some of the services we need.

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, she's right. There are criteria. There are rules. They are written down, and they actually apply to this Premier. A hundred and twenty-two thousand people work in oil and gas, yet the Premier claims that David Yager is the only person who can provide the needed expertise. This is nonsensical and, worse, it's dishonest. We wrote to the Auditor General asking him to review the Premier's decision. Will she join us in asking for his opinion, and if not, why not?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, one of the rules around sole-source contracting is that if you want to get advice in an expedited manner, you can use them. We got the report. We're already acting upon it. I think the issue the member of the opposition has is that she doesn't like the advice that's given, because when she takes advice from the energy sector, she takes it from Tzeporah Berman, who called the oil sands Mordor, and she was so embarrassed she ended up having to fire them, or even from her Calgary-Elbow MLA, who says that fossil fuels need to be completely phased out by 2050. I don't need to get advice like that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, two days after Kearl spilled hundreds of thousands of litres from tailings ponds into the Muskeg River last week, the Energy minister praised their top-notch commitment to environmental safety. It is clear that Albertans cannot count on the UCP's elected leaders to regulate oil and gas, so the AER has to be free and independent of political interference, not reviewed by it. So to the Premier: why won't she rescind David Yager's contract and allow for independent, qualified expertise?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to visit the Kearl site last week, and I will tell you that I did see some issues. I did raise them with the management there, and I have raised them with the senior management. This particular spill is from muddy water from the surrounding area. It's not part of the tailings pond issue. It's just muddy water, and that muddy water is actually from rain and from snow. They might not be aware of that, but in the north it actually does snow. That has been stopped, and indeed water monitoring, air monitoring continue to be done and will continue to be done in the future. [interjections]

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

Ms Notley: Inspections by the minister of energy. I feel so much better, Mr. Speaker.

Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments

Ms Notley: You know what? There's a housing crisis; 115,000 Albertans are at risk of becoming . . . [interjections]

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

Ms Notley: . . . homeless; 3,000 Edmontonians do not have a place to call home, a number that's almost doubled under this UCP government's watch. However, it seems that the UCP is much more worried about the UCP gift crisis. To the Premier: will she apologize to Albertans for wasting time on her plan to remove MLA gift limits and instead start helping them keep a roof over their head?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, my Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services is working with the Edmonton city council to make sure that there are enough shelter spaces for this winter. In fact, he was praised by the mayor, Amarjeet Sohi, for working so collaboratively with them. We have an upcoming strategy to be able to address the issue of affordable housing, we've got \$3 billion being invested over the next number of years, and we have an additional strategy to help with attainable housing. We're working with our municipalities to make sure more housing is built.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, while over 150,000 Albertans are struggling to put food on the table, a shocking 73 per cent increase since 2019, the UCP is busy making sure MLAs can get bigger and better gifts. It's astonishing, really. Albertans are forced to make difficult choices between paying the rent bill, the electricity bill, or the grocery bill. Why won't this Premier admit that affordability is the real crisis and walk away from her plan to fix the UCP gift crisis?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the legislation is simply moving the statute into regulation. There will still be rules in place. [interjection] For the exact same reason that the member opposite just mentioned. Rising inflation is causing the increase in the cost of all of the ticket prices for every event that we're invited to, and as a result we're having to make sure that we're keeping that at an appropriate level so that everyone is able to do their work. I think the member opposite should take responsibility for why we have an inflation crisis. It is her federal leader that continues to support a carbon tax that continues to drive up the cost of everything.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, public education is also in crisis. Our kids are crammed into crumbling, overcrowded classrooms. Overall, on a per capita basis Alberta's kids have the lowest funding per student and their classrooms are the most crowded in the country. To the Premier. These kids don't care about the UCP gift crisis. They want more teachers and more EAs. Why won't she drop her campaign to get more gifts to her MLAs and instead focus on fixing our public education?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to take a trip down memory lane, when they were in power, and we had 13 consecutive quarters of people leaving this province, which ended up seeing a decrease in the number of kids going to school. We had to bring through a funding formula to stabilize the amount of income that was going to each of those boards so that they were able to support the students that they had and not have to reduce the amount of staffing. We happen to be in a great position where, now that the Alberta Is Calling campaign is working, people are coming here. More kids are coming here, so we're working with the school boards to see how we might be able to amend the formula to increase this spending. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is next.

Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: Today is National Housing Day. Today should be a reminder for all of us that housing is a human right. What an opportunity the UCP had to be leaders on housing. Instead, they're reannouncing old funding, they're finger pointing at the feds, and they're refusing to help the thousands of Albertans without homes or those worried about how they'll pay next month's rent.

Governing is about choices, and they're choosing to hand out lucrative contracts to their pals, spending millions on pension propaganda, and changing laws so they can get fancier gifts. Wrong priorities, Premier. Albertans want action on affordability and housing. Why doesn't the Premier?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, just a moment ago I was with the mayor of Edmonton at city council celebrating National Housing Day. Her mayor, the hon. member's mayor, who thanked the province for . . . [interjections]

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

Mr. Nixon: That hon. member couldn't even be bothered to show up at her own city council on National Housing Day, Mr. Speaker, but the mayor thanked the government, the Premier, and myself for our hard work on this file. We continue to invest unprecedented amounts in affordable housing across this province. We're in year 3 of a 10-year plan that's going to create 25,000 more units of affordable housing across the province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Irwin: We are hearing a lot of reannouncements, and we're hearing a lot about mats on the floors. Those aren't solutions. We are hearing from folks. The minister might actually know what unhoused folks want if he'd actually talk to them. The answer to rising homelessness isn't more shelters. The cost of their ideological approach is real, it's human, and it's devastating. What is the Premier doing to prevent the ever-increasing number of folks without the dignity of a roof over their head? Stop telling us that shelters are the answer.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the Premier is doing is investing an unprecedented amount in housing all across this province. That said, the Premier knows that we also have to deal with the emergency housing situation in Edmonton and in Calgary and across the province. We have worked tirelessly with the city of Edmonton, who has thanked us, to create the most emergency shelter spaces in the history of the city, increased investment in emergency housing by 71 per cent while the Premier has been the Premier. That's real action. The NDP has done nothing.

2:00

Member Irwin: Earlier today I was joined by Brad Lafortune. He's a housing advocate, and he's the executive director of Public Interest Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Irwin: He argues that we need to stop thinking that homelessness is an impossible challenge to solve. But instead of planning and building, this government is privatizing, blocking, and defunding: privatizing existing social housing, threatening to block funding agreements between municipalities and the federal government, and defunding harm reduction and other supports that would help the hardest to house. On this side of the House we believe that we can end homelessness. Does the UCP?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, all of that is ridiculous. If the hon. member is concerned about governments working together, again, why could she not be bothered to even show up at her own city hall with her mayor on National Housing Day? I suspect it's because she didn't get instructions from Mr. Singh in Ottawa. On this side of the House we're working every day for Albertans. I thank the

city of Edmonton for working with us. I appreciate their support. We're going to continue to work each and every day on this side of the aisle to help protect vulnerable Albertans and make sure our province is the best place in the world to live. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, tonight is the last of the government's telephone town halls on this Premier's risky plot to gamble away the CPP. The government promised over a month ago in-person town halls with Albertans but have announced no details since. The Finance minister yesterday hedged on whether there would even be in-person town halls. Albertans are telling me that they want to look this Premier in the eye and tell her that they don't support leaving the CPP. Why is the Premier avoiding face to face with Albertans?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the engagement process that has played out to this date. We're very pleased that Mr. Dinning, Mary Ritchie, Moin Yahya have taken this on to have this conversation with Albertans. You know, we hear so much about affordability in the questions we've heard today that you'd think it would warrant fair consideration. Something that would have the potential to leave \$5 billion in the overall Alberta economy annually, half in the pockets of every Alberta family and employee and the other half in every Alberta business, should warrant fair consideration. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, last week I was so proud to cohost with the Leader of the Official Opposition an in-person pension town hall in my riding with about 500 of my constituents and my colleagues' constituents. It was clear that the people in attendance understand what's really at risk with gambling away the CPP. Furthermore, my constituents told us that they're proud to be in the CPP and they're proud to be Canadian first. Is the Premier really going to take that away from them, too?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have been clear while we're having this discussion and conversation with Albertans as we await the federal government to provide us with an opinion on what the asset withdrawal number would be. They've said that they'll involve their chief actuary. They've said that they'll assist with their department. We look forward to hearing that information back. We're glad they're finally willing to participate after they've acknowledged and made clear that this is any province's right to consider, withdrawing from the CPP. All we're doing on behalf of Albertans is considering it, and I wish you'd give it fair consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The previous PC government tried to mess with Alberta pensions, too. At that time one Doug Horner was the Finance minister. Ruining pension seems to be like an obsession with this family. The difference: Doug held in-person town halls; he had all-party committees. His government heard loud and clear from Albertans, and they backed down. To the Premier: isn't it time to maybe call a family meeting and end this horrible plan?

Mr. Horner: I know the other side likes to call the mother ship and talk to Jagmeet to get their marching orders. I do have Doug's phone number. We talk often, but I don't get my marching orders from cousin Doug. Like I said, tonight for central Alberta is the fifth of the telephone town halls. Mr. Dinning is leading. I hope that everybody in central Alberta picks up the call and is part of the conversation. It's very important that they get the feedback, they understand, if there are questions in the minds of Albertans, what they are, and they're able to give the best information they can.

Health Facility Capital Plans

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve strong public health care that's there when and where they need it. The last community hospital in Edmonton, the Grey Nuns, was built in 1988. Our population of this city has nearly doubled since then. In 2017 Alberta's NDP government announced a new community hospital in south Edmonton. The UCP told Edmontonians they could be trusted to deliver on it, but it's been six years of excuses and delays. So when will the minister, the new minister, please announce that the new hospital will be opened? What's the date we can count on her to open it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I took over office on June 9, I'm continuing to look at what the capital infrastructure needs across the province are. In fact, just recently we opened the Misericordia community hospital emergency department, which actually is tripling the amount of space for the Misericordia that they currently see. We're continuing to make investments in capital infrastructure, and, yes, it is in Edmonton.

Ms Hoffman: Given that it sounds like the minister just said 2000 and never and given that I was the minister . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. This is unnecessary interruption, for which the member will start again.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Given that the minister just said 2000 and never, basically, to the city of Edmonton and given that I was the Minister of Health and I was proud to announce that we would fund the replacement and expansion of the Misericordia emergency department, making it three times the original size, and given that patients deserve a well-staffed emergency department with timely care when they show up – thanks to the NDP, we have three times the beds now at the Misericordia emerg – will the minister commit to hiring three times the staff?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the NDP, we have the highest debt, that we inherited when we took office. In fact, we made a commitment in the Budget 2023 capital plan that includes \$4.2 billion in capital funding over three years to address Health capital needs, including \$2.8 billion for Health infrastructure and equipment, \$732 million for Alberta Health Services self-financed capital, \$529 million for capital maintenance and renewal of existing facilities, and I could go on.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Calgary is also in need of important health care investments like the Calgary cancer centre, which our NDP government delivered after consecutive Conservative governments delayed and played games, and given that the new Calgary cancer centre is set to open very soon, will the Minister of Health please tell Albertans exactly how many additional staff she

has funded – she has, the UCP – in the NDP-funded Calgary cancer hospital? Please don't make it a fancy box, like your colleagues have accused it of being.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member opposite why, when she was the Minister of Health, she took the Red Deer hospital off the capital plan. The people of Red Deer and central Alberta deserve a Red Deer hospital that this member took off . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I was hoping the presence of Speaker Wanner would rub off on everyone. It seems it hasn't.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to go on on other items that we're doing. New and additional capital funding has been approved to support a number of initiatives, some of which include the increase of \$120 million over three years for the Alberta surgical initiative capital program, an increase of \$105 million over three years for the continuing care capital program.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to build the Red Deer hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are concerned about the physician shortages we are facing. My constituents inform me of their difficulties in finding a family doctor or even being able to book an appointment with the one they already have. Primary care is an essential component to our health care system, and we need to ensure that every Albertan can access the care they need no matter where they reside in the province. To the Minister of Health: can you explain what our government is doing to address Alberta's physician shortage and what we are doing to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve a health care system that they can fully rely on. We recognize that not all Albertans can access the care they need, and that is unacceptable. That is why our government is committed to refocusing Albertans' health care system and why a key part of our work is centred around building primary care as the foundation of the health system. There is much work to do, but a key part of addressing this challenge is expanding opportunities for nurse practitioners. I'm so proud of the announcement we made today. We are keeping our promises to Albertans.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that the current physician shortage is evident throughout the entire province and given that rural Albertans are even more likely to experience hardships with finding a family doctor and they often need to travel long distances to attend appointments and receive care, can the same minister explain how these new initiatives will assist rural Albertans specifically?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Training and drawing more physicians to rural

Alberta is one of the top priorities of our government. Our ongoing efforts such as supporting medical students to complete their studies in rural centres as well as new efforts in enabling nurse practitioners to open up their own clinics and work within larger health teams will also help work to ensure rural Albertans will have better access to primary care physicians and nurse practitioners closer to home. We've made this commitment, we are dedicated to it, and we're going to get the job done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that physicians are well known for their experience and expertise in specific fields and given that family physicians are also known to be one of the main contacts for primary care in Alberta and given that nurse practitioners are qualified to provide many aspects of primary care, can the minister explain how nurse practitioners and physicians differ and how the new nurse practitioner compensation model will help provide more primary care options in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Nurse practitioners have advanced education with which they can assess patients, provide diagnosis and treatment, order tests, prescribe medications, and make referrals. Nurse practitioners offer many of the same services as doctors; however, they are not equally qualified in all situations. The new compensation model will enable nurse practitioners to open their own clinics, provide patient care, and allow more publicly funded options for Albertan communities. This is great news for Albertans.

Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage Funding

Ms Ganley: In yesterday's fall economic statement the federal government announced details regarding funding of carbon capture, utilization, and storage projects. This funding is vital for our province. I agree with industry leaders that funding is encouraging but also long overdue, but so, too, are details on provincial funding. As always, this minister has plenty of criticism but no action of his own. His homework is also overdue. So, Minister, where's your plan?

Mr. Jean: It took me a minute to stand up, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little bit shocked that they would support our oil and gas industry. It comes as a bit of a surprise to me. I saw them for four years on that side of the House dismantle it, drive 180,000 people out of our province. Please, I would ask the member to hold her breath. It's not going to be long. We're coming forward with a plan right away, but of course we are dependent on the federal government. Maybe they could reach out to their overlord and talk to their Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his friend Mr. Singh.

Ms Ganley: Given that the UCP doesn't actually need to wait for the federal government to act – they could introduce their own program tomorrow or, better yet, months ago – and given that the UCP keeps talking about their own program but, just like the federal government, they fail to deliver on the important details and given that it's not just oil and gas looking for support, it's critical for cement, steel, and electricity sectors. Why the delay? Why the blaming of others? Why not show some leadership yourself, Minister?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, four years I waited for them to do anything to support the oil and gas industry – four years

– and they're waiting four months and expect me to jump to the pump. I've done my job. They just need to be patient because I'm under confidence. You know what? Unlike them, I'm not going to give up that confidence. I take my job very seriously. I work for the people of Alberta. I'm not going to take any lessons from them on any of it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that the Pathways Alliance has said that they need to receive federal and provincial support by the end of the year if they're going to meet their targets and given that if we don't meet this deadline, tens of thousands of Alberta jobs could be at risk and given that we absolutely must make progress on climate change and this is a critical piece of that, can the minister commit to a clear provincial program by the end of this year? Yes or no?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that she is supporting the government in our CCUS initiatives. We are going to be the first jurisdiction in North America to have a carbon-abated field, an oil field that's abated. It's amazing. And do you know who's going to do it? It's going to be this Conservative government. We're going to lead the world on CCUS. We're going to lead the world on carbon abatement. We're going to lead the world on minerals and oil and gas and so many other things, if they would just get out of our way and make sure that Justin Trudeau does, too. It's time for a new government in Ottawa. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is next. Oh, correction. It's my fault. It's the first day. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Benga Mining Limited, camouflaged under new name Northback Holdings, has a plan to mine the eastern slopes. Repeatedly, Albertans have told this government: no mining in the eastern slopes. There is clear opposition from Albertans against turning the mountains into a commodity. No means no, just like it did two years ago. When will the minister recognize that Albertans reject the notion of tearing apart the eastern slopes?

Mr. Jean: Albertans have been clear, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. Albertans saw what the NDP did in four years in Alberta, and they've seen what the NDP have done in Elk Valley in British Columbia. We're not going to take any lessons from the NDP on how to run a coal mine. The truth is that we have one of the most pristine environments in the world. Although the NDP is at record shipments in the port of Vancouver for coal being exported and although the Elk Valley looks like a disaster zone, I can assure the member that we're going to take no lessons from the NDP.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that downstream from Grassy Mountain concerns are piling up every day, water levels are at a historic low due to severe drought and local sources are running dry, and given that amid the water scarcity the UCP is contemplating water diversification for coal exploration, advised by the regulator and tagged as massive policy failure, why does this government think that the satisfaction of their financial thirst is worth leaving Albertans high and dry?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that the drought situation that we've been seeing over the last year and what we're expecting to see next year is very serious. We've been working with municipalities and industries and local stakeholders in the areas to look at how we can manage that. Now, I would like to point out that this project has not yet been approved, and if folks have concerns, they can raise them to the regulator. This is exactly the type of thing that the regulator would look into. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Well, then. Given that reputable reports, like from the University of Calgary and other academic institutions, have outlined the negative environmental impacts on the eastern slopes and that Albertans have been loud and clear, when will the minister make a decision based on evidence-based research, based on peer-reviewed research, evidence-based data, and the voices of Albertans? When are you going to stop bending to your corporate friends and institutions?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear to everybody that Alberta has some of the most stringent regulations in the world on coal. [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jean: As I was mentioning, we have some of the most stringent regulations on coal in the world, Mr. Speaker, and we have the very best in class in the world on monitoring air and water in our oil sands. If it's good enough for the oil sands, it's good enough for coal. We're going to make sure that coal remains safe and people are safe. But let's be clear about a couple of things. The first thing is that Grassy Mountain is not on the eastern slopes, just so you're aware. Maybe check Google. Secondly, the last minister to encourage this . . .

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

New Stollery Children's Hospital

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, given that today is Stollery day here at the Legislature, I would like to make note of the fact that out of the 300,000 patients treated at the Stollery last year, approximately 120,000 were from my home region of northern Alberta. With this government's support the Stollery Foundation will raise up to \$250 million for a new hospital, making it the largest charitable campaign in Alberta's history. Considering all this, could the Minister of Health please inform the House when or if the government is planning on building an independent, stand-alone hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our children deserve the very best care available, and a stand-alone Stollery children's hospital will support this goal. Budget 2023 allocated \$3 million over three years to advance the planning of this new facility. This funding is matched by \$3 million from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation. This planning is under way. A formal business case is now being developed to outline the project's scope and costs. I want to thank the members of the Stollery board, the Stollery families, especially Cecily and all the Stollery children for their advocacy. Well done.

2:20

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that 20 per cent of all Stollery patients are Indigenous, including my own daughter Sloane, who was given the gift of sight by the amazing Dr. Carlos Solarte and further given . . . [some applause] – thank you – . . . that the Awasisak program is the only Indigenous pediatric program of its kind in North America, could the same minister please describe how the government is going to support the unique needs of the Indigenous patients and not let them fall through the cracks?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government recognizes that Indigenous peoples face numerous barriers to access appropriate health care. That's why when we were developing Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System, or MAPS, we found it critical to include some of the following immediate actions: creating an Indigenous health division within Alberta Health, establishing a \$20 million fund for Indigenous communities to develop and run their own health care projects, and implementing an Indigenous patient complaints investigator and elders roster to address incidents of racism during health care delivery. We remain committed to collaborating with Indigenous leaders and communities.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that the population of the province is expected to increase by 2.6 million people by 2051, which will undoubtedly put new stresses on this children's hospital in terms of adequate space and resources, and further given that I have my new little heroes – Dax, Ben, and Jake – all watching me here today, could the minister please tell this House how the Stollery children's hospital will meet the demands of an increased population and provide the quality health care that every child in Alberta deserves?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that the Stollery children's hospital has a significant role in our health care system and plays a critical part in ensuring that children get the care they need. A new stand-alone hospital will improve upon and expand the services provided as well as access to those services ensuring that children in our province get the quality care they need as quickly as possible. The hospital's approximate 132,000 square metre size would accommodate service capacity needs from 2040 to 2041 with the flexibility to support needs of at least 15 years beyond that opening date.

Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Report

Ms Goehring: The government commissioned a dismal report by Preston Manning on the COVID-19 response. We are appalled but not shocked that this Premier would give, again, one of her besties a six-figure salary paid for by Albertans to promote partisan political campaigning, e-mailing Conservative MPs and telling them how to leverage his work for electoral gain. This report is a scam, and its rollout is absurd. Will the minister condemn the Premier and her pal Preston for this horrific misuse of power?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and answer this question. I will never condemn the Premier. I will applaud her for commissioning this panel because it is important that Albertans get a report on the government's response to COVID-19. On this side of the House we recognize that there is a need to review how the government responded to COVID-19 so if, heaven forbid, we ever encounter another event like that, we can do so properly with minimal damage and minimal impact on the general public.

Ms Goehring: Given that the Manning report touts antiscience theories and passes them off as fact and given that this report is not just explicitly partisan but dangerous because it paves the way to put more science deniers and extremists in power and given that Albertans don't pay taxes just to be deceived by the Premier and her high-paid friends, will the minister reject the antiscience, power-hungry recommendations in this report and apologize for wasting Albertans' money?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, what I reject is the premise of the question from the member opposite. Together as a caucus we will absolutely take the recommendations from the Manning panel, and we will review it as a caucus to determine what policies we may choose to implement going forward should we in the future, heaven forbid, encounter another public health emergency like we did during the COVID-19 pandemic. What this is really about, though, is the members opposite trying to distract from the fact that they take their direction from Ottawa, not the people of Alberta. On this side of the House we know who our bosses are, and they're Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Goehring: Given that this Premier seems to be pretty comfy in her new role as conductor of the gravy train while hard-working Albertans struggle to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads and given that this report has done nothing to help Albertans' health, safety, or well-being but has helped make sure that Manning can buy some pretty posh presents this holiday season, will the minister apologize for what is an absolutely unacceptable use of taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only people who should be apologizing in this Chamber to the rest of Albertans are the members opposite for the \$8 million they spent trying to peddle a carbon tax to the rest of Albertans. Their record in this House is abysmal. I ask them also . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, clearly, Team Angry is hard at work over there today. On this side of the House we're hard at work serving Albertans.

I would love to know, Mr. Speaker, how much money the members opposite, while they were in government, spent on light bulbs and shower heads. How much NDP money does it cost to change a single light bulb? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Regional Health Advisory Councils

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local voices in regard to provincial services are so important to Albertans, including my constituents in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, which is why the

regional boards with Alberta Health Services play a key role in ensuring that the needs of our communities are met. Following the refocusing announcement, advisory boards will be redefined to provide direction and support to the newly reorganized health care system. Can the Minister of Health explain what changes are expected when these redefined advisory boards are established?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government wants to empower health care workers and regional partners to bring their ideas and perspectives forward to support local decision-making. By implementing specialized advisory boards, the new leadership will be expected to uphold accountability and achieve priority goals that will improve patient outcomes. This new approach will garner a more patient- and physician-focused system that will serve to benefit all Albertans. These are changes that are needed to make the system better and stronger.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health: thank you so much for the answer. It's given that Albertans have differing needs of care from region to region and that the original AHS regional boards were supposed to ensure that the needs of a particular region were recognized and attended to. It's given that local issues must be heard to understand the regional issues. Can the minister expand on how local decision-making will be impacted in response to creating four provincial centralized organizations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. By establishing four specific organizations within Alberta's health care system, we are ensuring that the health needs of all Albertans are being properly addressed and identified through the correct networks. Thirteen new advisory councils will also be formed, including an Indigenous advisory council, to represent regional perspectives, bring forward local priorities, and give input on capital and system plans, because we believe in listening to the front lines and to the regions.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: thank you so much for that answer. It's given that the new local advisory councils will play a critical role in shaping Alberta's future health care initiatives and that previously we had many engaged Albertans who played a role in these councils. Given that some Albertans would like to be involved in the process and have access to transparency around these vital councils, can the minister explain how the new local advisory councils will be chosen as well as who gets to be on them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for the question. Our work to refocus Alberta's health care system establishes a fresh framework for local decision-making and regional advice and recognizes the importance of decisions being made at the right level. Alberta Health is working on a plan to make sure the advisory councils have appropriate representation from right across the province. I'm happy to say that we're moving forward on this bold new plan.

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

Health Spending Accounts

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In advance of the election the Premier made a promise that nobody would be paying for a family doctor. Through the campaign no mention was made of health spending accounts, and the Premier did commit repeatedly that no Albertan would pay to see a doctor. Clearly, she intends to break that promise. The introduction of a health spending account was included in the mandate letter for Technology and Innovation. Since that letter was issued, we have heard nothing. Will the Premier disclose the essential services she intends Albertans to pay for?

2:30

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

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. It's true that the Premier has asked me to look into the feasibility of what a health spending account program could look like, and of course there would be a significant technology component to that in order to make sure that all of the systems in our health care system could communicate with one another and communicate with the Albertans who are using the system. We continue to do that work, and we look forward to reporting back to Albertans in due course.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that we have already seen the chaos caused by the Premier in committing to fix our health care system, given that we have already seen evidence of the gross failure of attempts to privatize elements of our health care with chaos caused by lab services, will the Premier admit her plans for health spending accounts is just part of her ploy to privatize? Clearly, there's something the Premier expects Albertans to pay for. Will she say today what she wants Albertans to pay for?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been very clear. I've been very clear. We are going to have publicly funded public health care, period. But why the member opposite wouldn't want others to have what he enjoys – all of the members have health spending accounts. Many people have health spending accounts. So you know what? I find it very rich that the others on the other side wouldn't want others to have what they enjoy.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the Premier herself previously admitted on video that the health spending accounts would get Albertans used to paying for essential medical services, given that the people in this province are already being denied the care they deserve for free and given that Albertans are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and can't afford to have their public health ripped away, will the Premier cut this out and get back to delivering public health care for the people of Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious the hon. member didn't get the memo. The Public Health Act guarantees every single Albertan and, in fact, all Canadians health care, and this province is committed to providing the best care for Albertans in the world. When will the NDP learn that that strategy won't work? They learned in May that it didn't work. I hope that they continue to learn that it's never going to get them on this side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont is... [interjections] Order. Order. Order. The only one with the call is Calgary-Edgemont. [interjection] Order.

Women's Shelters

Ms Hayter: Today on National Housing Day I want to make it clear that every Albertan deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. Sadly, for many women escaping domestic violence in the midst of a housing crisis, this is not a reality. Women's shelters in this province desperately need funding and support. When these shelters are at capacity, women trying to access help end up in danger. This is dire. Will the minister explain to women who need these shelters why the government is turning their backs on them?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, far from it. This government is investing in women's shelters. We heard loud and clear the need to be able to create emergency spaces, particularly on the homeless side, that were women spaces only for safety. I'm proud to say that 100 of those beds are coming online right here in the city of Edmonton. Again, when the NDP were in government, they did zero of those spaces – zero – because the reality is that the NDP wants to continue to be here, play political games, and not focus on investing in Albertans. This government is laser focused on making sure that all Albertans have homes to go to.

Ms Hayter: Given that Ermineskin women's shelter serves women from St. Albert, Wetaskiwin, Ponoka and now is out of space and in need of more support and given that this shelter does critical work to protect Indigenous women and support them even after they leave, what is the minister going to do right here and right now to ensure that vulnerable women have the support that they need? I want a specific commitment now.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member had bothered to show up at National Housing Day here in Edmonton with the Edmonton mayor, she would also know that we have 100 more Indigenous beds coming online right here in the city of Edmonton. We also have recently done the same thing with our Blood Tribe partners in Lethbridge, working with them to make their shelter work Indigenous led. The hon. members across the way: they don't want that. They continue to drive towards union-driven shelters. This side of the House works with our nonprofit partners, municipalities, and Indigenous communities, unlike the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Hayter: Given that women's shelters across the province are facing increased demand due to the housing crisis and in the cold winter months and given that no person should ever be forced to stay in a situation of domestic violence because the government is not providing adequate funding and given that this government could do the right thing today and increase the funding of women's shelters, like the one in Ermineskin shelter, that are so short-staffed but continuing to do the vital work, will the minister commit to increasing the funding? Yes or no?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the member should take yes for an answer, but she should also stop being so irresponsible. The NDP's behaviour inside this House could cost people their very lives. Continuing to say false facts about there not being capacity within the shelter system for people is completely ridiculous.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: That hon. member should feel shame for the way that she's handled that.

Through you to Albertans, I want to assure them we have adequate capacity.

An Hon. Member: You do not deserve this job.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Anybody that needs emergency spaces: please come forward; you will be kept care of, unlike what the NDP is trying to do.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:37 and perhaps an additional one at 2:37 as well.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner has a question to ask.

Designated Industrial Zones

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Excessive red tape slows down business and can make Alberta less appealing for investment opportunities. Having to wait months or even years for approval on an application can be extremely frustrating for individuals trying to provide for their families and build a future here. One of the reasons why this province has gotten back the Alberta advantage is this government's push for more streamlined regulations. To that end, could the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas please explain what plans they have to create a designated industrial zone between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank my colleague for that important question. We absolutely agree that unnecessary red tape is bad for business and for Alberta. It should not slow down decisions and tie up investments for no good reason. That's why reducing red tape is a priority for my department and our government. The pilot program in Alberta's Industrial Heartland is well under way. This project is focused on reducing red tape, streamlining regulatory approvals while, of course, maintaining our high environmental standards. We're watching the pilot closely and learning from its success. Based on that success, I know we'd look at other similar designated industrial zones across the province.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her response. Given that the minister has expressed an openness to creating a future designated industrial zone specific to the agrifood processing industry and further given that such a zone could present exciting new opportunities for Albertans living in this region, could the same minister please provide some details on the benefits that southern Alberta individuals and businesses can expect if they see this process move forward?

Mr. Sabir: Hooray.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Designated Industrial Zone is really all about common sense. It's focused on making industry more competitive by reducing nonessential, regulatory red tape in Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Now, if this

pilot is successful, the benefits could be huge. The trial under way in the Industrial Heartland has the potential to help attract billions of dollars in capital investment and support thousands of direct and indirect jobs. We know many regions are watching closely, and we're aware of the strong interest from southern Alberta. My department is reviewing the possibility of establishing future designated industrial zones in other parts of the province.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given all the benefits that southern Albertans can expect from setting up a designated industrial zone and how vital it is to streamlining regulations and red tape while maintaining our commitment to the environment, can the same minister elaborate on how long it will take to achieve this designation as we move forward to try to be able to build out the southern Alberta region?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of environment and parks.

Ms Schulz: Thank you again for the question. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Designated Industrial Zone is an exciting pilot, and we want to replicate it as soon as possible. Now, this project was 15 years in the making, with municipalities, the province, and industry working together. The pilot is still under way. Important activities are happening this year, including an air emissions reduction program for nonpoint sources and establishing a streamlined environmental assessment process. We will learn from this pilot, and then based on its success, we hope to start working with other regions and municipalities very soon.

2:40

The Speaker: That concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Hon. members, I beg the indulgence of the Assembly. As some of you may have noticed, during Members' Statements I may have made some minor errors in the rotation. [interjections] Hard to believe; I know. In fact, the Assembly today heard five members' statements instead of the required six. However, I wondered if the hon. Government House Leader might be willing to move a request for unanimous consent to revert to Members' Statements so that we can correct the error of the Speaker.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Ponoka Secondary Campus Hall of Valour Project

Mrs. Johnson: Remembrance Day was honoured very recently, and one school in the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency is going the extra mile to honour those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom today. The Broncs' World Tour cenotaph project, led by teacher Ron Labrie at the Ponoka Secondary Campus, has changed thousands of lives over the years. Students research the untold stories of Ponoka and area soldiers killed in action, 72 altogether.

This one-year program is completely extracurricular, culminating in a year-end trip to the battlefields and cemeteries of Europe. The mission is to tell the biography of every fallen soldier from the community at their gravesite or memorial and honour their sacrifice. In many cases these students are the only visitors to the final resting place of our soldiers who were killed in action. These

events have been emotional yet very rewarding as students discover the sense of connection and reminiscence to soldiers long lost.

Today an entire wing of the school has been dedicated to honour and remember these soldiers. The hall of valour is a showcase of the community cenotaph list, plaques for soldier inductees, student artwork, grave rubbings, and even a poppy made from a brass shell casing fired in combat from the Royal Canadian Artillery.

Every day at 11 o'clock in active remembrance one to two junior high students turn a page in the book of remembrance, saying out loud the name of a fallen soldier and standing in respect for one minute of silence. All 72 soldiers are in this book. As students research the eye colour, the height and weight, siblings and family relationships, reasons for joining, and how each soldier died, they become connected in a new way. As they walk the same streets these soldiers walked, they have a deeper sense of reverence and profound sense of gratitude for the peace and freedom that is granted to them. They are truly making the world a better place.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. member for Athabasca-Westlock-Barrhead.

Mr. van Dijken: Close.

Mr. Speaker, as deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with section 4(7) of the Election Act and section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I am pleased to table the 2022-2023 annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-Edgemont.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an article that was published yesterday by well-respected columnist Don Braid in the *Calgary Herald* in regard to the very concerning report released by Preston Manning per the call from this government. It concludes that there used to be at least some reluctance to use public money for such nakedly political purposes. Those days appear to be gone.

Thank you.

Ms Hayter: I have two tablings of e-mails from constituents, that I had referenced last night, with their concerns about leaving the Canadian pension for the Alberta pension plan.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:37 the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 23, mostly (h), (i), and (j); I will rely more on (j). My colleague from Calgary-Edgemont was asking a pretty serious question about domestic violence and availability of women's shelters and asking about the government policy, and the minister rose and answered something – I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but said something to the effect that the member needs to stop being irresponsible. And then he went on to say that that kind of behaviour could cost lives.

I thought that was way too over the top in response to a pretty serious question. Telling the member after getting up and asking a question that she needs to stop being irresponsible and it could cost lives, I think that's the kind of behaviour that creates disruption

here. It's not helpful to the order of the House, and that kind of answer should be ruled out of order.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a matter of debate. I listened with great intent as the minister of community and social services and housing responded to that question, and I actually agree in whole with what that member said. When the members opposite use inflammatory language and suggest things like the shelters are full and that there's nowhere to go, they are using that and they're signalling to members of the public, including women who might be victims of domestic abuse, that there is nowhere to go.

That is not, in fact, true, Mr. Speaker. That kind of language is in fact dangerous, and I would encourage members opposite to stop talking like that. When they speak like that and they put that kind of language on social media, whatever platform they may be using at the time, there are many people who take what they're saying as absolute fact. And you don't have to spend much time in this Chamber to realize that what they say lacks a great deal of fact if I'm going to be charitable.

But I definitely believe, Mr. Speaker, that what the hon. minister was saying was definitely in order. This is a matter of debate. And I would encourage members opposite to be very careful with the language they use in this Chamber. People are listening.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there other submissions? I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues.

Mr. Speaker, the member should take yes for an answer, but she should also stop being so irresponsible. The NDP's behaviour inside this House could cost people their . . . lives. Continuing to say false facts about there not being capacity within the shelter system for people is completely ridiculous.

A point of order is called. He continued:

That hon. member should feel shame for the way that she's handled that.

It continued on, and then the Government House Leader called a point of order.

I am prepared to rule, and I do think that there are elements of this point of order that are, in fact, areas of debate, but I do want to, in the strongest way possible – the hon. minister on two separate occasions in his response, one prior to the point of order being called and one after the point of order was called, referred directly to the member in the way that she handled that and that she should feel shame. Prior to that, he made the accusation that she should also stop being so irresponsible.

I have provided many, many, many comments with respect to referring to individual members and what they may or may not intend to do, and if you refer to a caucus or a government or an opposition, this is significantly less personal in its nature. While the hon. Official Opposition House Leader may have not argued that point specifically, I do find the minister's direct reference to the individual to be a point of order, for which I'm sure the Government House Leader is happy to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: I withdraw and apologize.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: We are at point of order number 2. The hon. the Government House Leader rose immediately following, at 2:38, on a point of order.

2:50

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've contemplated withdrawing this as a point of order, but I guess I'm on my feet so I

might as well go ahead with it and have at it. While the hon. minister that we were just talking about was speaking, the Member for Edmonton-North West said: you do not deserve your job. Multiple times. Now, while speaking generally about a caucus you could certainly say: you don't deserve your jobs; you don't deserve to be in government. We hear that every day from the opposition. That's just part of their talking points, which are noise. But in this instance, you had just provided caution about making direct statements about a member from an opposing caucus. So while I suspect it's not going to be in the Blues, which only you have access to, and I learned that yesterday, I do believe this would be a point of order. I would hope that even if you rule against me, that member would refrain from making such accusations and making such statements in the future. But roll the dice.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard the Government House Leader's submission with interest on the previous point of order as well, where he talked about how certain things, matters can be points of debate. So to me it looked more like a point of debate, whether somebody deserves their job or not. It could be the member's opinion. But in this case I think it was happening during question period while the environment was quite heated. I look forward to your direction on this and am happy to comply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there other submissions?

I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues, and in this particular context, as the members well know, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 624 makes reference to Speakers not being able to rule on comments made off the record and which they did not hear or if there is not a clear written record. The hon. minister was saying the following: "That hon. member should feel shame for the way that she's handled that. Through you to Albertans, I want to assure them we have adequate capacity." And an hon. member, in the Blues, said, "You do not deserve this job." Now, in this case it does not attribute it to that particular member. However, if the member is in the Chamber who said the phrase, they should apologize and withdraw as it is a point of order. If they aren't – and I would never make reference to their presence or absence – perhaps the hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader will apologize on their behalf.

Mr. Sabir: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. If passed, this bill would make a number of changes to a number of acts, including the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Trustee Act, the Jury Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, and the Court of King's Bench Act. The purpose of these changes is to increase clarity and efficiencies and

make it easier for Albertans to access services within the justice system. Amendments would also make sure our laws align with current practices and other pieces of legislation.

First, the amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act would allow key concepts to be clarified through regulation and transparently incorporate recommendations of the Ethics Commissioner into legislation. Specifically, investigations by the Ethics Commissioner would be suspended once a general election is called. Not having such a provision puts the Ethics Commissioner and you, in fact, Mr. Speaker, in an extremely difficult position with respect to timing and release of any report. Further amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act would provide flexibility for adjusting dollar limits and rules for elected officials receiving gifts in the ordinary course of their official duties by moving these limits and rules into regulation.

Mr. Speaker, an amendment to the Trustee Act would clarify the definition of an incapacitated person. This is a minor but important change. It would clarify that a person is not an incapacitated person unless that person has an attorney acting under the Powers of Attorney Act and the person is unable to make decisions about financial matters by reason of mental disability.

Amendments to the Estate Administration Act would clarify the requirements for an Albertan acting as a personal representative in the administration of a deceased person's estate. Mr. Speaker, the Estate Administration Act is often given out by wills and estate lawyers to personal representatives or persons being asked to be named as a personal representative in a will to explain the roles and responsibilities. Self-represented persons rely on it as a how-to manual to administer an estate in Alberta. As well, the act provides guidance to beneficiaries on roles and responsibilities of a personal representative in administering an estate. The proposed amendments would make clear which requirements in the new Trustee Act such as the prudent investor rules or the delegation of an agent provisions apply to a personal representative and which requirements will continue from the prior Trustee Act.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is also working very hard to improve Albertans' access to justice by introducing a new, streamlined trial process for family and civil matters in the Court of King's Bench. The streamlined trial would replace the seldomly used summary trial and take effect on January 1, 2024. A streamlined trial differs from other forms of trial because it relies primarily on written evidence rather than oral evidence. This allows court resources to be used more efficiently and free up additional court time. To support this change, the Jury Act is also being amended to replace a reference to the summary trial with the streamlined trial. This will help more Albertans get their matters heard by the courts more expeditiously, more efficiently, while saving them a ton of legal fees in the process.

To help further improve access to justice for Albertans, the proposed amendments to the Justice of the Peace Act would temporarily increase the maximum number of terms that a Justice of the Peace could serve. This will allow justices of the peace whose terms would be expiring to continue working while additional appointments are being made.

Mr. Speaker, another way that Alberta's government has been working to improve Albertans' access to justice is by increasing the number of judges at the Court of King's Bench. Since 2021 government has increased the number of other judges, through orders in council, from 74 to 80. Other judges are full-time justices, other than the chief and associate chief justices. Amendments to the Court of King's Bench Act would increase the number of other justices in the act from 74 to 80 to provide clarity on the actual current number of positions on the court.

I am proud of our government's commitment to increasing the number of judges, which helps ensure timely access to justice for Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, Albertans expect and deserve a system that is clear and easy to access. The amendments in Bill 8, if passed, would improve clarity and efficiencies in our justice laws. They would also support government's ongoing work to help build a more accessible justice system. I encourage everyone in this House to support this bill.

With that, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 8? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 8. I don't have concerns with changes to, for instance, the Trustee Act, Estate Administration Act, Jury Act, and Justice of the Peace Act. I do have some comments about Court of King's Bench Act changes. But the real concern here is that one piece of one part of this act is just essentially attaching another cart to the UCP gravy train. That's what I'm very concerned about; that's what Albertans are concerned about, because the UCP is attempting to introduce completely unethical and blatantly self-serving amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act.

3:00

At a time when Albertans are facing significant challenges such as a crisis in health care, a crisis in emergency rooms, skyrocketing rent, record homelessness, skyrocketing insurance and utility costs, skyrocketing grocery prices, the UCP thinks that the gifts they and their MLAs are receiving are not expensive enough. That's what these changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act really mean. That is what the government is trying to do with this piece of legislation.

This legislation does not reflect the reality of everyday Albertans. As I said, although other changes we don't take issue with, the changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act are the ones that Albertans are opposed to and we will oppose as well. Not once – not once – any constituent, any Albertan has asked me, has said that he's concerned that the gift I am getting doesn't have a high enough limit. And if anybody else from the other side had any constituent or Albertan telling them that, they should share that with us as well.

The second thing is that they are also taking a recommendation from the May 17 report of Commissioner Trussler. Just to give you a little bit of background on that report, before that, for months, the Premier was musing about her conversations with prosecutors about specific cases, about COVID-related cases, about Cottts-related cases on video. Later she denied that, that she didn't mean what she plainly said in those videos. And then there was a video where the Premier was seen talking to now convicted criminal Artur Pawlowski for 11 minutes about his criminal charges. At that time we filed a complaint that these conversations of the Premier with an accused are unethical. There is no room for that. Of course, the Premier and UCP then insisted that there is nothing wrong about it; they get lots of calls, and that was one of them. In this case they just got caught; otherwise, they get a lot of calls.

So the Ethics Commissioner looked into it and found those conversations were unethical. She found that the Premier's behaviour in reaching out to then Justice minister Tyler Shandro was inappropriate, and she found that in her interactions the Premier interfered in the administration of justice and she also contravened

section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act. She broke the law. That was the conclusion of that report.

In passing, the Ethics Commissioner also mentioned that if the Legislature so chooses, they can have these investigations suspended during the election period. That was just mentioned in passing. The government left everything that the Ethics Commissioner said in her report aside and picked the one recommendation that they think suits them, that just in case they are in the midst of another investigation during the election period, they would be able to shut it down. That's what government is doing.

If they were really to listen to the Ethics Commissioner, she had made so many other recommendations. She had made recommendations that such kind of behaviour is a threat to democracy. She had still reserved the right to make further recommendations and sanctions against the Premier. But they are rushing to change this one since they found it mentioned in that report while ignoring everything else that's mentioned there. So that's a bit self-serving for this government, to come up with this change without addressing the actual finding of that report, without addressing how they will make sure that such kinds of things will not happen again and they will not be interfering in the justice system again.

The second thing, as I mentioned, is that in almost eight-plus years not one Albertan has ever asked me or shared concerns with me about my gift limits, but the UCP is making that change through this legislation. The argument there is that – I don't know if there is any argument, but there were a few versions of explanation, rationale for this change. Something was said online that this is preventing them from being in suites where the limit exceeds \$400 or something for more than 20 minutes. I think I would ask that if the Premier so chooses, she should share a list with this Assembly, with Albertans where she was prevented from attending those suites for more than 20 minutes, some examples. I have been going to the Stampede as well for eight-plus years, more than that, and never had that been an issue. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sabir: If seriously that's a problem, there is Zoom, Teams, conference calls, other technologies that can be relied on and used to have those meetings, have those engagements. Again, we didn't hear much rationale for that.

Also, the minister claimed that these changes will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions, so we decided to look at the other jurisdictions. We thought: okay, why is Alberta falling so far behind in receiving gifts? Madam Speaker, we didn't find any jurisdiction that has a gift limit of more than \$250, and most jurisdictions have a gift limit of \$200. So the maximum is \$250, but \$200 seems like the standard. For instance, in B.C. that limit is \$250; in Saskatchewan that limit is \$200; in Manitoba that limit is \$250; in Ontario, one of the biggest provinces in this country, MLAs there are okay with a \$200 gift limit as well for running that big province; Quebec has a limit of \$200 as well; Nova Scotia has a limit of \$250; New Brunswick also has a limit of \$250. There was Prince Edward Island that used to have a limit of \$500. Their gift limit was higher. So what they did was that they also brought forward legislation, but their legislation is different from the UCP's legislation; they lowered it from \$500 to \$200.

3:10

So, Madam Speaker, it would be nice to have some rationale why they're doing it because it's not true when they said that this will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions. Alberta is fairly in line with other jurisdictions. Any member in this Legislature, whether on this side of the House, whether on the government side of the

House: I ask them, I invite them, I challenge them to get up in this Legislature and say on the record that that \$200 gift limit is not enough, that I need gifts to be higher than \$200. Anyone, whether on opposition side, government side, any MLA.

These are limits that were in legislation, and now what they're doing is that they are trying to consolidate the power around the cabinet table so that they can decide behind closed doors what a reasonable gift limit should look like. Maybe some days, some months that limit needs to be higher when they have awarded some sole-source contract. Around Christmas that limit might need to be higher. Around Stampede that limit might need to be higher. They need to go watch in infield suits. That's why they are giving themselves this flexibility . . .

Mr. Schow: Suites.

Mr. Sabir: Suites, infield suites. Thank you, House leader, for the correction on this one. Since English is not my first language, every once in a while I don't pronounce things accurately.

But all I meant was that they are giving themselves this flexibility so that they can change the gift limit behind closed doors as they see fit. That's unethical. That's not needed. No Albertan is asking for it. No Albertan is asking for it. It's just for their own sake. It's a very self-serving amendment to the Conflicts of Interest Act.

I urge all members to talk to their constituents, whether that's what their constituents want them to look at. Alberta is in crisis when it comes to health care. They don't have access to a family doctor. And here we have a government that is not satisfied and content with a \$200 gift limit. They don't have access to schools in their communities. In particular, in northeast Calgary we didn't see a single school in the last four years. Kids are being bused for hours to other quadrants. And here we've got a government, again, that is trying to line their pockets with gifts. We saw insurance go up, utilities go up because they removed caps on them, and now they are removing the cap from the gift limit so they can get higher gifts. That's absolutely shameful.

There are a few other changes, as I mentioned, that I will talk to as well. For instance, the bill is also making changes to the Court of King's Bench Act which will increase the number of judges from 74 to 80. Like, we don't have any issue with this change, and increasing judges creates the room for the federal government to appoint more judges, but government funds the administration. In the last four years what we have seen from this government is that they have reduced resources overall to the court system. Conflict resolution services: they have cut that. The minister was talking about access to justice, that somehow these changes will improve access to justice. Like, there are many things that this government can do that will improve access to justice, but having a higher gift limit for UCP MLAs or MLAs in general is not one of them.

In the last two or three years they have cut legal aid, for instance. That is the number one resource when it comes to facilitating access to justice. When we were in government, the then Justice minister, now MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, worked with the Law Society, with the Legal Aid Society as well, and there was a tripartite agreement entered into which would have increased \$70 million over four years to Legal Aid Alberta. The first instalment was paid to Legal Aid when we were in government. As soon as the UCP became government, they tore apart that agreement and didn't honour that agreement and instead made cuts to legal aid throughout their first tenure. There were rallies. There were protests in Calgary forcing this government to reverse some of those cuts. If they really are serious about improving access to justice, they should consider improving legal aid, facilitating people's access to justice. That would be the change that they should be making.

The second thing that would strengthen our justice system, access to the justice system, and the image of our justice system is that they need to stop interfering in the justice system, because Albertans also deserve to have a free, independent justice system that they can trust. Again, back to the Conflicts of Interest Act changes, they have made some changes that Commissioner Trussler recommended, but Commissioner Trussler also found that they broke the law.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there are others to join the debate on Bill 8? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in second reading to Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Well, you know, this is really a pattern of this government. You know, of course, I was hopeful, like I always am, that things would change from the last session to this session, but sadly it has not or doesn't appear to have changed much. That pattern is that this government will toss in some really egregious pieces into legislation that we can actually agree with most parts of it that are needed, that are helpful, that are useful, that, you know, bring us up to date. But no.

3:20

I'm going to focus on a couple of the pieces that I think, you know, as my colleague has outlined, are really awful, actually, Madam Speaker. Again, this is the latest move from this United Conservative government to remove more independent oversight of MLAs, ministers, and Premiers. It's funny. Last week – probably most of you don't realize this. The St. Albert *Gazette* is only published once a week. It's a small-town paper. It's a fabulous paper, and most constituents read it cover to cover every week. One of the *Gazette* reporters asked me last week – we were doing an interview on Bill 8. A very smart young man asked me, "So what do you think, MLA Renaud?" Sorry; I said my own name. "MLA representing St. Albert, what do you think? Do you believe that MLAs need more gifts?" I said, "No." "Do you think that they need more access to tickets or freebies?" No, absolutely not. As my colleague said, that has never once entered my thought process.

I've never heard that from a constituent in an e-mail, a call, a discussion, while door-knocking ever. I have never heard anybody say: "Jeez, I wish MLAs could get more gifts without disclosing to the Alberta public. I just think they could do their job better if they got more gifts, more expensive gifts, and tickets to do their job. I just think that's just going to make or break the difference." That is never what I hear, and I'm wagering that probably every person in this Chamber – not one person has probably had a constituent say that. If that's not the case, Madam Speaker, I would love to hear that. I wish somebody would table that from a real constituent saying: I think MLAs should get more expensive gifts. Anyway, here we are.

Just as a reminder I wanted to go back and talk about the office of the Ethics Commissioner's A Short Guide to Gifts. Now, this is fairly recent, Madam Speaker. This was published in November 2023. My colleague is waving his, too. It's very clear. It's very handy. I'm sure many of the new members in this place received the outline of how things work here. I think it's pretty crystal clear. I'm just going to go over a few pieces that I think the people watching at home really need to hear.

Now, we as legislators, or as MLAs, get this information. Our office gets this information. It's part of our job to understand the rules that we work with so we comply with the rules. I'm not saying that we're always perfect, but we do our best to comply with the rules. And for those of you at home that don't know, here they are. You can also find them currently online if you go to the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

[Ms de Jonge in the chair]

Anyway, here's A Short Guide to Gifts for November 2023.

The basic rule regarding gifts is that Members are prohibited from accepting a fee, gift, or other benefit connected directly or indirectly with the performance of their duties as an elected official.

Now, Madam Speaker, I would submit that there's a reason for that. There's also a reason for the cap.

Gifts from family are not subjected to . . . Conflicts of Interest . . . Gifts from friends are also not included unless the friend wants a political favour.

Now, that requires some disclosure, but that's a discussion for another day.

There also are a number of exceptions. The exception for gifts from charities, other Canadian governments or political parties: pretty straightforward.

Regardless of [the] value, a Member may accept gifts from their constituency association, their political party, [or a] charitable organization.

Now, that is only a charitable organization (as defined by the Canada Revenue Agency) . . .

That's an important distinction. . . . and any level of Canadian government.

Not that I imagine – well, we aren't, anyway, getting gifts from that particular source. Anyway,

Caution is advised because a Member may receive tickets to an event put on by a charity but the tickets may come from, or the seats may be paid for by, a corporation or an individual.

Now, the reason that I'm talking about that particular line in the exemption for gifts from charities, Canadian government, and political parties is that the Ethics Commissioner office is very focused on ensuring not that we are treated in the best way – I'm not saying that her office doesn't ensure that we are treated in the best way possible – but that the Alberta public feels as secure as possible knowing that the elected representatives in this place are not beholden to gift givers and that if they are being lobbied, those people have registered with the registry, with the lobbyist registry, that they are not able to skirt the rules and to give gifts without it being publicly disclosed to Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think that's important, and I think that there's a big difference between a \$200 gift – that is the limit that we currently have – and, say, a \$400 gift. Now, we don't know where that number is going to land because, like so many other things that happen in this place, those decisions will not be made in the sunshine. Those decisions will not be made in this place, debated in the open for every Albertan to see, watch, and hear. That decision will be made behind closed doors, as we heard, I think, the Premier answer a question earlier this week saying that those will be made at orders in council. That tells me that we're not involved in setting those limits.

And I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, but this particular government does not have a good track record of transparency, of openness. I've heard more than once, as I'm sure my colleagues have, criticism about this government, that what we really need is more transparency. I don't think I've ever heard any constituent say that we need less information and less oversight for politicians. Never heard that. So that is not good.

Now, "Gifts that are offered, aside from gifts from family and friends [and the ones that] are otherwise exempted," that I mentioned, "may only be accepted if they are an incident of protocol or social obligation and not above a certain value", which I already mentioned, and there's a reason for that. I think that we can all agree – I mean, you just look inside the drawer in your desk,

right? It's kind of like a walk back in time. You can see all the different people that were elected, and they put the years that they were elected and the years that they served in their constituency. I use that example because we stand on the shoulders of almost a thousand people that have come before us, and many of the rules that are in place in the independent offices and otherwise were made because legislators saw fit to put the rules in place for a reason. I can assume that all of these rules were put in place for very good reasons.

Now, do they need to be tweaked occasionally? Yes, because things change. But do they need to be tweaked and changed in secret and behind closed doors and just to benefit a select group of people? I think not. I don't think any Albertan – I haven't heard from any Albertan saying to me: I think MLAs need more gifts, less disclosure, less transparency. That's not been on my radar. I have not heard that.

Mr. Schow: Nothing behind closed doors about it. It's in the bill.

Ms Renaud: Perhaps if the member might want to intervene and ask a question, I'm happy to entertain. But he can keep yakking.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Renaud: Anyway, let's move on to tickets and invitations. "Members may accept tickets and invitations to events if the total of the value of the tickets from the same source in a year is less than \$400 without breaching the Act." Again, this act, this legislation was put in place for a reason, but we don't really hear the reason from the government telling us why it's insufficient or why it needs to be changed. I don't know. We heard some silliness about spending time in a box at a sporting event. Okay. I'm not sure what else the rationale is for more expensive gifts, less public disclosure. I'm happy to hear it. If there is a rationale, if there's a meaningful reason for doing this, I would love to see that. I just haven't seen that.

We have a lobbyist registry. It's very clear. If you are going to lobby an MLA, if you are going to lobby a minister or certainly if you are going to lobby the Premier of the province, you need to register so Albertans understand: what are you doing? What are you buying? If you are giving a gift or tickets or a fee for speaking somewhere or whatever it is, what are you buying? What is your intention? Albertans absolutely have the right to know.

Now, am I saying that the gifts are given always for an ulterior motive? Absolutely not. Sometimes gifts are just given in the kindness of people's hearts. Sometimes gifts are just given to recognize a relationship or work that you've done. Absolutely, they are not all done inappropriately. But I believe this legislation and certainly the Ethics Commissioner office is there for a reason, because we know we can point to lots of different examples or instances where things have not gone well.

Now, the other piece . . . [interjection] Oh, sure. I will let my colleague intervene.

Ms Chapman: Well, thank you so much. Thank you so much to the Member for St. Albert for letting me hop in here. As a new MLA there are all these different new pieces of the job that we're learning about, and gifts are something that I'm definitely looking to our more experienced colleagues on. You know, so far I have received a total of one gift. It was a lovely notebook from the Calgary public library. It did come with a pen as well.

3:30

Member Ceci: Was it over \$200?

Ms Chapman: No, I don't think it was over \$200. But, yeah, I'm just wondering if the member can give some context, you know, for the kinds of gifts that maybe an MLA might receive in their office. What would be sort of considered the standard and what we would be expecting to receive – what would be normal to receive as an MLA as a gift from a constituent or from a stakeholder organization or kind of any organization that you're interacting with?

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for that. That's a great question. I know I can't speak for anyone else, but some of the gifts I've received: a lot of them are home made. I have – not a big surprise – a lot of people in the disability community that I have relationships with that have made me gifts. I've had photographers give me photographs.

An Hon. Member: What did they give you?

Ms Renaud: Home-made paintings and things, home-made – like, I think there was one sort of like a papier mâché statue or something.

An Hon. Member: Did you say the distillery community?

Ms Renaud: I'm sorry?

An Hon. Member: Did you say the distillery community?

Ms Renaud: Disability. Through the Speaker.

Anyway, I have received those kinds of gifts. Like, a photographer gave me, you know, a print of a photograph of a bear or something that he took. That's quite beautiful. Then I've also received tickets, right? Lots of us get tickets. I think particularly that one of the members was talking about Stampede or K Days or whatever it is. I know that I've received, like, actually an expensive ticket – I think it was like \$250 – for an autism gala, which I'm happy to go to and support their fundraising efforts.

All of those things are reported. It's not a problem. I don't have a problem. It's a gift tracking sheet that we all have that we record what we're given. If we have to get an appraised value of something, it's not really a problem. We have staff. We can google; we can check out values of things. It's not difficult is what I'm saying.

When we focus this much time and attention – I mean, if you think about all the time and attention going into this debate and you think about what'll actually happen if this legislation passes and then you think about what's actually happening in the real world. I know my colleague earlier started to talk about: while we're having this kind of bizarre discussion about MLAs needing more expensive gifts and less transparency, we've got people that are surviving on things like income support, which is about half of what AISH is, and AISH, and they get clawed back if they get things that are beyond a certain limit, lower than MLA limits. Let me tell you, if you are an AISH recipient and you have a roommate: no problem; it's just a roommate that you're living with. But let's say that roommate becomes a relationship and you end up getting married or you end up, you know, being just more than a roommate relationship. Then it's incumbent on that AISH recipient to report their income, and then if that income is too high, AISH dollars are clawed back, like, literally clawed back.

If the partner, let's say – a good example was during COVID, Madam Speaker. We had people, AISH recipients and income support recipients: perhaps their husband or wife or partner was laid off, like so many people were during COVID, and they were able to get on to a federal income replacement benefit. Dollars were

clawed back from AISH recipients here in Alberta. So while we are nickel and diming some of the poorest people in Alberta, we're in this beautiful place talking about the fact that we need to raise the limit for gifts for Members of the Legislative Assembly. It's not okay. I don't think it's okay.

Now, the other piece that is problematic is that this bill serves to amend the Conflicts of Interest Act so that the Premier or anyone else in her entire caucus, for that matter, is found to break the law right before an election.

Now . . . [interjection] Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member giving me an opportunity to stand up and intervene. I hear the member talking a lot about the wasted time in this Chamber on this bill and how frustrating it is and there are other matters that aren't very pressing. If the member feels so strongly about that, why don't we vote on this bill? Then we can move to Bill 3, which is the opioid damages and health costs recovery act, which most certainly has an important impact on this province. I'm just curious. If the member, you know, feels so strongly about it, then let's get at it and let's vote.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for that intervention. Well, actually, I'm sure you could refer to the Blues, but I never said the word "waste" or "frustration" or anything like that. What I said is that I find it very difficult to be talking about raising the gift levels for people like us, Members of the Legislative Assembly, when I know what the policies are for people that are living or trying to survive on income support and AISH when we have rules, legislation, and policies that literally look at gift limits, literally look at any other extra income that they get and systematically reduces the poverty level income. That's what I'm concerned about.

Anyway, the other piece that I'm concerned about is that the bill serves to amend the Conflicts of Interest Act so that the Premier or anyone else in her caucus, if she's found to break the law right before an election – most of us, all of us in this place, I'm sure, are very much aware of what happened during the election. Now . . .

Mr. Nixon: You lost.

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you, Captain Obvious. But let's move on. Yeah. [interjections] How's your brother doing?

Anyway, Madam Speaker, what I am going to focus on is . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this may be fun, maybe lots in jest, but I think we're crossing some lines. Let's reset.

Ms Renaud: Anyway, I think we know what happened during the election. Actually, let me rephrase that. Let me explain what didn't happen during the election. What didn't happen during the election was this government or the Premier coming clean about what the actual plans were, because I'm pretty sure they were pretty certain that if they were honest about what the plans were immediately following an election, if they won, I'm pretty sure things would have been different. They knew that. They chose very clearly to not shine the light on what their actual plans were.

Now, what we know is that there was a plan to dismantle health care, a health care system already in crisis. Already in crisis. Let's establish more bureaucracy, spend more money, make it worse. Okay. Let's look at CPP. Let's withdraw from CPP. Oh, but let's pretend to have a referendum, and let's do some legislation about that. Also, let's increase the gift limit for MLAs because that is something super important, so important, in fact, that we're going to bring it in in the First Session of the Legislature. That says a lot. That says a great deal about what is important to this government.

Anyway, going back to the report that we got from the Ethics Commissioner. Now, I think Albertans have every right – it doesn't matter who you are. If you are running to be the Premier of a province and you have been found to have broken the law, Albertans have the right to know that. They absolutely have the right to know that. That should not be hidden – that should not be hidden – from the Alberta public. [interjections] You can keep saying it; I'm going to keep saying it, too. That should not be hidden from the Alberta public. If you have chosen to break the law, because you called your Justice minister, because you had a great conversation with a fellow who was inciting violence, and it turns out that there was a plot to harm or murder RCMP officers – I don't know – I think Albertans have a right to know.

So I have some issues with this particular piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: That was particularly good timing on the end of whatever the end of that was.

Are there other members to join the debate on Bill 8? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 8. I think this bill is problematic. Obviously, there are multiple things in the bill as there are multiple things in most bills. But in this case specifically I think section 1 is what is problematic, which is changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act.

Now, the minister just stood up in this place and defended the removal of limits on how big a gift given to an MLA can be as "flexibility." Well, Madam Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that flexibility is not a good thing in all cases. For instance, flexibility when it comes to, say, negotiable values or flexible morals is probably not a good thing, and I believe that that is exactly the type of flexibility that we are getting with this change.

The current gift limit, Madam Speaker, is \$200. Two hundred dollars is – I don't know – a pretty pricey gift. Call me old fashioned, but I don't think that \$200 is an unreasonable limit. But the UCP feel that this is insufficient, that it needs to be removed so that their MLAs can receive gifts that are higher than \$200. Now, they tend to shout at us about things like hockey games and specialty boxes at the Stampede. I don't actually consider it a great imposition on me that I'm not permitted to take those gifts. I think it's okay for an independent body to place those restrictions.

3:40

Mr. Schow: Because they never wanted to meet with you.

Ms Ganley: You know, the member can yell that they want to meet with me all he wants. I'm perfectly capable of meeting with my stakeholders outside of that. I don't have to accept their invitation.

In fact, what I did when I received invitations from energy companies to attend those sorts of events is I set up a meeting.

Mr. Schow: That's why you're over there.

Ms Ganley: I set up a meeting to hear their concerns and to listen to them. You know, the hon. Government House Leader can yell at me all he wants. It is not required that I accept their free drinks in order to listen to the concerns of stakeholders. I am perfectly capable of performing that function without taking gifts over \$200.

Mr. McIver: But did you? Did you? Did you listen to them?

Ms Ganley: Obviously, the hon. members on the other side are not, which is why they are currently screaming at me about not having taken those gifts.

Madam Speaker, I think that our duty in this House, in this place: we serve the public. The public has a right to have oversight of those

things. Now, obviously, the ministers on the other side don't agree with that position. They think the public has no right to have oversight of the gifts that MLAs receive, but I think that that is wrong. I think that that sort of flexibility, the flexibility to allow MLAs on the UCP side to accept gifts, to be lobbied without the public being aware of that – I don't think that's a good thing. I don't think it's a good thing at all. I think it erodes our democracy, and I think it makes this place weaker.

You know, they seem to have a really strong objection to our objections to this bill, I guess because they're pretty into their gravy train, and that's fine. You know, we have been sent to this place to do a job, and I'm going to do that job. I am going to call them out for the fact that we have an affordability crisis in this province, that people are unable to afford their electricity, they are unable to afford their rent, they are unable to afford their groceries, but the biggest concern that these folks have is about the size of the gifts that they are able to receive. That's their biggest concern, that they're not allowed to accept gifts over \$200.

In fact, we currently have, Madam Speaker, before this House eight bills. Eight bills in this session. And do you know what two of them are about? Two of them – that's 25 per cent of the government legislation in this House right now – two of those bills are about the gravy train. There's one bill about putting their failed candidates on agencies, boards, and commissions and paying them higher salaries, and there's one bill about increasing the size of gifts that their MLAs can accept without reporting those gifts to the Ethics Commissioner. I think that's a pretty big concern. I think that the public thinks that that's a pretty big concern, and I'm not going to be shouted down by the members opposite about those concerns because . . . [interjections] Yeah, there they are again.

These things are an erosion of our democracy. They are. Eroding our public agencies, our boards by putting insiders on them and increasing the amount of money that they can pay those insiders, because a \$400 salary isn't sufficient for a failed UCP candidate: that's a big problem.

There are a lot of problems that this government could be addressing. They could be addressing the fact that they didn't invest a single penny in affordable housing for four years in their first term in government. The crisis we see on our streets, the children unable to take the C-Train or public transit as a result of their decision to defund affordable housing: that's something we could be addressing in this place. But, oh, no. Oh, no. Of eight bills, two of those bills, 25 per cent of the UCP's major concerns, are about ensuring that political insiders can have more money, can get bigger gifts. That's the affordability that the UCP is concerned about. I think it's shameful. I'm just going to say it.

Member Ceci: Madam Speaker.

Ms Ganley: Oh, sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry; is this an intervention?

Member Ceci: Yes, please.

I was just listening to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. You talked about a quarter of the bills that are coming forward have to do with lining, essentially, the pockets – you didn't say those words; I'm going to say those words – of people who perhaps are friends and insiders of the government. Can you speculate? Do you have a sense of why the last government, the Kenney administration, didn't bring these things forward? They weren't talked about at the cabinet table, I assume, because perhaps former Premier Kenney did not allow this sort of largesse to fill people's pockets to go on, that that person had more control over

the cabinet members than perhaps the current administration does over their cabinet. Maybe you can talk about that.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for that question. It's true, and it's actually a point worth noting. These bills about lining the pockets of insiders may be the top priority of this current UCP government, but they weren't actually the top priority of the previous UCP administration. While I don't give a lot of credit often to former Premier Kenney, the truth is that he does appear to have kept some of this at bay. That wasn't his priority. It wasn't the first thing he came forward and dealt with. But this new government under this new Premier: you know, four pieces of legislation, two of them are about the gravy train.

Member Ceci: Right out of the gate.

Ms Ganley: Right out of the gate the first thing they want to do is remove limits on gifts and ensure that the people that they are appointing to agencies, boards, and commissions are able to be paid more. Just to be clear, we're talking about, in some cases, you know, a \$400,000 salary, \$750,000 salary. These aren't paltry salaries. These aren't people who are struggling to live. These are UCP insiders that apparently can't be attracted to these jobs without a sufficient amount of this money.

It's really, really troubling. The degree to which we're potentially seeing an erosion in our democracy is very problematic. We have a Premier who is very willing to besmirch the reputation of what are supposed to be independent agencies. When she brought in her renewables ban, for instance, first she said, "Oh, it was the AUC who asked for it," but the AUC said, "No." The letter made it clear. Then she said, "Oh, it was the AESO that asked for it," but the AESO didn't ask for it either. And then she said, "Oh, it was RMA that asked for it," but, oops, RMA didn't ask for it either. The willingness – the willingness – of this government to just erode those agencies that are meant to be an oversight, that are meant to keep democracy accountable is incredibly troubling to me.

I mean, I really think, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, this comes down to values. It comes down to what we value. Our values over here on this side of the House are ensuring that folks have access to their pension, ensuring that an average Albertan can afford an average life; they can have food and clothing and hockey or soccer practice for their kids and maybe the occasional vacation. Those are things that I think should be priorities of the government. Ensuring that children have access to education, ensuring that children go to school and they're not hungry when they go to school, ensuring that people have access to a doctor: these are all valid priorities for a government. These are all things that I think we should all value in this place.

But this is not what the government is acting on. What the government is acting on is ensuring that the gravy train continues, that they can put their failed candidates in cushy positions, that they can appoint insiders. We're seeing this even, you know, with respect to these sole-source contracts. I mean, they literally stood in the House today – they literally stood in the House – and defended the fact that a partisan insider that served as the president of the Wildrose Alliance under the current Premier was the only person in the province with the energy knowledge to be able to review the AER. The only person in the entire province: that's crazy, and it's obviously untrue. You know, we've written to the Auditor General to hear back with respect to that because it is highly problematic.

3:50

It really speaks to the priorities of this government, of the use of government funds and government agencies to essentially funnel money to insiders. We saw this with their R-star program that they

tried to put through; \$20 billion to folks to clean up their own liabilities. I mean, that's not a solution. I think it's extremely problematic to see these changes. It's extremely problematic to see members coming forward and asking to receive bigger gifts when we could be doing the public business, when we could be more concerned about the people of Alberta.

They shouted at my colleague saying: well, just pass the bill; just pass the bill then. Well, that's not really the point, right? The point isn't the waste of our time. The point isn't about us in this Chamber. The point is about the people, the people out there in Alberta, the people who deserve to have a government that is focused on their concerns, on their cost of living, on their inability to pay for their rent or their groceries. They deserve to have a government that thinks about the people, that believes that it is here to serve the people, and that's not what they have.

Instead they have a government that is most concerned about lining their own pockets. They have a government who thinks that it's important. The most important thing they can worry about is the size of the gifts that they receive. They have a government who thinks that their top priority should be ensuring that people who make sometimes orders of magnitude, literally 10 times, the average salary of an Albertan need bigger salaries in order to recruit and retain them. This inequality that is created by the policies of this government ultimately has an eroding effect on democracy. This situation where some people wind up with the resources to participate and other people have to dedicate every minute and every hour of their time to just trying to get by, to trying to keep a roof over their head and keep their children fed: that's not fair, Madam Speaker.

I realize that fairness is a word that we don't use that often in this place, but we should be concerned. We should be concerned about whether this province is fair, about whether everyone has an equal chance to participate in the economy and in democracy, about whether everyone has an equal chance to aspire to a position like this one, to aspire to be leaders. We should be concerned about whether people have what they need to live, about whether people have the ability to pay their rent and put food on their table and pay their electricity bill. We should be more concerned. We should be more concerned about those things than we are about the size of the gifts that we receive.

That is my problem with this bill. It is a government that is demonstrating that their priorities are not the priorities of the people that they are supposed to serve, and I think that that is shameful.

With that, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. How much time do I have if you don't mind, please?

The Deputy Speaker: Fifteen minutes.

Mr. McIver: Fifteen minutes. Okay. Well, I'll probably go to 4 o'clock or a little bit right around there, just so you know.

So much material, Madam Speaker. So much material. I mean, I can forgive some of the folks over there that weren't here before, because they don't automatically have the benefit of being here for some of the history. But what we just heard was from somebody that should know better and actually had the chutzpah, the nerve to talk about caring about average Albertans being able to pay for their groceries and their rent and their families. This from the folks across that brought the biggest tax increase in the history of Alberta when they first started in government, made everything . . . [interjections] See how upset they are when I talk about what they did.

Member Ceci: What about the bill?

Mr. McIver: This is about the bill. I'm responding to the debate I just heard.

The folks don't want to talk – the only government. Now, how old is Alberta? It started in 1905, so it's about – I don't know – roughly 118 years old. In all that time, if you look in general terms, Madam Speaker, it's about a government every four years. I know that's not a rule, but you might say to yourself: how many governments is that? I don't know the math, because it wasn't exact, but you would think: how many one-term governments do you think there were in that 118 years? It turns out there was one.

The only government in the history of this great province that got fired with prejudice after a single term of office is the folks across, and the fact seems, it turns out, that they haven't learned a thing because they have forgotten that they did more damage to this province and the affordability of Albertans to pay for their families and their groceries and to put their kids through school than the UCP did. They added the carbon tax. They made everything more important: food, transportation, dry goods, services. Actually, it was such an attack on the people of Alberta that they were fired after one term of office. No other government – no other government – in the history of Alberta was fired after one term of office, Madam Speaker. You know, the folks over there haven't seemed to learn anything from it.

Now, what a good part of this conversation was – there's so much material. I could actually be here for a long time, but I'm going to spare the folks across the humiliation because really what they've talked about is talking to Albertans, communicating with Albertans. Madam Speaker, this is about this government listening to Albertans, having meaningful conversations and meetings with Albertans about what matters to Albertans. That's what this government does. That's what this government is committed to. That's what this piece of legislation will enable.

I can see why the folks across aren't interested, Madam Speaker, because their track record when they were in government was not listening. I remember so many business people came to us and said: "I finally, after months, got a meeting with the minister. The minister sat in front of us playing video games on their computer, didn't say a word, looked at their watch and said, 'Oh, your 30 minutes are up; now I've consulted; you can go now.'" Over and over and over, and if they did say something, what they typically heard from the government ministers of the day was: if you don't agree with our government policy, we will put you out of business. That's the level of disrespect that the NDP showed Albertans when they were in office. They did this over and over and over again.

You would think that if they learned something, they would want policy that would allow the government of the day and governments of the future to spend time with Albertans to find out what's important to Albertans and to act on it through government policy. But how would you know, Madam Speaker, what Albertans worry about if you didn't actually take the time to listen to them?

That's not just the business community, Madam Speaker. Let's just touch on some of the high points, because there's so much material. They did such a bad job. Let's talk about farmers. Let's talk about Bill 6. They didn't talk to farmers or ranchers. They charged in here with an attempt to unionize the family farms. They actually accused families of not caring about the safety of their own kids on their farm or ranch. They actually said that they, the NDP, thought they were going to create a culture of safety. They actually used that phrase. The NDP actually had the courage to say that they were going to create a culture of safety on the family farm.

4:00

I can't think of anything more insulting, more out of touch, more wrong than what they've done. Of course, how do we know that they insulted everybody? Well, the folks showed up. I remember being here in front of this building, in front of the Legislature Building. Between there and as far as you could see down the open space, it was full of farmers and ranchers and other angry Albertans that cared about farmers and ranchers, people from the city that understand that while the city is a wonderful place, most of what they had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner yesterday did not come from the city; it came from rural Albertans that work hard every day.

You know what? The NDP, when they were in government, discounted decades, dare I say more than a century, of those noble efforts of rural Albertans to feed not only themselves but city Albertans and, frankly, a good part of the world, because Albertans always punch above their weight and produce much more than they can consume on their own. For a bill that's going to enable government to talk to people and listen to people, you'd think they'd be a little more sensitive, have learned something after being the only government fired after one term of office in the history of Alberta. The only one – the only one – and here they are proving that they have learned nothing, not a blessed thing, from all of that, Madam Speaker.

Now let's talk about – they talk about accountability. We know, because they had to admit it, that when they were in office, there was sexual conduct between their members. Did they ever disclose who they were? No. They actually hid that from Albertans. They admitted that it happened, but they said: we're not going to tell you. So consequently . . .

Mr. Sabir: You have people in cabinet.

Mr. McIver: See, this is the kind of not listening to Albertans, not paying attention to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, they actually had a member that billed 80,000 kilometres of mileage in one year. Now, you say: well, okay. If you want to unpack that just a little bit, if somebody was going, on average, on a highway the whole time at 100 kilometres an hour, what's that? 8,000 hours? Or it's 800 hours. On a 40-hour workweek that's 20 weeks of the year driving at 100 kilometres an hour for 40 hours every week.

Somehow the folks across there didn't correct their member. They're talking about ethics here. They didn't correct their member. They let that go by the boards. They didn't disclose what they actually knew was going on with sexual misconduct. They didn't listen to businesspeople. They didn't listen to families. They didn't listen to farmers and ranchers. Madam Speaker, they didn't listen to anybody – and now they're criticizing a bill that's going to make it more possible for government to listen to the very people that they didn't listen to – and then got fired with prejudice after one term of office. Shameful.

Madam Speaker, I could actually go on a lot longer, but in the interest of getting more business of the House done, I will now move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I am not able to put the question on a second motion to adjourn the Assembly at this time. Standing Order 28 provides that "no second motion [to adjourn] shall be made until after some intermediate proceeding has taken place." Both the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, on page 553 and *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, at paragraph 385 define intermediate proceeding as a "proceeding that can

properly be entered on the *Journals*” such as a vote or a second or third reading on the bill or reporting a bill out of committee.

In the Legislative Assembly of Alberta the rule has not been applied so strictly as to prevent a second motion to adjourn from ever being put during the course of a debate. However, there must first be a reasonable amount of time of further debate on the matter under consideration in order for the chair to conclude that it is appropriate to once again test the will of the Assembly on a motion to adjourn.

I note that under its Standing Order 34 the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia also requires an intermediate proceeding to have taken place before a second motion to adjourn may be put. *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, fourth edition, notes on page 78 that Speakers have accepted a second motion to adjourn in the absence of intermediate proceedings when a sufficient period of time has elapsed since the last motion and the Speaker deems it appropriate to test the will of the Assembly to continue with debate.

I would also note that if members prefer for some other procedure to apply in these situations, I would encourage them to speak with their respective House leaders to discuss the possibility of an amendment to Standing Order 28 to change the procedure with respect to if the motion to adjourn will be in order.

Hon. members, the choice is yours. We will proceed with debate or have some movement on this particular stage of the bill.

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, may I ask for unanimous consent to adjourn debate?

The Deputy Speaker: You can ask to waive Standing Order 28 and seek unanimous consent.

Mr. Schow: So moved.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, can you just move your motion to adjourn again?

Mr. McIver: With your permission, Madam Speaker, and always only with your permission, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 3 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023

The Chair: Are there speakers wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to rise and join debate on this important piece of legislation. First off, I'd like to rise and make clear that I do support the hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction on this important piece of legislation as well as several of the other critical pieces of legislation, regulations, and different policy changes that he is bringing forward here with the government of Alberta to significantly help deal with the epidemic of addiction that we're seeing in our province and around the world.

I do today, Madam Chair, want to talk a little bit about what we hear a lot from the NDP when we are talking about this issue, and that is the concept of harm reduction. I do not believe that when the NDP rise and talk about harm reduction, they are intending in any way to harm anybody. I don't believe that for a minute. Unlike the NDP, I don't automatically assume that the other side is trying to hurt people or do things that are negative. But I do have significant concerns with that approach that is continuing to be pushed by the NDP and others because, at the end of the day, it is a concept that will cost people their very lives. It is a misguided policy that is having a negative impact on the very people that the NDP would be professing to help.

Our approach, in turn, though, the Conservative government, is about actually helping individuals receive recovery. And I have often said in this Chamber when discussing this in the past, Madam Chair, that the approach that is pushed by the NDP has failed in most jurisdictions. Just look at San Francisco, Vancouver as examples. Any member could quickly google both of those areas on this topic, and you will see what a disaster it has been in those communities but most particularly for the people that are facing addiction. It is essentially a process that is being pushed by the left that ends up being palliative care for drug addicts, the complete abandonment of these individuals and the acceptance that they have to be stuck in a space of addiction for the rest of their lives when nothing could be further from the truth.

I've told you this story before, Madam Chair, but I don't know if I've told all of the new members in this Chamber this story. I will tell you a quick story about a young man, who was about 12 years old, who ended up living on the streets in Chase, B.C. That young man lived there for several years. He became addicted to every substance under the sun, so addicted to his addiction that he was drinking Lysol on a daily basis, Madam Chair, to be able to fulfill his addiction. He ended up being a drug mule for biker gangs and would grow up inside that community for the next several years.

4:10

When he was about 15 years old, the RCMP in Chase got so sick of dealing with him. They found him passed out in a park. Then they pooled their money together, bought him a bus ticket, and sent him to Calgary. So at 15 years old he woke up on the bus in Calgary. He had no idea how he got there, and now he was living on the streets in Calgary. He would then start to live right under where the Calgary Tower is now, along the train tracks, continuing his destructive behaviour, panhandling to pay for his habit in the +15, that's still there to this day, that goes between the hotel and the Calgary Tower if you're trying to get through that area.

Along the way came some gentlemen, who are still Albertans, and they found that individual. He was trying to raise money for more drugs. They said to him: "We're not going to do that. Instead, we're going to take you for dinner. We're going to take you in, and we're going to help you face this issue of addiction. We're going to help you get into recovery." That would start a very long journey, that I would not have time to talk about.

That individual, Madam Chair, would go through that process, through lots of hurdles, but would ultimately be able to recover from their addiction, would go on and marry a nice girl here in Alberta, would have six sons, of which I'm proud to say that I am his oldest son, two sons who served in this Chamber, two sons who served as ministers in this Chamber. He would go on to start the Mustard Seed in Calgary, one of the largest organizations that works with the poor anywhere in this country. He is now the most decorated Canadian in history for his work in poverty and with people with addictions and has continued because of his work and the people that have been with him along the way for that journey.

The Mustard Seed in Calgary tonight will impact thousands of people, literally thousands of people's lives as we speak, and has across the world. Not just in Alberta but their work across the world has impacted tens of thousands of Canadians and other people in the world, including those that are facing addictions.

Now, why do I bring that up, Madam Chair? If those individuals had chosen in that +15 to go the other way, which was to continue to give my dad the poison that was killing him and indicate to him that that was appropriate behaviour and that was the way forward instead of providing him an avenue for meaningful recovery, the simple fact is that I would not stand here today. Neither would my five brothers. We would not be here because our dad would not have lived. Neither would his 17 grandchildren. Would they be here today? I certainly wouldn't have had the opportunity to come to this Chamber. My little brother, a former member of this Chamber, would not have had the opportunity to come to this Chamber. But those three men, who are great Albertans, chose to go a different route, and that's the difference between so-called harm reduction and what our government is trying to do, what the hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction is trying to do, which is instead to provide meaningful avenues for recovery so individuals can find their way forward.

It's not harm reduction to continue to give people poison. It's not. If you were sitting out at the lake on vacation, Madam Chair, and you saw somebody drowning and they were too far out swimming, you wouldn't swim out there and keep holding their head under water and then let them up just before they were about to die and then push their head back under water and let them up just before they were going to die. If we found a poison victim that we knew was being poisoned by something in society, we wouldn't continue to give them the very same poison right up to the point of where they would pass away, intervene, stop, and then continue to give them the poison again. Of course not. You would instead try to figure out how to correct either the behaviour or the circumstances that were taking place to be able to provide an avenue for that person to recover.

You know, I was with the hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction a few months ago down at our shelter in Lethbridge, which is run by the Blood Tribe in Lethbridge. Lethbridge has been dealing with some real struggles when it comes to addictions in their community, and I have to, Madam Chair, give a quick shout-out to the Blood Tribe, who have done an amazing job down there since they've taken over that shelter working with their nation. In the case of Lethbridge it's almost 99 per cent Blood that are living on the streets doing drugs there. So it would make sense that they would lead the way, and they've been doing a really good job.

We were outside of the so-called safe injection site that AHS runs outside of that facility, talking with AHS officials, and I asked them at that time how many recoveries they were doing through those facilities, how many people that were in the state of OD had they interacted with to save their lives inside that facility. They gave us the numbers. I can't recall what it was. Then I asked how many of those people that were using the facility, that they had intervened with were still alive 12 months after the first time that they intervened. You know what the answer was, Madam Chair? I think you'll be shocked by it. One hundred per cent were not alive. Think about that for a moment. So, yes, they did interact, and they did intervene. We should help people that are ODing – don't get me wrong – but the idea that they can continue to use that drug and somehow magically be able to live long term is false. It's a falsehood. It's a false argument. Ultimately, what we're doing is that we're condemning these individuals to certain death at some point, which is not the approach that we should take.

Again, I think the hon. members across the way, when they say this, they truly do want to help. I don't dispute that at all. But the approach that they're taking is not working. I would rather the approach that was taken with my father, certainly, than that approach. Could you imagine that, if they had taken him and put him into a spot to just keep using this poison? He certainly would have died, and the consequences, obviously, for me and others would have been significant, but it would have been significant also for the province and all of the other areas that he would ultimately have a positive impact on.

The reality is that people in these circumstances want help. Sometimes they may not know it at the moment, but ultimately they do want help. They need help to be able to do it, and they can recover. I've seen it time and time again, that if you move away from this approach of continuing to give somebody the poison that is killing them, continuing, Madam Chair, to put them into a process and say that the behaviour is acceptable when it's not – it's not acceptable to put yourself in a spot where you're going to continue to end up in a spot where it's going to kill you – and instead put individuals into true recovery programs with support, you can see absolutely amazing success.

Before my time in this Chamber I ran, as you know, Madam Chair, an addiction treatment facility that was very successful. Well north of 80 per cent successful sobriety rates compared to most Alberta Health Services addiction treatment facilities, which I believe are south of 10 per cent. I don't have the exact number in front of me. The hon. minister would know. That was true recovery. Individuals would come to our program that desperately wanted help.

I had one lady who – I won't say her name, but I've spoken about her in this Chamber before. I'm immensely proud of her. She came. She was down to 80-some pounds, addicted to methamphetamine. Her parents called, begging for help. Fortunately, we had a bed at that moment. Brought her in. She went through her detox process, through her long-term recovery process inside our program, and then stayed, became a staffer, ultimately became my executive assistant while I was the executive director of that facility and would have an impact on countless other addicts' lives. Then she would go on, went to university, became a CPA, and she's an accountant about 20 minutes away from this building.

Pretty big difference between, "Hey, we can help you recover; here's the process of how to correct behaviour," and then end up in a spot that is going to make sure that you can end up having success, because that's ultimately what you would want for that individual. The alternative being what we see, sadly, happening right now, which, again, is people continuing to be told that you can take drugs – Madam Chair, you cannot take the drugs that we have in this society safely ever. There is no such thing as a safe supply of drugs. It doesn't exist. They're toxic chemicals that are killing people. That's the sad reality of what happens. That path leads to death, full stop.

Of course, we should help people, make sure that they're warm and in circumstances that they can be relatively safe for what's taking place in places like the streets or in the homeless circles that we see in our province, but the goal should be to move them to recovery. That's why I'm so proud to be part of a province that is investing unprecedented amounts into recovery. When my dad was a kid here in this province, I mean, under the age of 16 living on the streets, facing those addictions, there was no way anybody would have dreamed that the government of this province would be standing up dozens of treatment facilities all across the province to be able to make sure that individuals can receive treatment, Madam Chair, and ultimately be able to get better.

I want to encourage everybody in this House to continue to support the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, to continue to support the government in their direction of what is really a focus to save lives. This should be a nonpartisan issue. The hon. members should not want Hastings to take place inside the province. They may not understand it, but each time that they get up and advocate for it, that's what they're advocating for. I would encourage them, if they have some time, to go down and spend some time on Hastings Street and look what has taken place in Vancouver. That is not saving people's lives. Again, I give them credit. I think that they truly do want to save individuals' lives, but their approach is wrong. It will not work. This government's approach is right, and I think we have to continue as a House to do everything we can to support the minister, to support this government's direction, Madam Chair, and make sure we save as many lives as we can as a province. That's what the focus should be.

Thank you very much for your time, Madam Chair.

4:20

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 4 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Chair: Are there speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. We are pleased to see the fuel tax pause extended. Albertans are facing a tremendous cost-of-living crisis. Now more than ever we need government to make decisions that keep costs low for ordinary Albertans.

This is a bill that has many parts to it. One is extending the fuel tax pause, which is the one that is most directly applicable to Albertans and the concerns of Albertans. There is also another part of the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, that aligns provincial income tax policy for people living with disabilities with the federal government. That's also – I mean, it's very clearly a good move, and of course we support that. The lowered threshold for people with disabilities to qualify means more Albertans who are disabled are getting the support that they need, and that is good.

The other piece, the most confusing part, is with the tourism levy. The challenge with this is that currently under statute the tourism levy is required to be collected by aggregators. There were apparently challenges with the technology in order to make that happen. The stakeholders could not make it work as it was; therefore, the government has now backed off on that requirement and changed it to being a mandatory collection by the operator. Now, the challenge with this, of course, is that it leaves collection of the tourism levy in the hands of the operator, who now needs to apply for a tourism levy ID. It creates a lot of paperwork, potentially, for small operators, and it also creates the risk of leakage if operators are not aware or choose not to comply with their requirement.

We support level collection of that tourism levy that keeps every operator, large and small, on a level playing field. If it's a large hotel

operator that clearly must collect the tourism levy versus a small homestay operator or an Airbnb, both of those should be required to collect the levy. The risk here is that with small operators there are just too many to chase and that won't happen. That's the risk here. That's the question I have, that, you know, the regulations are clear and that there is an ability for the Alberta government to follow up with these smaller operators and ensure that they have the ability to comply with the law.

That, I believe, concludes my comments, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to Bill 4 in Committee of the Whole? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much. Yes. When I was reading through the bill here, Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, I really wanted the opportunity to speak on it. I just had a chat with someone in my constituency on something related, so I really wanted this opportunity.

As one of my colleagues said earlier, there are some of these bills that come to the House and, you know, there are some good things in there. Much like how a broken clock is right twice a day, there are some things that the UCP do get right now and then, and this bill does have a few really good nuggets in it.

The fuel tax pause. Now, the original provincial fuel tax pause had been set to expire January 1 of this year, but the pause will now continue until December 31. This pause has provided some much-needed relief to Albertans who are struggling under the weight of the continued cost-of-living crisis in our province. I'm also really pleased to see that the UCP took up our suggestion on this. You know, I'm sure lots of folks in this House will remember that the Alberta NDP was very vocal about this issue in 2022, about extending the fuel tax pause to provide some relief to Albertans. Given that many UCP decisions have actually driven up costs for Albertans, I was heartened to see this small nod to the pocketbooks of everyday folks, you know, just trying to drive to work, get their kids to school.

I was speaking with a constituent recently, Jason, and he's a small-business owner. We talked for a long time about how the price of fuel has an impact on his business. I actually learned a lot about trucks that day. I drive a tiny little sedan myself, but he was really knowledgeable about trucks. You know, we talked about how he owns four trucks for his business, and, like, he really puts the kilometres on those vehicles. The work that he does requires him to move all the way around the city. Calgary is a big city; it's a lot of kms going from north to south, that's for sure. So saving those few cents at the pump every time he fills up: that really adds up for him.

He reported that his business is doing well, I mean, booming even, and talked a lot about how proud he was to be able to provide a good living for himself and for his family. And he actually talked about how that hasn't always been the case for him. We talked about what it was like to grow up poorer in Calgary. Jason really knew what it was like to rely on social programs, to live paycheque to paycheque, and to struggle to cover the costs of, you know, even basic necessities.

It took Jason many years – many, many years – to pull himself out of the poverty he grew up in, and he was so adamant with me about the need for social programs to help others do the same. That was really the takeaway message that he wanted to make sure that I had from that conversation. You know, poverty wasn't a choice that he made as a child; it was circumstance that he was born into. And Jason isn't alone. There are many, many, many Albertans who are living paycheque to paycheque right now, and that world-wide

inflation crisis is hitting home right here in Alberta. The fuel tax should be paused until inflation levels stabilize.

I mean, I'd say maybe, you know, it's a bit of a shame that the government wasn't able to provide clarity on the fuel tax pause earlier to Albertans. For folks who are living paycheque to paycheque, they're running really tight on their budgets, right? They're really tracking their expenses line item by line item, and they're able to tell how much their average cost of fuel is. So knowing that they're maybe able to save \$5, \$10, \$15, \$20 in a month makes a big difference in their household budgets, and then they can plan to move that money into other areas.

You know, maybe they get to order pizza for their family on Friday night instead of just making it at home. Maybe they're able to rent whatever the newest movie is to watch at home with their families, because \$20 actually isn't enough to go to the movies. Anyone who has kids I'm sure knows how expensive it is to actually go see a movie these days. So an earlier announcement on that really would have helped Albertans with that planning and budgeting and would have really helped to lessen the anxiety that many Albertans are facing as they struggle to keep up with those rising bills.

4:30

You know, speaking of those rising bills, certainly, again, that cost of fuel is hitting many Albertans, but fuel isn't actually the biggest cost that I hear about in my constituency. While I do appreciate this government bringing Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 – and, again, certainly, that fuel tax pause is needed this year to help Albertans weather higher costs – the rising cost I hear most about in my constituency is actually electricity. Albertans are paying quadruple what they did before the UCP made those regulatory changes to our electricity market. So again, like I said, while I do support this fuel tax pause, on behalf of my constituents, certainly in Calgary-Beddington, I do hope that going forward we are able to see some movement and some action from this government to address some of the other costs that are impacting Albertans such as the cost of electricity.

Thank you again for your time on this.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 4, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. You know, in terms of making life more affordable for Albertans, this piece of legislation does extraordinarily little beyond extending the fuel tax, which we called for in 2022, and aligning provincial legislation with federal legislation for Albertans eligible for the disability tax credit to ensure the maximum benefit from the feds. And that would be, for those of you that don't know – in order to be eligible for the RDSP, which is the registered disability savings plan, you actually already need to be approved for the disability tax credit. So, naturally, this is a good thing. But I will say about this, before I move on a little bit: now, it seems to me that a few of the community and social service ministers – I think there were probably a couple of them at the time – did release some funds or fund a number of agencies in Calgary, Edmonton, I'm not entirely sure where else, and that was to actually make this more accessible.

To actually do some education in the disability community, which is a great thing, you want to ensure that as many people as possible are aware that if they are eligible for the disability tax credit, it's not that difficult to do, and once you do it, it actually triggers some other things. Again, one of my biggest criticisms of this government is that they'll do things – I think there's sometimes

a good intent. They'll say, "We're funding this much for this organization, and here's what we say it will do," but then there's never any follow-up. There's never any place you can go to see: "Okay. They spent half a million dollars to get this education out; where are the stats?" How many Albertans were receiving the disability tax credit before this massive investment in education in this area, and where are we at now two years later? I have no idea. I've actually written to the minister asking for some information but haven't received that yet. I'm hopeful, always the optimist, but we'll have to see about that.

Anyway, for the purpose of this bill debate I'm actually going to focus on the changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, that align federal and provincial tax practices as it relates to disability tax credit and, as I said, by virtue the registered disability savings. Now, to be clear, I have absolutely no issue with supporting the alignment between the two programs. Not at all. Nor do I have issue with the federal changes that triggered these changes. What I do have issue with is the lack of meaningful changes.

Now, in 2021 16.5 per cent of people with disabilities lived in poverty, which is down from 23.2 per cent in 2015, the sharpest decrease in 2020. There was a sharp decrease in overall poverty and child poverty rates, which is attributed to the significant increase in government transfers during the first year of the pandemic.

Now, earlier this afternoon I was speaking to another bill. You know, I talked about some of the things that happened during COVID. I mean, most were awful, and I hope we never go there again. But there were some things that we learned during the pandemic, and one of those things was around income. We saw just the stats – I just told you – it went from 23 per cent down to 16.5 per cent. That is a huge drop Canada-wide in poverty rates. That was because, for the first time in a long time, I think we were focused on income replacement or income support that was meant to keep people safe. The absolute focus was: let's keep people safe; let's replace what they're losing. As a result, we saw things changing.

The reason that I'm talking about this as I talk about Bill 4, statutes amendment act, is that I am extraordinarily grateful that the government even included the word "disability" and even included programs that focus on people with disabilities. But once again – you know, I do feel like a broken record, actually – it's just not enough. All you have to do is talk to your constituents that live on AISH or income support. They're not making it. They're just not.

Alberta income supports are insufficient, and I will continue to say this. Income support, which is a product – it's a program. It's, like, in a department. It's an income support product for people that are not on AISH. So people have not yet applied for AISH, have not qualified for AISH, or they're expected to return to work: they receive about half of what AISH recipients receive. Now, AISH recipients live on just over \$20,000 a year. Can you imagine living on that? Then can you imagine living on half that? Yet we've got a piece of legislation that's finally addressing some of the inequities for people with disabilities just not going far enough.

Now, for those of you that – I'm sure the government benches are all familiar with the registered disability savings plan and how that works. You have to have money to put into a disability savings plan in order to get, you know, maximum benefit out. There is a different product for low-income Canadians with disabilities that do not have any funds to put into, like, a retirement savings sort of idea because they just, I mean, can't survive. They can't survive on income support; they can't survive on AISH. So unless they have a spouse that helps them or a partner or a family or a friend that helps them financially on a regular basis, this program is not even reachable for them.

Luckily – I know you all like to trash the current government in Ottawa. That’s fine with me. I just am saying that they at least did something. They actually did something. You know what they did? They brought in some accessibility legislation for this country. You know why? Because they have a vision of a barrier-free Canada. That is something. We’re finally catching up to the Americans with Disabilities Act. That was this government that brought it in, and as a result we’re seeing all of these changes, including a disability benefit that is coming. Now, I’m a little worried about this minister negotiating that or how that’s going to work for clawbacks in Alberta, but I’ll save that for another day.

Anyway, people that have disabilities in this province: for the most part, if they’re reliant on these products – assured income for the severely handicapped, income support – the reality of their life is struggle. I’m sure you know this; this is not new information for anyone. If you are living with a disability, there are very often costs that nondisabled peers don’t have. I don’t have to, you know, replace my battery on my electric wheelchair. I don’t have the certain medications or equipment or technology that my disabled peers have. So we know there are a lot more expenses.

Now, again, I am not saying that this legislation is wrong trying to align federal and provincial rules. I am not saying it’s wrong to try to promote disability tax credit eligibility and then, hence, the registered disability savings plan. I’m not saying that at all. I’m just saying that it is not enough. This government is not doing enough for people with disabilities, period.

The Alberta Living Wage Network, in collaboration with 60 municipalities, released living wages for 2023. This is defined as an hourly wage a worker needs in order to cover their basic expenses. Now, you might not be surprised, but the lowest is Grande Prairie at \$18.90, Brooks at \$19.05. The highest is Canmore at \$38.80, St. Albert at \$23.80, and big cities Edmonton at \$22.25 and Calgary at \$23.70. Minimum wage is \$15 an hour. People can’t survive on that. Now, if you take an AISH income and calculate what they would be paid per hour at a full-time job, roughly 2,080 hours a year, that comes out to \$10.30 an hour. Why are they struggling if they’re disabled in Alberta? Because they’re living way below the poverty line. But we have legislation that’s going to align policy and make life better for people with disabilities; it’s not enough.

4:40

How deep is the poverty? Well, disabled people typically live not just at or near the poverty line. On average they’re living 30 per cent below the poverty line. That’s on average. Canadians with disabilities are struggling, and Albertans are no different. Now, what is funny – not funny-funny but funny ironic – is that, you know, we’re talking about this government that has repeatedly stood up and said: Alberta has the most generous disability benefits in the country. Not true. Factually incorrect. We know this. Factually incorrect. Just google. Incorrect. Yet they’re saying: “It’s generous. What’s wrong with that?” And they want to increase the amount of gifts they give themselves. I mean, it’s a bit mind-boggling.

Anyway, basic principles. I think – actually, I’m going to skip over and I’m going to go to RDSP for a second. Here’s a thought. Let me just put it out there for the government. They don’t tend to listen that much, Madam Chair, but I’m just going to put it out there. Let’s say that RDSP is – you know, it is a federal program. There is a matching component. It’s a larger matching component; if you have the funds to invest in the product, you get a larger grant. There is a program for low-income people. But why not look at something creative like a first-time homebuyer plan for people with RDSPs? Not all people with disabilities live in poverty. There are many that, I’m so happy to report, are doing quite well in whatever profession,

or perhaps it’s just that their family is able to support them in a way that they are not living in poverty. I’m extraordinarily happy for them, but unfortunately that is not the norm.

But let’s be creative. We are not doing enough for people with disabilities in Alberta. Just doing the status quo and upping the budget a few per cent to match growth and complexity and then patting yourself on the back as you stand up and answer a question and say, “Well, we funded this much money,” is not enough. When you fail to invest in people with disabilities, you fail to get all of the benefits that come when you invest properly in people with disabilities.

Going back to the registered disability savings plan. For those of you that don’t know about this product, I’m pretty sure that every single constituency in this province has people with disabilities living in it. Pretty confident in saying that. Here’s some good information you can take back to your folks.

Albertans under 59 are automatically qualified to set up an RDSP. They must be under 49 to receive the government matching component, though. That means that if you’re under 59, it’s very straightforward. It’s actually far simpler than applying for AISH or income support, I would suggest. But it is easy to – it’s fairly straightforward. I’m not going to say “easy” because no government application is easy. Let’s just be honest about that. But it is fairly straightforward to apply for this, to apply to be eligible for the tax credit and then automatically trigger the RDSP eligibility. Even if your people don’t have enough money to put into the product to get the larger matching grant, they can still get some extra money back to put towards savings or whatever it might be that they’re going to use it for.

So I would encourage you all – if you don’t know about this product, it is something great that we can all do for our constituents. I encourage everybody to get that information out. I would also encourage members opposite to talk to your Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, that has gotten even larger – I mean that that ministry is even larger than it used to be, so I imagine it’s tough to manage all those files. [interjection] I’m sorry?

Mr. Schow: He is a big guy who’s got a large responsibility.

Ms Renaud: Well, he’s a big guy, but, yeah, it’s a big ministry.

An Hon. Member: Bigger than the previous minister.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Okay. I suppose, if that’s how you assign people.

You know, here’s the thing. [interjection] Yeah, it’s kind of funny. Now you made me lose my train of thought here. Okay. Maybe that was the point of that.

Anyway, disabled Albertans 18 to 49 who contribute, say, \$3,500 annually will have it matched up to a lifetime total of \$70,000. That is \$70,000 these folks could use. I mean, I think we could all use more to save towards retirement or even as you get a little bit older.

Now, low-income people that I told you about – and people living on AISH and income support, let’s just be honest about that, don’t have any extra. There is no disposable income. People that have nothing to contribute will get a thousand dollars in that year for a lifetime total of \$20,000. Again, for putting nothing into that plan, a lifetime total of \$20,000 for your constituents with disabilities: that is a good thing. There’s very little that you have to do to get this information out to your disabled constituents. It is free money from the feds. I’m thinking you’ll like that. This is something that you can do. This is a nonpartisan thing, in my opinion. I think it’s incumbent on all of us to do everything we can for our constituents with disabilities.

Now, let me go back to this. I talked about this at the beginning. Now, this is the kind of thing that we should all be vigilant about. A couple of years ago this government made a significant investment. In '21-22 I think it was in the – yeah; it was actually in that annual report, 2021-22, where they listed the grants that went out. It went out to places like Inclusion Alberta, Autism Alberta, step society, Cerebral Palsy Association, immigrant-serving organizations, native friendship centres, so a good selection, a good cross-section. It looked like geographically sort of it was in the major cities, but you know it was pretty well distributed, and it was like half a million dollars that I could see. I think there's probably another round going out, so I imagine these organizations are getting more money, but there's no data.

You know, like the bill that my colleague, my wonderful colleague, brought about reporting on class sizes and complexity of classrooms, it's really hard to make any progress at all if you don't have data, if you don't know where you're going, you don't know the extent of the problem, so you certainly can't map out where you want to be and the steps you need to take, so I would encourage all of the members opposite to ask those questions of your ministers, to ask them: hey, I heard about this; how's it going? Can I get some data on this? Is it working?

You know, for a government caucus that likes to talk about small government, market-driven this, I don't personally understand why you didn't actually form a relationship with banks to talk to them. They are the experts on these products, and they've been doing it for at least a decade that I know of. I don't really know why you avoided them and didn't include them in this because I think they could actually help for free. But you know what? We'll leave that for another day, too.

Madam Chair, I obviously had a fair amount to say on this bill. I hope that it was useful. I hope more than anything else – what would be most useful is even if just a few people went back to their constituencies and did whatever they could to reach out to any of their constituents with disabilities. If they are over 18 years of age – you know what? – it's time. Get them young, get them signed up, get a disability tax credit, get them eligible for this grant. They are going to age. They are going to have expenses, and I guarantee you that they are going to have some challenges and barriers to employment because that's a fact. Disabled Albertans are, I think, twice as likely to be unemployed as their nondisabled peers. This is something that we can all do to support people. They're all going to need a bit of a cushion when they get older.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 4. The Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa has proven again that they are out of touch with reality and everyday Albertans. Despite the sustained affordability crisis the NDP-Liberals continue to impose the carbon tax and move full steam ahead with irresponsible fiscal policies that are hurting our families.

Our United Conservative government is looking out for Albertans. Comparably within Canada Alberta remains one of the most affordable places to live, and while this is the case, we recognize the pressures that Albertans are facing and recognize that there's a lot of important work to do to shield hard-working Albertans from national and global inflationary prices and pressures.

We remain committed to protecting the Alberta advantage, so I rise today to encourage all members of this Chamber to support Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, to implement measures

to help keep life affordable for Albertans. Families are having to make tough choices. Seniors are struggling and feeling uncertain about their futures, and while this government has invested record levels in food banks across the province, it's tragic to see the increased reliance on food banks. Many of the most vulnerable Albertans are facing the brunt of the affordability crisis.

Bill 4 supports our commitment to help make life affordable for Albertans and support economic growth. This act, Madam Chair, is the embodiment of our unwavering commitment to Albertans, ensuring that our tax laws not only remain relevant and efficient but also serve as a bastion of economic stability and growth.

There are four main components in Bill 4 that, if passed, will work in conjunction to nurture the Alberta economy and keep life affordable. The first element of the Tax Statutes Amendment Act is the Fuel Tax Act. This means that our government will legislate the extension of the provincial fuel tax pause to the end of 2023, a decision that we announced earlier this year.

4:50

We understand the financial challenges that many Albertans are facing, including those in my home of Chestermere-Strathmore. Legislating the extension of the fuel tax pause shows our government's commitment to keeping life affordable. This is a promise we've made to keep costs down for families and businesses, especially when times are tough. We promised that we would pause the provincial fuel tax so Albertans don't have to pay the additional tax when they're filling up their truck or car. We've kept our word, and we're committed to making sure the law says the same thing, which is no fuel tax to the end of this year. That means that every time you fill up, you're saving money, and that adds up. As a result, Albertans are seeing real relief and real results.

Another important aspect of Bill 4 is the changes to the Tourism Levy Act. These amendments, as announced in Budget 2022, will bring in a new framework to address a gap in the current legislation surrounding the collection of essential tourism levies by online brokers. The changes in this bill will help address industry concerns that will streamline the process, ensuring an efficient and well-defined process for everyone.

Bill 4 will also update and enhance a number of technical and administrative aspects of Alberta's tax system, including the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. These changes will ensure that our tax legislation is aligned with federal legislation, making sure things like eligibility criteria for tax credits remain consistent across both provincial and federal laws. By aligning our legislation, we're making sure that Albertans and their businesses have clarity and, as a result, a more straightforward path to success.

Each one of these changes is a piece to a larger puzzle. They show our government's determination to build a tax system that doesn't just collect money but does so with a sense of justice and understanding of the realities Albertans face. It's about doing everything we can to make sure that Albertans have an opportunity to thrive. The changes we're proposing through Bill 4 are not just about numbers on a page; this is about everyday life in Alberta. This is about making sure that when Martha and Henry sit down at the kitchen table to plan their budget, things are a little easier.

By bringing our tax legislation up to speed, these are not just about making small adjustments to paperwork; we're giving back to Albertans, supporting the tourism industry, and we're helping families and businesses keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets. We're making sure that our tax laws are easy to understand and follow.

As I previously said, the cost of living in my home of Chestermere-Strathmore and across the province has been consistently climbing

during the government of the Trudeau Liberals. We are really feeling first-hand the effects of irresponsible fiscal management in Ottawa and the global supply chain issues, and as the parliamentary secretary for Affordability and Utilities I'm proud to see the steps that our government here in Alberta is taking to help keep life affordable for Albertans. These amendments to the Fuel Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act are necessary steps that we must take in protecting the affordability for Albertans, and I invite all members of this Chamber to support Bill 4 with me. These are common-sense steps needed to ensure our tax system reflects the values of fairness, clarity, and the economic progress that our province stands for.

We believe that by making these changes, we're building a stronger economy, and a stronger economy means better jobs, better services, and a better quality of life. This bill is about setting Alberta up for success today and in the years to come. I'm confident, Madam Chair, that these changes will have a positive and lasting impact on the economic well-being of our citizens and the overall health of Alberta's economy. We are committed to a tax system that stands as a pillar of support, not a barrier to success.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and to this hon. House for considering the ways in which we can make Alberta not just a place to live but a place to prosper. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 4 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 3 and 4.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 3 and Bill 4.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 6

Public Health Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Amery]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. Everything old is new again, because this is a government that's already tried more than once to award itself more sweeping power, especially including, actually, before through the Public Health Act. I think back to the spring of 2020, Bill 10. Bill 10 came to this floor, introduced during the first wave of the pandemic, in which the government attempted – in fact, well, they didn't attempt; they passed the bill. They awarded themselves the sweeping power to not only amend or add to any existing law but to write entirely new laws behind closed doors at the stroke of a pen without ever setting foot in the Legislature. Unprecedented. This government thought it should have the power to create entirely new legislation simply in a backroom somewhere without ever debating it or voting on it in the Alberta Legislature, and they passed that legislation. In fact, it was supported by ministers who are sitting in this current government.

Indeed, we spoke in this House. We raised concerns. They said it was only a clarification of powers that they believed they already had. You want to talk about a sense of entitlement, Madam Speaker? They assumed they already had that power and were just passing legislation to clarify that they believe they had the right to create brand new legislation without ever setting foot in the Legislature.

Now, we introduced a number of amendments to try to curb that sweeping power. They were all rejected by the government. Indeed, the Minister of Municipal Affairs stood in this House and told me that those amendments were not necessary; it was okay; we've got this; it's not a problem. Well, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, it was a significant problem and this government heard about it.

They heard about it from constituents across this province who were upset at the arrogance and the entitlement of this government in trying to take that power for themselves. They had major push-back for the committee, so much so that the government was eventually forced to call an entire special committee of the Legislature to review the entirety of the Public Health Act as a distraction while they walked back that colossal mistake. Hours of time, expense, staff hours here at the Legislature because this government refused to listen when they tried to pass legislation awarding themselves these kinds of sweeping powers.

After that you might think that they might have learned their lesson. You would hope so. But no. Last year with the arrival of the new Premier, new leader of their party, they pushed forward with their promised sovereignty act, and right there in the middle of the sovereignty act, Madam Speaker, once again exactly the same thing. They didn't learn the first time. They didn't learn when Albertans were upset and pushed back and wrote hundreds of e-mails to their ministers. They tried to do it again. Right there in the middle of the sovereignty act they had a section that would grant the UCP cabinet new powers to bypass the Legislative Assembly and unilaterally amend provincial laws all over again. Now, they spent at least a week in the Legislature, in the press denying that they were doing what they were in fact doing before they finally admitted that was what they were doing and finally agreed to amend the act and take that section out.

So we have a pattern with this government, Madam Speaker, multiple examples where they have clearly appeared to think that they are above the law and multiple attempts to actually codify that in law. Now we have in front of us Bill 6, which is another bill in which this government wants to make themselves the final arbiter and decision-maker in the case, of all things, of a public health

emergency. That is what this bill does. This bill gives cabinet the power to override absolutely anybody on decisions about public health. Now, of course, we do know that during the COVID-19 pandemic that's exactly how they chose to behave even though they would have known that that was in contravention of the law.

5:00

The Public Health Act, well, currently states – that's why we have this bill here, because they want to stop it from stating it. The Public Health Act currently states that only the chief medical officer of health has the right to give final approval of public health orders. Only the chief medical officer of health. But in the midst of one of the most serious public health emergencies we have seen in this province in generations, the government ignored that fact. We know that on multiple occasions and consistently the government, cabinet, gave final approval on public health orders despite the fact that the legislation, the Public Health Act, said that that was the sole right and responsibility of the chief medical officer of health.

Now, we recently, in fact, had that quite well clarified. Now, this government likes to clarify legislation. Thankfully, we have the courts, which do a much better job. The courts, in the case of *Ingram versus Alberta*, contested this government's assumed view. They found, in fact, that the government was in violation; therefore, a number of the public health orders and restrictions that had been issued during the pandemic were now invalid because this government chose to act contrary to the law. So once again now we have the government coming in and trying to clarify the Public Health Act by officially awarding that power to themselves.

Now, Madam Speaker, there has been some commentary on this already. I really appreciate that here in Alberta we do have some excellent law experts. Dr. Lorian Hardcastle is a wonderful health law expert at the University of Calgary. She has provided some very helpful commentary throughout the pandemic, and at many times provided some helpful, I think, analysis and criticism of some of the government decisions. She took a look at Bill 6, and you know what? She did note that the approach that's being put forward in Bill 6 is, in fact, the approach of some other jurisdictions, other provinces in Canada, so I recognize that fact. There are other provinces in Canada where government holds the final responsibility in terms of issuing public health orders, so it's not an unprecedented step.

But, Madam Speaker, once again this government simply could not resist putting on just a little extra secret sauce. Section 74.1 in this amendment awards this government sweeping new powers that no other government in Canada has. So once again this government, you know, almost got there. You know, I could not have criticized them for the legislation if they had simply done what other jurisdictions have done because it is a fair and working workable model. Now, certainly, many people raise concerns about the particular individuals that may be in this cabinet and that were in the previous cabinet in terms of them making those decisions about public health orders, and I'll have more to say about that in a moment, but the fact is that it is a model that exists.

But section 74.1: no other jurisdiction in Canada. Here's why: because it allows cabinet to “by order reverse or vary any decision of any decision-maker” under the Public Health Act, not just during a public health emergency; at any time. That includes any decision made by the chief medical officer of health, the deputy chief medical officer of health, the appeals board. This government puts itself above that appeals tribunal. They put themselves above every single health inspector in the province of Alberta. They say that they know better than every director in the system.

Madam Speaker, think about that. We just went through a significant health emergency here in the province of Alberta where

we had many, many children who were deeply ill from E coli poisoning because of a lack of oversight, and this government feels that it should have the power – if a decision in that situation had been made by the inspectors who went into that daycare and chose to shut it down to protect those kids and their families, this government believes they should have the right to override that decision. Now, to the best of my knowledge, nobody who's currently sitting at the cabinet table has training as a health inspector, but they feel they should have the ability to override. None of them have training in public health, but they feel that they should be able to override any decision made by somebody who does.

Again, Madam Speaker, this is a power that is not enjoyed or exercised by any other government in Canada, so my question to this government, to the Minister of Justice is: why? Why do they feel they need a power that no other government in Canada has? Indeed, I would ask that to the members of that government, the private members who are sitting here, some of whom I know have great resonance with folks like Mr. David Parker or Preston Manning in his recent report talking about government interference in public health.

Do they feel that government should have more power over public health? Any government? Not just their government; any future government? If they're voting for Bill 6, that is what they are voting for. They may feel that in their hands this power is absolutely A-okay even though they would not trust this from any other government. They certainly wouldn't trust it from the federal government. But they feel that they should have that power. These private members, if they vote for these bills, are voting to say that they trust their cabinet colleagues to have that power over themselves and their constituents.

Perhaps they should go and discuss that with their constituents and see if they feel similarly. I can tell them, from the correspondence I got on Bill 10 way back in 2020, which came from across the province and a whole lot of seats where these members represent, that folks were not fans of it then. I doubt they'd be fans of it now. But, Madam Speaker, everything old is new again: new sweeping powers for this government. I wasn't comfortable the last two times this government tried to sneak this through. I am certainly not comfortable with it now, especially because Bill 6 is awarding these powers to government. Now, of course, the powers that are enjoyed by some other governments in Canada as well as these sweeping new powers under section 74.1 that are not – with absolutely no requirement of transparency or accountability. Absolutely none.

The government has the ability to exercise any one of these powers and never have to explain itself, provide no justification, provide no data. They simply get to make these decisions behind closed doors and never answer to anyone.

Now, the bill does say the government must consult and consider the advice of the chief medical officer of health. We have seen how well this government consults. Just ask Albertans about the Alberta pension plan, how consulted they actually feel as this government spends 7 and a half million dollars to force its propaganda down their throats, holds telephone town halls where they screen the callers and where the moderator, in fact, tries to shout down Albertans who disagree. You can ask the Indigenous communities who have raised concerns about this government's lack of consultation on sweeping changes to our health care system. This is a government that does not know the meaning of the word “consult.” We saw that during the last pandemic.

An Hon. Member: Bill 6.

Mr. Shepherd: This is a government that loves to pull up things from eight years ago but can't even look in the mirror and see the log in its own eye.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When this government makes a decision under Bill 6, there is no means for anyone to be able to tell if they actually are following the advice or if they have even considered or heard the advice of the chief medical officer of health. In fact, this is fascinating, Mr. Speaker, because this runs in direct contravention to the recommendations from their own new Manning report, you know, the Premier's personal adviser and supporter who she paid \$250,000 to write his own little piece of political propaganda that he's already shopping around to his buddies with the Conservative Party of Canada.

5:10

Now, he thinks that as soon as anyone chooses to challenge a public health order in court, as soon as that happens, that order should be stayed, so immediately that order is declared null and void until such time as it goes through the entire court process. That includes all the way up to those Laurentian elites all the way out east that this government is such a big fan of. They think they should get consideration on any public health order before it is allowed to actually take effect.

But this government thinks it personally should have the right to simply choose to implement any health order or override any decision made by anybody in the entire apparatus of public health immediately without providing any reason or justification.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen this film before. We saw how this government chose to act in the face of public emergencies and the impacts that had on Albertans. Let us not forget the best summer ever, where as case counts rose and beds filled and Albertans were begging for action from this government, they sat silent for weeks. No one was minding the store. The Premier was on vacation. The Education minister was apparently covering for Health, but she was nowhere to be seen either.

It took until well into September before we saw any action from this government. And that, Mr. Speaker, I dare say was at the cost of lives. It was at the cost of incredible impact on our health care system. It was an embarrassment, it was a tragedy, and it is emblematic of how this government has chosen to operate when it comes to public health. And now they want to give themselves even more sweeping power to behave in exactly the same way with no accountability, no transparency.

How well is this government able to handle a public health emergency? Well, let's look at recently the shortage of Children's Tylenol, Mr. Speaker. That was a relatively minor emergency, and this government's plan, unconsulted, unsupported, was to spend \$75 million to try to obtain that from Türkiye. How well did that work out? Only 1 and a half million of the 5 million bottles they bought actually got here; of those, 4,700 actually got to pharmacies. And we're not going to see the vast majority of it even ever actually arrive in this province, so we are essentially looking at a cost of about \$5,000 per bottle for what was actually delivered and used.

An Hon. Member: What would you guys have done?

Mr. Shepherd: This is a government that says it is prepared to handle a public health emergency. The members opposite say: what would we have done? Not that. The problem was resolved within a matter of weeks by the federal government, who actually used the proper systems to actually increase the supply. By the time their \$5,000 knock-off Children's Tylenol got here, it wasn't needed.

Of course, in the Manning report we have the recommendation that evidence-informed decision-making consider nonscientific evidence as well. Mr. Manning said: you don't want to exclude evidence that hasn't been arrived through the application of the scientific method and testing in some laboratory. Oh, God, no, Mr. Speaker. Why would we want to exclude anything that actually hadn't been scientifically tested? My God. In the midst of a pandemic?

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, a government who commissioned a report like that, a government that contains people who compared vaccinated Canadians to supporters of Hitler, called unvaccinated people the most discriminated group they had ever seen, who promoted horse dewormer as a cure for COVID-19, and have spread and promoted conspiracy theories about the World Economic Forum: they should hold not only the power of all decisions on public health but sweeping powers that no other jurisdiction in Canada affords its government, and they should hold that power with zero accountability and zero requirements for transparency? Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, we on this side of the House fundamentally disagree.

We are going to take the opportunity to make a bad bill better, to remove some of these egregious pieces and at least bring this in line with other jurisdictions in Canada so that Albertans can at least have some protection against a government that has demonstrated that when it comes to public emergencies, it will never fail to put politics ahead of public health, that has demonstrated utter incompetence time and time again in the face of public emergencies. Albertans deserve far better than what is being presented here in Bill 6. I believe this government knows it; I believe these private members know it. The question is whether they are going to have the courage to vote against it or whether they simply have the courage to toss heckles across the aisle, like children.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I can say that, without amendment, I certainly will not be voting in favour of Bill 6, and I certainly look forward to many more opportunities to clarify precisely why. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East is on his feet, followed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. This bill is intended to provide additional clarity about decision-making under the Public Health Act to all Albertans.

Firstly, I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-East for sending me here to represent and speak for them. As a person who values the hard work and well-being of Albertans, I am more than willing to speak in favour of this legislation. I would like also to thank the minister for introducing this significant bill.

Mr. Speaker, this bill shows that Alberta's government will continuously stand up for the interests of all Albertans. Bill 6 proposes legislative measures that would create clear lines of authority related to public health decisions and affirms that the people elected by Albertans should have the authority to make the final decision based on scientific and medical public health factors during public health situations. As elected representatives of Albertans we are expected to hear their concerns in matters that are important for them. As we legislate, amend, or repeal laws to be implemented in this province, we consider these concerns in matters of our constituents. We are as well expected to prioritize their health and safety.

As part of democratic exercise, the voice of the majority prevails, meaning that the incumbent government, who has the trust and confidence of the majority of Albertans, is tasked with and entrusted to make the necessary decisions. As such, the legislation, that limits the ability of members of this Chamber to decide about the wellness of Albertans, must be changed or amended to give effect to that authority. This bill does that, Mr. Speaker, by empowering the Lieutenant Governor in Council to have a say in determining what would be in the best interests of Albertans.

As we are all aware, the Public Health Act is aimed at protecting and promoting the health of the public by addressing the treatment of communicable diseases and outbreaks, management of environmental hazards, and management of pandemics, and response to public health emergencies. The Public Health Act also outlines the duties of the chief medical officer of health, the deputy chief medical officer of health, medical officers of health, and public health inspectors. During a public health emergency section 29 of the Public Health Act permits a medical officer of health, including the chief medical officer of health, to take the steps that are necessary to suppress the disease, protect those not already exposed, break the chain of transmission, and remove the source of the infection as well as any other steps that are, in their opinion, necessary to lessen the impact of the public health emergency.

5:20

However, section 29 of the act does not currently include any cabinet decision-making authority. Mr. Speaker, during the summer, in this ruling on the Ingram case, the court clarified who has the authority in issuing public health orders as provided by the Public Health Act. It is an important ruling regarding government decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. In her decision Justice Romaine concluded that the public health orders under section 29 of the act must be made by a chief medical officer of health or one of the authorized delegates under the act. That means that the delegation of the chief medical officer of health's decision-making authority to cabinet is not permitted by the act in its current state. In order to provide that authority, like I mentioned a while ago, elected officials have the responsibility to ensure the health and safety of Albertans. The government reviewed the Public Health Act, and the result of the review is now embodied in this bill.

In accordance with our mandate, we are changing the Public Health Act in response to the Ingram court decision to ensure that decisions made during future public emergencies will align with Alberta's legislation. Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the Public Health Act that Bill 6 carries would provide clarity about who is responsible for decisions on public health orders during a declared state of public health emergency. Bill 6 would state plainly the roles and responsibilities of cabinet, medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health, and make the act reflect the trust and confidence of Albertans in their elected officials having the authority to issue the necessary decisions during future declared states of public health emergency.

What specifically will the amendments to the Public Health Act achieve for Albertans? While medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health, and their designates retain final decision-making authority for orders impacting a specific person or persons or a specific public place, amendments to section 29 would grant authority to cabinet to issue orders respecting all persons or groups of persons, including groups of individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and educational institutions, during the declared state of public health emergency. Orders and decisions would be made after taking into account the advice of the chief medical officer of health.

Mr. Speaker, let me again highlight that cabinet and cabinet committees would only make decisions after considering any

advice from Alberta's chief medical officer of health. This means that the chief medical officer of health will continue to fulfill the vital role of providing expert clinical advice to cabinet to help guide their decision-making during a declared state of public health emergency.

If passed, Bill 6 will ensure that the people elected by Albertans would make the final decisions based on scientific and medical public health factors during a public health situation. Albertans elect public officials to make the big decisions on their behalf, and that is why it is important that we make Alberta laws helpful to elected officials to make great decisions for our people.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that during a public health emergency the lines of authority and responsibility must be clear, and they must follow the law. In passing this bill, cabinet will be empowered to take the steps necessary to lessen the impact of the public health emergency, including steps to suppress disease, protect individuals from being exposed, break the chain of transmission, and to remove the source of infection.

Mr. Speaker, we want Albertans to know that public health is the top priority of our elected officials. We want Albertans to know that we are keeping to our mandate of prioritizing and protecting their health and safety and that our government is committed to providing a high-functioning health care system that aligns with our legislation. The current health care system's structure limits the government's ability to provide a system-wide oversight, to set system priorities, and to require accountability for those priorities on behalf of Albertans. To overcome current challenges and deliver the right care for my constituents and Albertans at the right time, these amendments will ensure that Alberta families are at the forefront of every health decision-making. Even during public health emergencies we will continue to act on behalf of health care workers, patients, and all Albertans to ensure that our system is strong and resilient for generations to come.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our world-class health care professionals – doctors, nurses, paramedics, and all front-line workers – who continuously and tirelessly provide exceptional health care to patients and families, that keep our health care system running every day. They deserve a system that works in alignment to Alberta legislation, as do patients and their families, and we are going to ensure that we will keep working hard to deliver that for them.

Mr. Speaker, I want Albertans to know that we dearly value the advice and input of the medical community and will continue to value the role of the medical community as partners in supporting Albertans' health and well-being.

In conclusion, if Bill 6 passes, the Public Health Amendment Act will ensure that the elected officials who make decisions are ultimately held accountable, bringing the legislation in line with the Ingram case court decision. This amendment will not slow down public health decisions during an emergency. Our government assures Albertans that public health officials will still have the latitude to move quickly during a public health emergency. Cabinet will have the entrusted authority to review decisions although the length of making these decisions may vary as necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I urge members, on both sides of this Chamber, to vote in favour of Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, as this bill is proof of the fact that this government is committed to ensuring that the best decisions are made for the health of Albertans during a public health emergency as their health and safety is our top priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 6.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. This bill gives power to politicians to oversee the health of Albertans even in a public health emergency. It gives them the power to completely ignore the advice of the chief medical officer of health and to not allow the public to even be aware what advice was given. This is supposed to be the government of choice, the government that wants people to take personal responsibility. They're not even allowing the public to be informed so that they can, if they choose, decide to take that personal responsibility.

I understand that actions of a government might not always follow the exact detailed advice of the medical officer of health, but a truly expert medical officer of health will not only provide their input on the medical side, but they're also properly, fully trained in understanding what's gone on in other jurisdictions. They know what the evidence is for different actions, and they'll be able to present that to the government. We need to hear what they have to say. We need to hear why the medical officer of health makes a specific suggestion and . . .

5:30

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I just hear an exuberant amount of personal conversations. If you'd like to have them, I encourage you to do so in either of the lounges. The peace lounge is also available.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the call.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need to be able to know what that information is, and the medical officer of health will need to justify their recommendation. We need the interventions that they recommend on the public to be explained. We need the government to say why they are not following that evidence. We need to know what the decisions are based on. We need to know that they're not based on an anecdote or several anecdotes. We need to know they're based on evidence. The public need to be informed. If the government chooses not to follow the advice of the medical officer of health, the public really need to know why that is, and we need to know their rationale. Give Albertans a choice, a chance to take that personal responsibility. If this government actually believes in those things, they will not go forward with this bill in its current state. Maybe they're just buzzwords. Maybe they're slogans. Maybe the idea of personal responsibility and choice are not really things that they can stand behind.

Now I want to talk to you a little bit about what real evidence is. Absolutely, the first step in solving any medical problem, including public health problems, is observation. Observation is anecdote. That's where you hear: oh, this happened, and I believe it's due to this. We all say in medicine that multiple anecdotes is not evidence; it's multiple anecdotes. But they are important in order to tell us we need to get evidence, and it should lead us to look into a problem, and in many cases that will lead us to find that we already have an answer to a problem and that that anecdote doesn't hold up in the whole court of evidence. The association between an event and a consequence may suggest cause and effect, but it does not prove that we have evidence.

In science we also need to explore other possible explanations for why one event maybe precedes something else that happens. We need to know the certainty of those relationships, and we need a government that respects that scientists actually know how to evaluate that cause-and-effect relationship in a specific field. We need to know that Albertans are not living with decisions based on anecdote, especially when that anecdote might be coming from a selected population, just the people that live in a certain area or people that fit a certain profile. Albertans deserve better. If we're

going to put politicians in charge of public health issues, we need to know how they arrived at these public health decisions.

I want to raise another flag, and that is that Alberta currently does not really have a medical officer of health that is trained in public health; we have a very expert physician who is trained in infectious disease. Public health is much, much more than infectious disease. It is about emissions from factories and mining operations, et cetera. There are many things that come into public health. I have heard from several sources that we don't have a chief medical officer of health trained in public health because over 200 people have been reached out to and nobody wants the job. In fact, someone said to me: if I would have taken that job, I would by definition have not been qualified because for the job as it stands now in Alberta, the person is not really allowed to do what they're professionally required to do. So we need to be very careful about who is controlling the message and that we're letting the medical officer of health actually speak to their expertise.

Are we going down the road of politicians looking after making more medical decisions? Do you want to start opening your constituency office up to help your constituents that don't have a family doctor? Are we going to have politicians be making engineering decisions on safety issues in road safety, in equipment safety? I think we need to give the respect to the experts in this area so that Albertans can be safe.

Now, an example I'd like to give you about evidence is that when a drug is being developed, there is – often one route to getting a drug in development is anecdote, where there's a question about whether this drug maybe is making this condition better. That can often be the start of developing a drug for a specific condition.

The next thing that happens is that you take more information. You dig into more information about that drug to find out whether there's any particular reason why that drug might scientifically have a reason to be beneficial in this particular situation, and one of the drugs that we looked at during the early days of COVID – and I was one of the leads on this drug development – was to see whether indeed there might be some benefit to hydroxychloroquine for keeping people well enough that they didn't need to be admitted to hospital.

Looking at the scientific evidence, it was very weak. There were some suggestions that maybe there was something to this, but we had a crisis on our hands. We had a crisis, an impending crisis of collapsing our health care system, and we needed to look quickly at anything that we could that was reasonable and safe to decide if we could make that collapse of our health care system less likely by identifying whether this drug, hydroxychloroquine, a generic drug, pretty inexpensive, might be able to reduce the likelihood of a person being admitted to hospital. So even though the evidence was weak, it was one of a few things that was in line for being tested.

The next step is to go on to a proper clinical trial to find out if it really holds up, because when you take a drug to a clinical trial, you find all kinds of unexpected things, and more often than not drugs don't pass the test of a clinical trial.

So anecdote is a great place to start and get an idea. You need to back it up and have more rationale, or you're never going to get a grant to do your study. But then you do have to go on and do a study that actually can test the question of whether it actually is helpful.

So we went on to be studying this drug, and it takes a huge number of people to test it in order to get your answer. If a drug is great and it works every time, you don't need that many people, but when you're looking for a pretty marginal benefit such as in this case preventing people from hospitalization and when you know that even without the drug most people aren't going to need hospitalization, you really do need thousands of people to be tested to know whether you're getting some benefit. When you're looking

at collapse in your health care system, even a little bit of benefit for something that's safe – in most people it can be used safely – and that's inexpensive is worth having a look at. So we went ahead and did that, and as all of you know, the major collapse of our health care system, like was experienced in some places in Italy and in New York and in a few places where they're really turning a lot of places into morgues: we didn't experience that here, so we didn't have the large numbers of people that would go into a trial.

5:40

One of the things you can do when you have a drug that you're testing – and this would go for many other aspects that apply to public health or other science and medicine – is that you can use a proper scientific process to combine the data from different studies. We did that internationally, because our study with not enough patients in it to answer the question didn't actually tell us for sure whether this was going to work or not. It looked very much like we're not getting any signal of benefit at all, but maybe we're biased, maybe people were healthier here than in other places, so we worked with people all around the world – in Europe, in South America, in the United States – and combined the data from many different trials that looked at the same question, whether hydroxychloroquine could actually decrease the risk of a person who is an outpatient having to be hospitalized, whether that was a thing.

We combined the data and moved on. [interjection] Yes.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. You know, the member is speaking extensively about the scientific method and the means by which she personally as a researcher undertook to look at things like medications, but Preston Manning feels that that kind of work – that we don't want to exclude evidence that doesn't have that kind of rigorous work. He says that we shouldn't just depend on the application of the scientific method and testing in some laboratory to decide on treatment in the midst of a pandemic or decisions that might be made about a medication. I was just wondering what the member as a physician herself thinks of that.

Dr. Metz: Well, certainly, thank you, hon. member. We certainly saw a lot of that during COVID, during the COVID pandemic, that there were a lot of anecdotal suggestions of this treatment or that treatment, many of which had very clear evidence that they did not work or that they were actually quite unsafe, and if there was enough evidence to suggest that they may work, they went on to some further testing either during the pandemic, the early days, or later. Some of the ideas didn't even have any scientific basis for them, and they didn't even get to the stage of anyone being ethically able to test them.

It's really important that we consider scientific evidence when we make our decisions, and it is extremely scary to me that we would consider on an equal footing or at all evidence that is anecdotal or someone's idea rather than scientific evidence. You can always use science to change opinions or modify them, but you don't use anecdote to change what the scientific evidence is without going through all the required steps of testing a hypothesis.

I'm worried, and for that reason I cannot support the Public Health Amendment Act. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others to second reading of Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'd just like to start by thanking my colleague the Member for Calgary-

Varsity. It's always a real pleasure to hear her speak on the topic. She has, you know, a lot of knowledge in the area.

Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023: what does Bill 6 do? What it does is it

proposes legislative measures that would create clear lines of authority related to public health decisions and affirms that people elected by Albertans should have discretionary authority to make the final decisions based on scientific and medical evidence during a public health situation, aligning how decisions were – and should be – made.

I think we'll be agreeing to disagree on this one.

You know, the first thing: I know when I saw this bill come up and I saw "health," what I thought I was going to be seeing was maybe a bill that was going to address the crisis in health care that we're seeing right now. Is this a bill that's going to be focused on how we recruit, train, and retain more doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals? No. Unfortunately, that's not really what we're seeing happen in this bill at all. You've not been seeing that come forward in any bills actually addressing the issues, certainly not the issues that I'm hearing about in my constituency.

I actually had a family doc come into my office last week, and she wanted to talk to me about, you know, the issues that are facing her practice. She's been practising in primary care I believe it was 25 or 30 years, and she said that this is actually the worst that the crisis has been in primary care in her time practising. She wanted to talk about the difficulties that there were filling the residency positions, especially compared to other provinces. Actually, I was talking to a couple of different docs this morning, and they had an interesting fun fact, which was that Saskatchewan was able to fill all those positions. They don't even have a better climate or . . .

Ms Renaud: Mountains.

Ms Chapman: Yeah. I mean, it's Saskatchewan. No mountains at all.

She wanted to talk about how one of the partners in her firm was retiring early, and it was really going to cause a big crisis in her practice. You know, it's a small practice. It's just four or five docs, and the issue is that the young docs coming up are really not wanting to fill those positions in primary care. So what is she to do? Like, the business can't keep operating if she's not got enough docs in there. These are the concerns certainly that I've been hearing from doctors when I'm talking to my constituents.

I live in a really established riding. I've got a lot of seniors, so I hear a lot about knee replacements. [interjection] Oh. Yes, please.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. Thank you to the member for the opportunity to speak. You know, the member was just speaking of the challenges that we are facing with recruiting and indeed retaining family doctors here in the province of Alberta, I think. I was at the same meeting this morning, and those doctors spoke of the significant disruption that's been created under this government and how that's created so much uncertainty that has made it far more difficult to retain and recruit. I'm just wondering if the member feels that having a government that gives itself the opportunity to exercise such sweeping power on public health, to make decisions that could run contrary to the recommendations of public health and indeed make their work potentially much more difficult, if she feels that's something that is going to improve that situation, make it easier for us to hold on to the medical professionals we have and indeed recruit the ones we need.

Ms Chapman: Thanks so much for popping up with that. I feel like maybe I was spending too much time in my constituency. I was getting there. I definitely do. I've got a section where I use the term

“peacocking,” right? Who do we want making this decision, you know? Is it the peacocks or is it the docs? For me it’s the docs. Absolutely.

Knee replacements. This is a huge thing that I hear about because, you know, folks are waiting two, four years to get in on that. Again, Bill 6 is really not addressing any of these issues. It’s not helping anyone find a family doctor. It’s not recruiting new docs into the province. It’s not addressing burnout with our health care professionals.

5:50

So what is it doing? This bill is a response to the Ingram decision that was issued July 31 of this year. Now, for those who aren’t familiar, there was a case here that was brought to our courts by a plaintiff group that included two churches and a gym owner. This was interesting for me. I was, you know, reflecting on the time during COVID. The churches that I was interacting with were more than happy to follow the public health orders. I mean, it was really interesting moving my in-laws on to the virtual for their church. That didn’t come easily for them, but all they wanted was to worship in community, and they were happy to move online to accommodate that.

You know, I remember having a really long conversation with my neighbour. He’s a pastor, and I remember asking him about his church and how his church was managing this and him telling me just how important it was for them to protect the seniors in their congregation. As I said, it was interesting for me to see that churches were part of this original plaintiff group because the churches I know and interact with, like I said, were wanting to follow those measures. They were wanting to protect their congregations.

This plaintiff group filed a lawsuit. The argument was that the pandemic-related public health measures were contrary to Alberta’s Bill of Rights and unlawfully breached people’s rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Now, the judge’s decision in this case was that any infringement that did happen on Alberta’s rights was amply and demonstrably justified under the Charter due to the nature of the pandemic. Remember, “pandemic” is not a word that we throw around lightly. It’s not a word that the health community throws around lightly. You know, I’ve heard it described as a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic.

The decision goes on to say, too, that Albertans facing charges for breaking pandemic-related laws should have those charges dropped because the health orders breached the Public Health Act. When I was looking at that and again thinking about the 100-year pandemic, it was interesting to me that the government didn’t go back to the data at that time. They didn’t go back to the legislation. They didn’t go back to the Public Health Act to do a refresher on: where was the responsibility supposed to be, right? Who was making decisions? Like, the reason that we were in this situation to begin with is that we had a government that wasn’t following what the legislation laid out. That was what the judge was saying with her ruling there. You know, maybe they did. Maybe they did go back and review that and maybe they knew full well and it was just a real choice that they made to politicize a public health crisis, to politicize public health measures.

Now, from my perspective, the public health strategy was pretty clear at the time. You know, it was to limit the spread while we waited for vaccines to be developed so that people could be protected from this once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic. I asked myself: what was it that people needed at that time, right? In a time of crisis did they need the peacocking politicians, or did we need doctors? Did we need experts to step up and tell us how to best

manage this, how to minimize the damage that could be done on a population with a pandemic like this?

I actually went and checked. I was just a little curious, you know, what Canada’s death rate was like compared to some other countries. I’ll just draw your attention to a couple of examples of some countries that didn’t manage this pandemic very well. One of them is Hungary. Now, Hungary suffered over 4,000 deaths per million, and this was a country where it was the peacocks, not docs, that were making those decisions. They suffered the second-highest death rate in the world. In the world. Another example: Montenegro. Now, this is a country that is very reliant on tourism, right? Despite avoiding a lot of the negative outcomes really early on, they did make decisions to open their economy back up to allow folks in, and they ended up in the same boat as Hungary. They ended up with 4,000 deaths per million.

If you’re wondering, in Canada it was 1,000 per million. Four times. In these countries where it was peacocks, not docs, we had four times the death rate. If you look at Canada, rather than 42,000 deaths we would have suffered 168,000 deaths. That would be 126,000 additional Canadians – grandparents, parents, friends who wouldn’t be with us today – if that was the path we wanted to go down.

I wanted to go back to this article, too. I’m sorry, Mr. Speaker. I will table this article tomorrow, a CBC article, November 2, 2023, Alberta Government Tables Bill to Clarify Decision-making During Public Health Emergencies. There was a quote in here that I’ll just read to you.

According to Minister of Justice and Attorney General Mickey Amery, the new legislation will ensure that elected officials make decisions and are held accountable for them.

He says:

Elected officials have a responsibility to act in the best interests of Albertans and swear an oath to duly and faithfully execute the powers and trust imparted. This legislation ensures that final decision-making ...

[interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I’ll just ask members to keep their private conversations significantly more private so that we can hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation ensures that final decision-making authority and the accountability that must come with it rest with those entrusted by Albertans.

I mean, that actually got me thinking about, you know, that responsibility to act and then thinking about doctors and what their responsibility is, where that lies.

I want to share something with you – again, I will table this in the Assembly tomorrow – a modernized version of what I’m sure some of you will be familiar with, the Hippocratic oath, in which a doctor would say:

I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

... [to] respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon’s knife or the chemist’s drug.

I will not be ashamed to say “I know not,” nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient’s recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given to me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to my fellow human beings . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt and do apologize to the hon. member, but the time is now 6 o'clock, and Standing Order 4(2) indicates that the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	287
Introduction of Visitors	287
Introduction of Guests	287
Members' Statements	
Renewable Energy Development.....	288
Federal Plastics Regulation Court Ruling.....	288
National Housing Day	288
Chiropractic Care.....	289
AHS Board Chair	289
Ponoka Secondary Campus Hall of Valour Project.....	297
Introduction of Bills	
Bill Pr1, St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023	289
Oral Question Period	
Alberta Energy Regulator Review	289
Conflicts of Interest Act Amendments	290
Affordable Housing.....	290
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	291
Health Facility Capital Plans	292
Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention.....	292
Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage Funding.....	293
Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies	293
New Stollery Children's Hospital.....	294
Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Report.....	294
Regional Health Advisory Councils	295
Health Spending Accounts	296
Women's Shelters.....	296
Designated Industrial Zones	297
Tabling Returns and Reports	298
Orders of the Day	299
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	299
Bill 6 Public Health Amendment Act, 2023.....	313
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 3 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023	307
Bill 4 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	309

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