



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 28, 2023

Day 14

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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Deputy Government House Leader  
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)  
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)  
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(UC)  
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Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)  
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
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(UC)  
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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
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Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)  
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
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Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees
Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Grant Hunter	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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Bouchard  
Brar  
Hunter  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Wiebe

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

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### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Lunty  
Metz  
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### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman  
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Long  
Renaud  
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### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

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Gray  
Long  
Phillips  
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Sabir  
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### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Ms Pitt

Deputy Chair: Mr. Stephan

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### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

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Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

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### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Pancholi

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
de Jonge  
Ganley  
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Lovely  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Al-Guneid  
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Dyck  
Hunter  
McDougall  
Sinclair  
Sweet

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing while we recognize former members who have passed away recently. As is our custom, we will pay a fuller tribute to them when their family members are able to join us here in the gallery.

**Mr. Peter Elzinga**  
April 6, 1944, to November 8, 2023

**The Speaker:** Former member Peter Elzinga passed away on November 8 at the age of 79. Mr. Elzinga served as the Member for Sherwood Park from 1986 to 1993. He was the minister of agriculture from 1986 to 1989, the minister of economic development and trade from 1989 to 1992, the minister of federal and intergovernmental relations and Deputy Premier from 1992 to 1993.

**Mr. Donald A. Tannas**  
April 25, 1938, to November 26, 2023

**The Speaker:** Former member Donald A. Tannas passed away on November 26 at the age of 85. Mr. Tannas served as the Member for Highwood from 1989 to 2004. He was the Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1993 to 2004. One of his notable accomplishments was the sponsoring of Bill 211, the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which passed unanimously and provided vulnerable people in care with protection from abuse.

In a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask that you each remember Mr. Elzinga and Mr. Tannas as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors has a school group.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you Jeanette Prendergast and the students of Innisfail home-school families from the incredible riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I would ask you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you the students and teachers and staff of Julia Kiniski elementary school in the riding of Edmonton-Meadows. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

**Ms Pitt:** Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you a good friend of mine, Dan Eddy, who is visiting here from Nova Scotia, a proud Nova Scotia Albertan, with his amazing daughter Cassandra Bohan. Dan is the director of global business development for CVS Controls, which is a company based right out of Edmonton here, employing thousands of Albertans. He is also the first Canadian team owner to win the U.S. NASCAR Whelen All-American championship. Please receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you leadership from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta, whom we had the pleasure, many of the members in this House, of dining with this morning for breakfast and that I met with this afternoon with the Minister of Health. Today with us is Rubyann Rice and Wendy Bonertz. I ask you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. Haji:** I rise, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you Dr. Afyare Elmi. He is a political science professor, an author, and a former CEO of the Heritage Institute. He is a good friend of mine, a resident of wonderful Edmonton-Manning. Please, I ask Dr. Afyare to stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two leaders from the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations: Dan Astner, president of the board of directors, and Al Nagel, CEO. These are tremendous individuals serving Albertans, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

**Ms Hayter:** Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you my daughter Clara Hayter and my mom, Carol Mayor. These two women inspire me and support me. Clara, thank you for reminding me daily of what is important and that kindness matters. Mom, thank you for showing me how to be an independent and strong woman. Who would have thought 49 years ago today that you would have met me at the Charles Camsell and that we'd be here today in this Leg. Please rise.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

#### School Construction in Northwest Calgary

**Mr. Ellingson:** The constituency of Calgary-Foothills, that I am so proud to represent, is a vibrant community experiencing considerable population growth. Young families have purchased homes in our community on the expectation that a Calgary board of education school would be built in their neighbourhood. But the UCP government has failed to support our families in growing communities by ignoring the desperate need for schools in Calgary's northwest.

Mr. Speaker, the government states that they are committed to excellent public education and providing the resources needed to deliver in our growing communities, yet providing funding on a historic three-year rolling average does just the opposite. The CBE estimates enrolment increases of 2,600 students annually. How can a backwards-looking three-year projection provide the funds necessary to accommodate growth? The additional funding announced today doesn't change that the model is a failure.

Mr. Speaker, according to 2021 Statistics Canada information there are almost 7,000 school-age children in our Symons Valley communities and not one CBE school. Every day these children are forced to travel an hour each way for the education they deserve. We must do better. The city of Calgary estimates the northern communities will grow by 18,600 in the next three years. It is imperative construction begins on a CBE Sage Hill/Kincora middle school immediately.

This government claims they are committed to investing in education. This government claims they are committed to providing the resources necessary for all of Alberta's children. The evidence shows that this is not the case. Yesterday this government voted against reporting on class sizes. Make no mistake; that investment must include accessible public schools for all children, including the children in Calgary-Foothills.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore is next.

### Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government will not let Albertans freeze in the dark, and this is the risk Albertans face if Justin Trudeau and his NDP allies' punitive clean electricity regulations come into effect. By tabling a historic Alberta sovereignty within a united Canada motion, the Alberta government took one more step to make it clear to Ottawa that we will not surrender our constitutionally protected right to regulate our energy industry.

Alberta has a more reasonable plan to achieve Canada's international commitments for carbon neutrality by 2050. However, we are faced with a hostile federal government misled by an ideology that places them more in line with climate protesters who vandalize museums than with world leaders acting in the interests of their citizens. Our Premier made it clear yesterday that we will do everything we can to ensure the lights and the heat stay on, and that is what the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act is designed to do. It is designed to protect Albertans from severe federal overreach. It is designed to reaffirm our province's exclusive constitutional jurisdictions.

Justin Trudeau and his NDP allies have been told multiple times by the Federal Court that their activist climate policies are out of step with the Constitution. They seek to divide the nation by playing cynical favouritism with their vote-buying carbon tax exemption. They continue to undermine Alberta's ability to contribute to the future prosperity of Canada and risk our quality of life with their dangerous clean electricity regulations.

It isn't just our government that recognizes the absurdity of the CER. Businesses, industry, and community leaders from across Canada and around the world have spoken against them. Mr. Speaker, even the NDP in Saskatchewan and a former leader of the federal NDP have raised grave concerns over the 2035 energy cliff. The opposition needs to stop playing politics with their handlers in Ottawa, listen to reason, and support this motion for the good of all Albertans. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### 1:40 Alberta Energy Regulator CEO

**Mr. Schmidt:** Mr. Speaker, imagine doing an annual performance review for Laurie Pushor, the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator, one of the most important public agencies that oversees the biggest sector in Alberta's economy and holds it to account for managing its massive environmental liabilities and respecting treaty rights. You note that in the past year Pushor covered up for the largest leak

of tailings fluid in Alberta's history, trampled treaty rights of multiple First Nations, and opened up the government to major lawsuits. He dodged accountability from both this Legislature and Canada's Parliament, preferring to hire his own investigator to look into the matter. Even that didn't exonerate him.

Those investigators concluded that Mr. Pushor's performance needs improvement. It's not like there weren't red flags on his resumé. Prior to a short stint in cushy jobs in the Saskatchewan civil service Mr. Pushor was a special adviser to the Saskatchewan transportation minister and was responsible for the GTH land deal, a corrupt deal that lost millions of taxpayer dollars and was subject to a criminal investigation by the RCMP. It shouldn't come as a surprise that Mr. Pushor's terrible track record has continued as CEO of the AER. A regular Albertan doing the performance review would thank Laurie Pushor for his service and quickly show him the door.

But what's the UCP doing? They're passing legislation to give Laurie Pushor a 50 per cent raise. The Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, if passed, will lift the lid on Laurie Pushor's already comfortable salary of nearly half a million dollars a year. How much will he get paid next year: \$700,000, like former CEO Jim Ellis? More? We'll have to wait and see. But whatever the amount, it's too much.

Constituents in my riding can't afford the rent, they can't afford groceries, they can't afford utility bills, and they're getting no help from this government. Instead, the UCP is passing legislation to fill the public trough so that their fat-cat friends can feed at the expense of my constituents, who have nothing left to give. This legislation stinks, it needs to be scrapped, and the government needs to get to work helping out people who need it.

Thank you.

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

### Bail System Reform

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few years northern Albertans have been facing an alarming threat from dangerous repeat offenders. Since the federal government's passing of its failed Bill C-75, which made it easier than ever for criminals to be granted bails, our communities have been grappling with a growing sense of insecurity and fear.

I am greatly encouraged by the work being done by our public safety minister and our Minister of Justice to take these challenges head-on. Initiatives such as our targeted prosecution units, changes to the bail practice protocol, and terminating the triage practice procedure have all been massive steps taken by our government to ensure the safety of our citizens.

Additionally, I would like to note that in my role as parliamentary secretary for Indigenous policing I am determined to ensure that Indigenous communities have access to culturally sensitive and effective policing services. As our Deputy Premier said so eloquently yesterday in this House, these policing services will serve as a reflection of the communities they serve.

Just as an example, Mr. Speaker, last month the MD of Opportunity declared a state of local emergency because the community of Calling Lake and its citizens were living in constant fear of break-ins, home invasions, and other crimes perpetuated by gangs, dangerous criminals, and repeat offenders. The residents of Calling Lake's story has become all too familiar in Alberta, and on this side of the aisle we hear them loud and clear. Anything less than a complete reversal and repeal of this soft-on-crime policy by the NDP-Liberal alliance is nothing more than a half measure by this fugazi of the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans won't be fooled any longer. We need to protect families, not criminals. If the members opposite wanted to stand up for Albertans for a change, they would tell their boss, Jagmeet, and his incompetent bestie, Trudeau, to repeal Bill C-75 and restore common-sense law and order.

Thank you.

### Prescription Contraception Access

**Ms Hayter:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's rejection of the motion for universal coverage of prescription contraceptives by the UCP speaks volumes to their priorities or lack thereof when it comes to the well-being of Albertans. Unlike the members across the aisle, who are busy dismantling our health care system, the Alberta NDP believes in placing the health and concerns of Albertans at the forefront. The motion, which aimed to ensure universal access to contraception, would have ensured that all Albertan women could receive essential health care free of cost. It is no secret that the UCP excels in cutting generous cheques to their inner circle, but when faced with the question of essential health care, a sudden amnesia about fiscal caution seems to set in.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at the real financial cost of the UCP rejecting this motion. Without prescription coverage Albertans are left with substantial financial burdens. It is an eye-watering \$10,000 over a woman's lifetime for birth control pills. A staggering 17 per cent of Albertans lack access to the prescription insurance coverage whatsoever. While the UCP may view this as a mere cost of doing business, we on this side of the House recognize the heavy burden of hard-working Albertans. Our stance remains clear: universal access to free prescription contraception is not just a matter of health policy; it's a cornerstone of a good economic policy. It's about empowering Albertans, particularly women, to exercise control over their economic future and health.

Listening to Albertans means acknowledging that affordable and accessible health care, including prescription contraception, is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It's high time the UCP heeds the voices of people that they represent rather than indulging in budgetary posturing.

### Edmonton-Mill Woods Resource Fair

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, recently I was delighted to once again host my Edmonton-Mill Woods Resource Fair. This was the seventh time that I and the incredible staff at my constituency office have sponsored and co-ordinated this important event. Now, back in 2015, during my first year as an MLA, I had the opportunity and privilege to learn about the deep network of overlapping community resources that exist in Mill Woods, a place I had lived in, volunteered in, and loved for many years. As an active community member I thought I knew all about Mill Woods, but as I became more and more aware of the amazing network of community organizations providing an important array of services and supports, it occurred to me that a person should not need to become an elected official to find out about all these incredible groups and the fantastic work they do. This is what inspired me with the idea for the resource fair.

My Mill Woods Resource Fair is an event that is proud to showcase many of these nonprofit organizations in a free-to-attend event for the public. It features community service agencies, faith groups, community leagues, service organizations, and many more, and together they serve seniors, families, jobseekers, and all community members. This year we were delighted to be once again offered space inside the Mill Woods Town Centre mall, allowing

hundreds of people to come and interact with these amazing organizations.

Mill Woods is a diverse community, conceived of and built at a time when inflation and interest rates were very high and the demand for housing greatly exceeded supply. Mill Woods helped solve those problems then and offers an incredible model that we can learn from now. Mill Woods is an exciting and integral part of the modern Edmonton, and I'm very proud that my resource fair helps to connect constituents with the wonderful organizations in our community. I invite all members of this Assembly to drop by next year, when we host the eighth annual resource fair, Mr. Speaker.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of an e-mail I received from Sean Kidd, a constituent, demonstrating that his automobile insurance is going up over \$2,000 a year without any new accidents or other things on their record.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table four documents that I referenced yesterday in the House. First, from Planned Parenthood, titled Birth Control Has Expanded Opportunity for Women – in Economic Advancement, Educational Attainment, and Health Outcomes.

Second, from the *New York Times* 2023, Claudia Goldin Wins Nobel in Economics for Studying Women in the Work Force.

Third, from CBC Manitoba, Women's Health Advocates Applaud Manitoba's Plan to Subsidize Prescription Birth Control.

Lastly, from Global News, March 2023, Alberta NDP Promise Free Birth Control If Elected.

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

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the CBC article titled Tidal Power Turbine Owned by Bankrupt Company Washes Ashore on Brier Island. This article describes a situation where insufficient reclamation regulations could potentially leave taxpayers footing the bill for a failed renewable energy project that was simply abandoned and left to rot.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we will conclude tablings following Oral Question Period.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

### Environmental Monitoring of the Oil Sands

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, in May 2022 the AER was notified about a slow leak at the Kearl oil sands site. Now, even though Kearl and the regulator knew this leak contained arsenic that summer, it took another accidental leak six months later for anyone to tell downstream community members. To date the Premier has refused to address this and instead passes it off to her increasingly incompetent ministers. To the Premier: would she really be so laissez-faire about all this if it was happening in Brooks?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the AER can do a better job on communications, and we've held them to account on that. We've asked the industry also to do a better job on communications.

But the AER has been very clear that there has been no negative impact to drinking water in either the recent release of water at the Kearn site or at the Suncor site. The NDP continues to fearmonger by making people downstream think that they're at risk, and it's very irresponsible and extremely disappointing. They should listen to the regulator, to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas officials on this issue, and they should stop being hysterical about it.

**Ms Notley:** Well, apparently, the Premier has the same messed-up talking points as her environment minister. That minister yesterday responded to our critic, condescendingly claiming, just like the Premier just did, that we were fearmongering and that the water was safe. Mr. Speaker, I have a report here from September 27 of this year, which I will table, that shows arsenic is exceeding safe levels in groundwater adjacent to Kearn Lake. To the Premier. This is serious. If the environment minister doesn't get it, if she doesn't get it, would they drink arsenic-laced groundwater?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is mistaken. This water is not leaking into drinking water. It is not getting downstream. It's irresponsible for them to be giving the impression that anyone is at risk. The industry is working with our regulator to make sure that they're dealing with issues of runoff at the moment, and we're not seeing a release of water from tailings ponds. We're not seeing a release even of treated water. We have had a couple of issues at these sites, that the regulator is looking into, regarding the runoff of a snow-water melt.

**Ms Notley:** The AER says that arsenic was in the groundwater in September 2023. The end.

Now, on October 9 Suncor disclosed an unplanned release of what they claimed was roughly 650,000 litres, but just last week they reported instead that the amount released was over 15 times that, likely closer to 10 million litres, and it may have been leaking actually for 18 months. Clearly, industry cannot be trusted to police themselves. Will the Premier stop defending the AER, apologize to the impacted communities, and commit to an independent . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the incident in question happened October 9. It was investigated November 24. There was an unplanned release of surface runoff from a containment pond located adjacent to the Fort Hills oil sands project into the Athabasca River. The pond the water was released from is not related to mining, not related to extraction, not related to tailings ponds processes . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The Leader of the Opposition will have an opportunity to ask another question. For now it's the Premier's opportunity to answer it.

**Ms Smith:** Instead, it was precipitation and snow-water melt. The AER has assured us that water quality has not been impacted, and I would invite the member of the opposition to be more reasonable in her comments.

**Ms Notley:** It'd be more reasonable when the Premier drinks arsenic-laced water.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

### Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act

**Ms Notley:** Yesterday the Premier admitted that most of what she claims to do through her sovereignty act, she could do without the act. Discussions are going on about the draft clean energy regulations, so even if this motion were either lawful or necessary, it's also premature. So to the Premier: why is she wasting our time with this performance art? Did the TBA school of sandbox diplomacy teach her that this is anything other than a juvenile, transparent, and ineffective form of negotiation?

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 1:55.

The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to apologize for defending Albertans. I often wonder why it is the member opposite always stands and defends one of her bosses, environment minister Steven Guilbeault. They have said that they support the net-zero regulations, so no wonder. If they were faced with the same thing that we were faced with, they would do absolutely nothing. They would do nothing. They sat by and would have done nothing about Bill C-69 and would have done nothing about the carbon tax, and they would simply do nothing about the clean electricity regulations while the federal government creates uncertainty in our market, that is causing instability in our power grid and unaffordability. We won't stand by while that happens.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, while the draft CER needs improvement to guarantee reliability and affordability, an ambitious push to decarbonize our grid is both good economic and good environmental policy. Now, the Premier claims she's worried about constitutionality, but the CER are sanctioned by the same legislation Stephen Harper used to start phasing out coal over a decade ago. Why is this unconstitutional now if it was okay back then? Isn't this ultimately the same old cynical Conservative partnership taking precedence over the truth and the best interests of Albertans once again?

**Ms Smith:** Well, there she goes defending Ottawa again, and I stand here defending Alberta once again. And you know what's interesting? Her former boss Thomas Mulcair actually agrees with me. One of the things he's said is that it means that this is going to have to be settled by the courts; nothing more, nothing less. He says: what Premier Smith is doing right now is simply saying that we've got jurisdiction as well, and the courts are going to have to settle that; she has an act in her Legislature, and she's going to use it. He also says: Smith isn't, you know, completely lost in her approach here; she's got some solid backing by what's been happening in the courts; so we'll see how it actually plays out.

**Ms Notley:** Well, the Premier's energy minister was okay with this so-called unconstitutionality when he was the one doing it.

Now, the so-called sovereignty motion sets up a Crown corp as well to provide electricity. The Crown could easily spend \$5 billion and potentially 10 times that if it's charged with chasing nuclear. Based on this government's past investment failures, the potential for a devastating boondoggle is alarming. Will the Premier commit today that any efforts to move this proposal forward will come to this House in the form of legislation, or is she planning on hiding it behind cabinet doors?

**Ms Smith:** I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's a bit odd for me to stand in defence of the need for a Crown corporation and have the members opposite argue against it. I feel like there's been a reversal here.



But you have to know that this is a measure of last resort. This is because we believe we need to be the generator of last resort. We continue to support the private sector. We want to see the private sector continue to propose projects. And as the . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** What we would hope to see is that the federal government would back down. Maybe the member opposite can talk to her boss, Jagmeet Singh, to encourage them to do that so that we can continue to develop our electricity grid, as we're entitled to under the Constitution.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a question.

### Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

**Ms Phillips:** Well, the Premier doesn't want to talk about how people really don't like the idea of her gambling with their pension, but we got thousands of the e-mails the Premier has received on the topic via freedom of information, and what a story they tell. On a Friday in September the Premier received an e-mail from an Albertan that accused her of leading folks to, quote, believe before the election that the takeover of the CPP was off the table. He added that, quote: I won't be fooled again. So why is the Premier trying to play Albertans for fools when it comes to their retirement security and their pensions?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the great question. I'd say that something that's very clear is that all we are doing is engaging with Albertans. We've also made clear that we would never proceed without a referendum. Bill 2 speaks to that, speaks to some of the things that we would need to see before any government could proceed. So make no mistake; every Albertan will have their say before we were to proceed in that way.

I think it's important to just come back to why we're doing this. The Fair Deal Panel recommended it. It has the ability to help every Albertan, every Alberta business, every Alberta family.

2:00

**Ms Phillips:** More from the Premier's e-mail inbox. Another Albertan wrote: I had to quit your online poll regarding pensions because it is so obviously skewed. Then they add, quote: leave our pensions alone. Albertans see through this bogus public consultation. The Premier only has to do one simple thing to listen to these thousands of Albertans who've taken the time to write. All she has to do is stand in the House today, abandon this fool's errand to gamble with Albertans' retirement. Will she abandon those plans today?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the member opposite brought up the engagement. Through the first five telephone town halls over 76,000 Albertans attended, received over 91,000 individual submissions. Many had a chance to hear their own questions live on the radio and converse with the panel, almost 150. And I think something else that's important to make clear to this House: the workbook did go live last Friday, just another tool that Albertans can have to make sure that Albertans know . . .

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

**Ms Phillips:** Now, Mr. Speaker, here's one more of the thousands of e-mails the Premier got that we received from freedom of information. Quote: in regard to starting our own Alberta pension plan, I say definitely not; no thanks; keep your hands off my pension. Now, the Premier, we know, is getting inundated with thousands of these e-mails, but she won't even meet with Albertans face to face. The invitation to our CPP town hall still stands. So the Premier really only has two choices of answers, as I see it: commit to attending one of our many town halls and meet Albertans face to face, or just abandon the whole bad idea right now. Which will it be?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, once again I am heartened to understand that the opposition suddenly likes consultation. I go back to Bighorn – that member knows well – Bill 6, the carbon tax. You know, talking about running advertising campaigns, how about advertising campaigns to try to beat you over the head with, "Hey, this is a good decision to make life unaffordable for every Alberta family"? Not only that; every Canadian family. That's what that government did. What we're committed to is having an engagement, having a consultation. We look forward to the opinion of the Chief Actuary, and if the information changes, so will the engagement.

### Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

**Member Batten:** Yesterday the office of the Child and Youth Advocate released their 2022-2023 annual report, a year that saw the highest number of notifications of death of young people since the mandate started in 2012. Mr. Speaker, to be clear, that astounding number is 44, almost 30 per cent more than the previous year. Despite this, the government has only met four of the 31 recommendations. Can the Premier please tell members why the UCP government doesn't place the safety and well-being of children in this province top of their priorities?

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

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the passionate question. The safety and well-being of children here in our province is one of my highest priorities. The death of any child here in the province absolutely rips my heart apart. As a father of two children this is an issue that I take extremely seriously. That's why any time a serious incident happens with any child under the ministry, we investigate it thoroughly. We're looking for ways to improve the system, and we're going to continue to work with the OCYA at ways we can improve the province for children.

**Member Batten:** "This is profoundly concerning and underscores the importance of ensuring our recommendations are implemented to help [improve services and supports for] vulnerable young people." Mr. Speaker, this is from the advocate herself. The UCP is the only government to have denied recommendations, the only government to have recommendations close due to lack of action. The evidence is in black and white. This government didn't even provide the advocate with proof that they have a process for evaluating policy changes. Can the Premier tell us why anyone should trust this government with caring for vulnerable children when they aren't even doing the bare minimum to . . .

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

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member for the question. One of the very first meetings I had after being appointed as minister was with the OCYA, and I appreciate the work that she does. Those recommendations are taken extremely seriously. Since 2013 CFS has actually actioned and completed over 100 recommendations, and these are all in an effort in order to make our province safer for children. I look forward to continuing to work with the OCYA on the outstanding recommendations and look at ways that we can continue to improve the system.

**Member Batten:** Mr. Speaker, 33 young people receiving intervention services dead in year 1 of the UCP government's last mandate, 34 dead the year after, 49 dead the year after that, and 50 young people dead in this last year: that's 166 young people receiving intervention services that died in the UCP's first term, young people this government was trusted to care and to provide for. To the Premier: will it take another 166 young people dying before this government does anything?

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

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much for that, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. The death of any child is a horrible event. My heart grieves alongside those families. That's why in our last Budget 2023 we did increase the amount of funding that goes into child intervention to deal with more complex cases. We will continue to meet with stakeholders and families right across the entire province, look for ways that we can actively make a difference in the lives of children. I know that we're making progress and there's a lot more work to do, but I'm confident in the actions that our government is having to protect the lives of children here.

#### Funding for Housing and Police

**Ms Hoffman:** Mr. Speaker, our Edmonton caucus met with this city's mayor and council recently, and it wouldn't surprise you to hear that their top priority is housing. Edmonton needs 31,000 deep-subsidy units, 7,000 near-market units, and 2,500 homes where rent is tied to income. We also desperately need more permanent supportive housing. The announcements to date have just been a drop in the bucket. What is the Minister of Municipal Affairs doing to convince his colleagues that Edmonton needs real housing investment in the next provincial budget?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton is getting real housing investment as is the entire province. On the point right now we're investing \$9 billion with our partners to create 25,000 new units, many of those coming on in Edmonton. I know that the hon. member is from Edmonton. If she had bothered to show up at National Housing Day with her mayor at city council, she would know the work that is being done with her city here and with the province and the federal government. We're going to keep doing that, and that's why Edmonton remains the most affordable large city in the world.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that Edmonton and Calgary face significant cuts to the police funding that they used to pay in these cities and given that when the province cuts funding, those positions are eliminated immediately but restoring police funding, the province says, will take 18 months before a single new officer walks the streets, will the Minister of Municipal Affairs assure this House that he will be fighting to restore the full funding to the cities of Calgary

and Edmonton around the cabinet table this time and push to have the officers and social workers our cities desperately need?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, nothing could be further from the truth in regard to that. I can tell you that we are making significant commitments to the cities of Calgary and Edmonton. We are working with them to put 50 police officers on the streets of Calgary, 50 police officers on the streets of Edmonton, and I can tell you right now that we are less safe in this country and in this province because of the NDP and their alliance with the federal Liberals. We will take no lessons from them. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the UCP has actually delivered zero so far for Edmonton or Calgary and given that the city of Edmonton reports that 70 per cent of the calls that Edmonton fire responds to are social issues and the Edmonton council also reports that 20 per cent of the policing calls are also about social needs, often drug poisoning and people living on the streets, will the Minister of Municipal Affairs stand with us in support of significantly enhancing funding for social workers, housing navigators, mental health therapists, and peer support workers now?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I know that the NDP is big on advocating for political interference – that seems to be their policy platform – but I can tell you right now that CPS and EPS are actively recruiting. They are training, and I can tell you that we are in communication with them to get those officers on the street, unlike the members opposite, who I'm pretty sure . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister of public safety.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pretty sure that many of the members opposite advocated for defunding the police. I think that was part of their platform. I can tell you that on this side of the House we support law enforcement and we support public safety in this province. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

#### 2:10 Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act (continued)

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ottawa has been unreasonable with its draft clean energy . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Morinville-St. Albert will come to order. [interjections] Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will come to order.

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

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ottawa has been unreasonable with its draft clean energy regulations and once again overstepped their constitutional boundaries. Our province needs more baseload power and natural gas, but unfortunately these regulations are already creating uncertainty and driving away investment. Yesterday the province took a historic step in invoking the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: why is it necessary for the government to take this step forward?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for this important question. This step is necessary to make sure Albertans do not freeze in the dark or suffer from a lack of electricity generation if the NDP's friends Justin Trudeau and Steven Guilbeault's draft electricity regulations go ahead. To this point they have refused to move off their 2035 target for net zero, but we are committed to carbon neutrality by 2050, and we'll get there by protecting Albertans and Albertan generators.

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

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that one of our government's most urgent concerns is ensuring that Albertans and Alberta businesses can keep their lights on and afford their electricity bills and given that the Alberta NDP is blindly standing behind their comrades in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: can you please inform this House why it's crucial that the NDP support this motion and protect Albertans? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the NDP's opportunity to show who they really prioritize, standing up for Albertans or siding with their out-to-lunch overlords in Ottawa. This motion is about protecting Albertans. It's about their businesses and the reliability and affordability of our grid. Electricity generation is our constitutional jurisdiction, and we will defend that. The NDP meanwhile stood up with the feds and stood against Albertans when they announced their support for the CER. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that one of our government's most urgent concerns is ensuring that Albertans and Alberta businesses keep their lights on and afford their electricity bills and given that the Alberta NDP continue to support Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: please inform this House yet again why it's crucial that the NDP support this motion. They're clearly not listening across the aisle. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the member for the question. I want to be clear. The Crown corporation would be a tool of last resort and would protect the industry, not compete with it. Through a Crown corporation we would examine asking provincial entities to not follow the Clean Electricity Regulations, and if necessary, we would pass legislation to ensure no personal liability falls on them. We are doing everything we can to protect our grid and our people and our companies and those who are running it, something the NDP has no plans to do. We ask them to stand up and defend Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a question now.

## Environmental Monitoring of the Oil Sands

(continued)

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Kearl waste-water overflow that earned Imperial an environment protection order from the AER in February was because the spill contained high amounts of arsenic, dissolved metals, F2 hydrocarbons, sulphate, and sulphide, all of which found their way into the surrounding muskeg and wetlands. The environment minister accused me of lying and fearmongering when I repeated these facts yesterday at a press conference. Albertans and our environment need protection. Minister, will you commit to investigating the health crisis that's happening in the Athabasca delta?

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:14.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is irresponsible and wrong for the NDP to continue to claim that drinking water is unsafe. Earlier today the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator appeared in Ottawa and made it clear that there is no evidence to support their claims and that there has been no impact to drinking water. I do want to repeat what I said yesterday because apparently the members opposite missed it: the drinking water is safe, and their claims are false.

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

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the UCP's defensive playbook when it comes to leaky industry projects is pretty simple – avoid, deflect, redirect, and downplay – given that it seems the AER was borrowing a page from their playbook as today the CEO of the AER actually, finally, answered a summons to speak at the federal standing committee for a second time regarding these leaks and given that the pollution is entering our waterways but government, industry, and the regulator alike seem to be allergic to accountability, who on that side of the House will shoulder the blame for this culture? Or are you going to let Ottawa get to the bottom of this?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, we continue to see the NDP trying to scare the public by failing to differentiate between the Kearl seepage incident that occurred in 2022 and more recent incidents that involved the release of waters that contained silt and mud. Now, the 2022 seepage, while serious, was contained and poses no threat to drinking water or wildlife. The more recent incidents that involve the release of waters that contain silt and mud: these are not leaks from tailings ponds. It is drainage from the surrounding landscape, including precipitation and snow melt.

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

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given there are spills in the northeast and drought in the south and so little snowfall late into November and given that Albertans are wondering what this could mean for the health of the environment, especially if we're in a risky climate situation come springtime, will the Premier or anyone on this UCP government commit to a climate resilience strategy, then the consideration of water safety, wildfire

mitigation, and an environmental crisis response? It signals to Albertans that our government doesn't just react to climate crises; we prepare for them.

**Ms Schulz:** Mr. Speaker, I do just want to go back to the previous line of questioning. We have done extensive testing to make sure that the drinking water is safe. Dozens of tests, analyzed by experts and conducted over multiple months, have shown that the water adheres to the Canadian drinking water guidelines. It's irresponsible and reckless for the NDP to suggest that the water is unsafe. The AER continues to monitor this and all other incidents that involve the release of water. We do expect and will ensure that the AER continues to uphold the highest environmental standards while undertaking their work.

### Women's Shelters

**Ms Hayter:** As the minister presides over a disturbing era of escalating domestic violence, it's evident that the UCP's approach to women's safety is falling woefully short. The recent data from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters speaks volumes about the failures of this government's policies. How does the minister justify fuelling the UCP's political gravy train while women's shelters, who are facing a decade of financial stagnation, are left scrambling to cope with this rising tide of domestic violence cases?

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

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our women's shelters do such incredible work. These are not faceless Albertans that are entering these shelters. These are neighbours, family members, mothers, siblings, parents. We want to make sure they're looked after. We think it's important that these women have a safe place to find refuge in their time of greatest need. That's why I continue to work with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to look at ways that we can strategically invest in the system to improve the system and make sure that women are looked after here in the province of Alberta.

**Ms Hayter:** Given that the data paints a grim picture of the women who are in crisis, grappling not just with physical abuse but also with a government that seems more focused on dismantling our health care than extending a lifeline to those who need it most, how does the minister justify her laissez-faire attitude towards women's shelters, especially when thousands of women and children are stranded in dangerous situations because of their government's failures?

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

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is doing something about this. That's why I was very pleased to see that the Premier included as part of my mandate letter a \$10 million increase over the next four years for Alberta sexual assault centres as well as an additional \$10 million for women's shelters here in the province of Alberta. Ensuring that women are looked after and safe and protected is a huge priority for me. Our ongoing investments into the sector are showing that we are actively looking after women. But there's a lot of work still to be done. We look forward to making the system better for women here in the province.

**Ms Hayter:** Given the alarming 57 per cent surge has reported physical abuse is worsening, one cannot help but wonder if the

UCP's commitment to the well-being of Albertan women is just another broken promise, and given that over 40 per cent more women are enduring forced sexual acts and 42 are facing strangulation – these aren't just numbers, Mr. Speaker, they're harrowing stories of pain and survival – how can the minister justify spending millions of dollars in political propaganda over taking concrete and urgent action to ensure the safety and the security of the people that need it the most?

2:20

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite may not be aware that we recently signed a \$54 million agreement with the federal government over four years to develop a 10-year strategy on the national action plan to end gender-based violence. It's about supporting survivors. It's a made-in-Alberta action plan tailored to Albertans' needs to enhance existing work and programs, identify gaps, and identify root causes. It's about supporting women in Alberta. There is an online survey that's open now until the end of the month, and we will be participating in engagement and roundtables with the critical stakeholders in the industry.

### Crime and Public Safety

**Mr. Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, safety and security in our communities is an important value that all Albertans share. Within my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed people are concerned about the crime rates on public transit and around their businesses. As we know, criminal and gang activities pose significant threats to our business community, our transit systems, and the overall standard of living. Can the Minister of Justice please share with the House what measures have been put in place by our United Conservative government to protect hard-working Albertans from criminals?

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

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. The position of the Alberta government has always been absolutely clear. There is no safe haven in this province for criminals. I'm working with my colleague the minister of public safety to make sure that violent criminals and gang members are taken off the streets and prosecuted immediately. Targeted prosecution units in our major cities are working hard to turn the tide of criminal activity in our downtown cores. These highly specialized teams of prosecutors will speak to bail applications.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that the Ministry of Justice is empowering the Alberta Crown prosecution service to ensure all crimes are prosecuted to the full extent of the law and also given that my constituents and all Albertans are tired of seeing violent crimes, especially gun and gang crimes, in their communities, can the same minister explain how the government is holding criminals, especially repeat violent offenders, accountable?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, it certainly is frustrating to hear about incidents where individuals are committing crimes while out on bail. Bail reform is ultimately a matter for Ottawa to act on. While we wait for the federal government to step up and the NDP to wake

up, we are shoring up our resources to support our prosecutors to effectively deal with high-risk offenders. We're investing \$10 million in our budget. As of June of 2023 the Alberta Crown prosecution service had a historically low vacancy rate in this province. These investments will ensure that we make a dramatic difference in keeping our communities safe.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that the federal government continues to fail Albertans with the weak bail system, specifically through Bill C-75, otherwise known as the catch-and-release program, making it far too easy for repeat violent offenders to be released into our communities on bail, can the same minister elaborate on how our government is standing up for Albertans and putting pressure on the federal government to reform the bail process and enhance public safety?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government's catch-and-release program is not holding criminals responsible whatsoever. This is completely unacceptable. Putting the onus on repeat offenders to prove why they should get bail is exactly what we've been advocating for. Bail reform, once again, ultimately lies with Ottawa; however, we will continue to be pushing for a substantial bail reform legislation piece. We'll continue to push for laws like Bill C-48 to become law and to make sure that high-risk repeat offenders remain behind bars. Make no mistake. We'll not stop putting pressure on . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

### Victims' Services

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, 150 victim services employees across 64 communities are anxiously waiting to find out if they will lose their jobs as the UCP dismantles Victim Services Alberta. Since the 2020 operational year the UCP has already cut funding to support victims by 38 per cent, yet the UCP still tries to argue that they are improving services for Albertans. Will the minister finally come clean and admit that this program is simply being gutted by the UCP?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth, what that member opposite said. What we're trying to do is provide predictable and sustainable funding, consistency throughout the province. That is what we're trying to do. I'm not sure why the members opposite would be opposed to predictable and sustainable funding as opposed to having to fund raise for victims' services and victims of trauma, but I can tell you that on this side of the House we're supporting victims of crime and victims of trauma, and we're going to continue to support them.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that 90 per cent of local victim services board and program managers are not in favour of this new regional model and given that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta have also raised concerns about restructuring, this time directly to the Premier, and given that the *Edmonton Journal* reported yesterday that even some members within the UCP caucus are concerned that Alberta is, and

I quote, moving in the wrong direction on this, when will the Premier stop this nonsense and actually start listening to Albertans?

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be looking at a regional governance model, which is already under way if you go from four zones to actually eight zones, to make sure that we're making sure that the people that are involved in victim services within their communities certainly have the say that they require, and I can tell you we've received a lot of very positive feedback. We're going to continue to go down this road because again it is about providing predictable, sustainable funding and consistency throughout the province.

**Mr. Sabir:** Given that the UCP won't properly consult with local experts on the new regional victim services model and given that the UCP doesn't really seem interested in consulting properly on any issue, as we have seen with the Alberta pension plan and dismantling of AHS, the government's stance on collaboration and consultation is clear: shut up or you will face consequences. Can the minister please explain to Albertans why the UCP won't take anyone else's opinion on this important matter seriously?

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, nothing can be further from the truth of what that member has said. There were hundreds and hundreds of hours of consultation in regard to this, but I have to ask. The communities of Athabasca, Boyle, Drumheller, Hanna, Oyen, Bow Island, Foremost, Cardston, Jasper, Maskwacis, Redwater, Smoky Lake, Sylvan Lake, and Wabasca: they had zero victim services. You know what? Now they have victim services because of this government, and we're going to continue to support them . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

### Affordability Plan Federal Carbon Tax

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordability is a top priority for all Albertans. The federal government's carbon tax and their failure to adequately address the harmful impacts of the carbon tax are negatively affecting all hard-working Albertans, from the increased cost to heat their homes and drive to work to the compounding effects the carbon tax has on the cost of their food. Can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities please provide the House with an overview of the government's actions and policies aimed at improving the affordability of essential needs for Albertans?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member. The NDP-backed carbon tax has made life more expensive for everyone. To counteract this we have provided help to Albertans with a wide range of supports. We have prioritized the most vulnerable by reindexing AISH and senior supports and issuing affordability payments to families, seniors, and others. All told, our affordability support payments totalled \$773 million and reached 1.4 million Albertans. We continue to look for long-term solutions to affordability for our province . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The only one with the call is the member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal carbon tax has many families in Alberta struggling with the rising cost of living, particularly related to their fuel, utilities, and grocery prices, and given that the carbon tax has significantly affected the cost of food production, processing, and distribution in our province, which hinders the ability of Albertans to put food on their family's table, can the same minister please provide the House with an update on how much the carbon tax is costing hard-working Albertans every year?

2:30

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation cites a parliamentary budget officer who says that Alberta households pay more than \$700 per year in excess of any rebates they receive from the carbon tax. The NDP-supported carbon tax drives the cost of everything up. It impacts school divisions, who cannot bear the cost of this crippling tax anymore. It impacts postsecondary institutions, hospitals, public libraries, seniors' living, all of which are supported by taxpayer dollars and reduce the working budget of these much-needed services.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given this government's commitment to making the cost of living more affordable for all Albertans and given that the issue of affordability impacts many various aspects of the daily lives of Albertans, can the minister please tell the House about the collaborative actions of this government, which foster a comprehensive approach to ensure that essential services are made affordable for all Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the member. Our government has worked in collaboration to bring several programs to Albertans which make life more affordable. This includes pausing the provincial fuel tax, expanding the electricity rebate, putting in a natural gas rebate program, support to food banks, lower income transit passes, indexed personal income tax, and more. We are not stopping there as we are looking for lasting, affordable solutions to support all Albertans and make life more affordable.

### South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

**Member Hoyle:** Hundreds of thousands of Albertans are suffering without access to quality health care. Families in Edmonton-South need a hospital. During an emergency, when seconds and minutes are critical, the nearest hospital is 40 minutes away. Minister, why are my constituents stranded, without access to a hospital, and when can we count on this government to actually start construction of the south Edmonton hospital?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is fully committed to building a new hospital in southwest Edmonton. The south Edmonton hospital was the single largest investment in the budget for the 2023 health capital plan, with \$634 million over three years allocated to this project. This new facility will address the need for increased hospital capacity and more beds in the Edmonton region.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that the closest hospital is at least a one-hour round trip and given that Edmonton-South is the fastest growing area in Edmonton and given that I recently heard . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Member Hoyle:** . . . the tragic story from a resident who almost lost her child due to not having hospital access and given that for six years the UCP told Edmontonians they could be trusted to build this hospital, how much longer will residents in Edmonton-South have to suffer from the gross failures of this government? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, large hospitals are very complex. They take a lot of planning. We know that we've spent \$58 million thus far making sure that we get the planning correct, and as we proceed, we will continue to put this project as a priority. That being said, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite were very willing to take many other hospitals off the planning list when they were members. In fact, in Red Deer the hospital came off the planning list under the NDP. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that Albertans are struggling to get access to quality health care when and where they need it, given that six years ago residents in Edmonton-South were told the south Edmonton hospital would be built in 2026, given that construction hasn't started but this government's excuses haven't stopped, can the minister tell this House on what date the south Edmonton hospital will open and start serving patients?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, the project for the south Edmonton hospital was announced in Budget 2017 under the members opposite. Obviously, they didn't do anything while they were in power. We've actually allocated \$634 million over three years for this project. It continues to move forward. I'm also happy to say that we just opened the emergency . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also happy to say that we just opened the Misericordia emergency department. It's actually going to triple the capacity of the Misericordia, so I know that members of Edmonton are well served.

### Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

(continued)

**Ms Renaud:** J'ai vraiment du mal à croire que ce gouvernement pense que ses cinq réunions téléphoniques destinées à consulter les Albertains sur le plan du PCU pour nos pensions soient suffisantes. Le recensement de 2021 nous a appris que 383,000 personnes – c'est 9 pour cent de la population de l'Alberta – sont d'origine francophone. J'espère que le premier ministre expliquera pourquoi le PCU n'a pas consulté les francophones.

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I can say that we value the francophone community in Alberta. We recognize their

important contributions to our province. We engage and listen in what's important to them. There have been numerous events that I've attended to engage and consult with the francophone community, from the ACFA meeting to an AACF round-table to a lovely breakfast with the Canadian Parents for French education and the seventh biannual Calgary francophone gala with the ACFA, where I received fantastic feedback from the members.

**Ms Renaud:** Ce n'est pas simplement les francophones que le gouvernement va oublier. Comme d'habitude, le PCU a oublié de consulter les Albertains handicapés. Cette fois-ci, ce sont les Albertains handicapés qui reçoivent les prestations d'invalidité du régime de pensions du Canada. Dix pour cent du total des paiements du RPC vont vers les prestations d'invalidité, and that is CPPD. Vos futures consultations sur le RPC : seront-elles accessible aux Albertains handicapés?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard to enhance services in French and to ensure they meet the needs of French-speaking Albertans. This year we responded to changing priorities and community suggestions by evaluating and updating Alberta's French policy. In addition to my role as representing the francophone community, the Minister of Technology and Innovation is also the francophone community liaison, and we work together to support and engage with Alberta's francophone community.

**Ms Renaud:** L'hésitation à organiser des réunions en personne viole directement la promesse que Jim Dinning avait fait lors de sa première assemblée publique téléphonique. Dinning avait promis des réunions en personne à partir de décembre. Ils ont brisé cette promesse. Nous, le NPD, tiendrons des réunions en personne en décembre, en janvier, et nous tiendrons une assemblée publique en français parce qu'on connaît que c'est important. Allez-vous faire la même?

And this is why French consultation is important. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. minister.

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the member opposite. French consultation is important, and I've been actively engaged in that. The French policy fosters a collaborative relationship with the Francophonie in Alberta to better understand their needs and . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Why isn't your workbook in French?

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. Members can speak in whichever language they choose, be it French or English. Otherwise, they need to provide a translation. But it's important that we allow all members to make the same choice that the hon. Member for St. Albert made.

The hon. the minister.

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the French policy fosters a collaborative relationship with the Francophonie in Alberta to better understand their needs and deliver enhanced French services in sectors such as health, education, and justice. We continue to work closely with the francophone community to ensure that services, programs, and supports to French-speaking Albertans are meaningful and sustainable. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

## Crime and Public Safety

(continued)

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-East and as an Albertan who prioritizes the safety of my constituents, the unhealthy rise of crime in my constituency such as car theft, home invasion, robbery, random shootings, sexual assault, and violence has sadly come up a lot in my recent conversations with constituents. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services please tell the House what they are doing to ensure that Albertans feel protected not only today but for years to come?

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister of public safety.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I of course thank the member for the question. Of course, public safety is a huge concern for this government. That's why Alberta's government has expanded the safer communities and neighborhoods unit; that's known as the SCAN team. That's why we recently put two positions in Calgary, four positions in Edmonton, and six positions in Lethbridge. Because you know what? The ability to investigate and address criminal activity, of course, on properties is extremely important, and we all know that the Liberal-NDP soft-on-crime approach is costing Albertans their own safety. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the residents of Alberta's largest cities, like Edmonton and Calgary, fear that their homes, businesses, and properties are not safe from individuals who wish to do them harm, can the same minister please tell the House what strategies they have in place to address the safety concern of Albertans and what support his ministry is planning to offer to those already affected?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Of course, in Budget 2023 we allocated money for the fugitive apprehension teams, the gang suppression teams, the firearms suppression teams to get dangerous gangs and weapons off the streets of Alberta because we know that those opposite policies are what are being advocated over in Ottawa by the Liberal-NDP alliance. Their catch-and-release bail program has been an absolute disaster. You know who's united on this? Every province in Canada is united on this. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the government has funded the safe streets action plan to increase the law enforcement presence and to act in bolstering community safety, to the same minister: what action is the government taking to ensure that this co-ordinated approach will effectively reduce the rate of crime, violence, and social disorder in Alberta's urban centres, like my constituency?

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth saying again. Of course, we are less safe in Canada because of the Liberal-NDP alliance. I think everybody is fully aware of that. I know my colleagues right across Canada seem to be aware of that. But I can tell you what we're doing here. We have committed to the 50 new

police officers in Calgary, the 50 new police officers in Edmonton, and I can tell you that recruiting and training is well under way. Those officers will be hitting the streets, because we are going to keep the province of Alberta safe, unlike the members opposite.

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

### Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a tabling.

**Ms Phillips:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, one of which is a letter I wrote to the minister of service Alberta on the topic of life leases and how it affects my constituents. I thank the hon. minister for his review of consumer protections for life leases, and I look forward to his action on that. That's the first one.

Then I have a letter from the city of Lethbridge to the minister of environment reaffirming concerns related to regional impacts of the requested deep drilling permit by Northback Holdings in the eastern slopes for the Grassy Mountain deposit.

Then a piece of good news for a change, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the announcement that Tourism Lethbridge has won the 2023 culinary tourism experience award from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, which is excellent and amplifies their food message and our region.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition I rise to table the five requisite copies of a document from the AER that shows that on September 27, 2023, arsenic was in the groundwater near Kearl oil sands in excess of AB tier 1 guidelines exceedance.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none – oh, my correction. I do have a tabling. Pursuant to section 63(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 95(1) of the Health Information Act, and section 44(1) of the Personal Information Protection Act I'm tabling six copies of the annual report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 1:55 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

### Point of Order

#### Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, citing 23(h), (i), and (j) of the standing orders. At the time noted, the Leader of the Opposition began one of her questions with saying: 'I'll be more reasonable when the Premier drinks arsenic-laced water. This is certainly language meant to cause disorder in this Chamber. It's certainly unparliamentary. That'd be like me saying that I'll take the Leader of the Opposition more seriously when she decides to listen to all of question period instead of just leaving halfway through.

**Ms Gray:** That's a point of order.

**Mr. Schow:** I do find this to be a point of order.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Withdraw.

**The Speaker:** What do you withdraw?

**Mr. Schow:** The previous comment I just made with regard to . . .

**The Speaker:** I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you.

On to the matter at hand.

**Ms Hoffman:** Want to talk about class? No, seriously.

**Mr. Schow:** Pot, meet kettle.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a point of order, suggesting the Premier drink arsenic-laced water. I would encourage the Leader of the Opposition to be better and apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but if the Government House Leader's comments are accurate, that the Leader of the Official Opposition said, "I'll be more reasonable when the Premier drinks arsenic-laced water," I would suggest this is not a point of order. This is a matter of debate and a pop culture reference. If the *Erin Brockovich* movie perhaps comes to mind, the idea of an argument around the safety of drinking water being made, suggesting that if somebody believes the water is safe, they should drink it, is something we are all quite familiar with. I believe Julia Roberts portrayed it excellently. This is similar and not a point of order. It is a colourful reference to bring seriousness to something that is impacting Albertans and is an issue of high concern. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. The Official Opposition House Leader has the floor. You might not agree with her position, but she's certainly entitled to make it.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I submit to you that this is a matter of debate, not a point of order. The Leader of the Official Opposition under 23(h), (i), and (j) did not make an accusation, did not insult; instead, she made a colourful reference that I think illustrates an important point in this debate about safety of drinking water.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. There may be some discrepancy amongst what was claimed and what the Blues have reported. I think the heart of the matter is still the same. The Blues report that the hon. Leader of the Opposition said the following: "It'd be more reasonable when the Premier drinks arsenic-laced water." I would suggest that under Standing Order 23(j), uses abusive or insulting language that is likely to create disorder, suggesting harm directed towards another member is certainly not going to create order in this Assembly. I consider this matter a point of order, which the hon. Opposition House Leader will rise to address.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition I apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:14 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.



## Point of Order Allegations against a Member

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was speaking and said, with unofficial records and, of course, without the benefit of the Blues, something to the effect of the following: the environment minister accused me of lying and fearmongering when I repeated facts yesterday at a press conference. This certainly falls under 23(h), (i), and (j), in particular: makes false accusations against another member, imputes false or unavowed motives against another member.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, you've also exercised caution as recently as yesterday, suggesting that in dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner, and intention of the member speaking. In this instance, I am certain the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was suggesting and making false accusations against the hon. minister of environment, and I believe that this is certainly unparliamentary. I would believe, in my opinion, that it would rise to the level of a point of order, and I'd ask that member to apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Normally when we are talking about the language around lying, it is accusing another member of lying or using mistruths, and there have been many, many rulings. In this case the member essentially said that the minister accused her of lying. Now, in order to defend this point of order, I've had to go back to the November 27, 2023, *Hansard* page 348, when the minister, in response to a question from the member, did say:

I do want to point out, though, that during the NDP's press conference today the member opposite did make numerous claims that arsenic, dissolved metals, and other carcinogens were at risk of causing danger to drinking water, wildlife, and people. Mr. Speaker, this is fearmongering and it is emphatically untrue. The drinking water does in fact remain safe.

Yesterday, on page 348, we have the official *Hansard* showing that the minister did in fact accuse this member of fearmongering and did specifically name her and say that it was "emphatically untrue," therefore accusing her of lying. Perhaps the Official Opposition should have called a point of order at that time, so I appreciate the Government House Leader flagging this to us now.

It is accurate that the minister accused the member of lying, making this not a point of order. I would suggest this is a matter of debate, again on a very serious issue, and I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that if I could, I would raise a point of order on yesterday, having now reviewed the *Hansard*. I don't believe I have that power, so I would urge you to rule this a matter of debate given the accuracy of the statements involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there other submissions?

I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said that the minister of environment "accused me of lying and fearmongering when I repeated these facts yesterday at a press conference." I should just note to members that the very presence of the word "lying" isn't itself a point of order. It is very difficult for the Speaker to rule, despite the references which the Official Opposition House Leader provided for us from *Hansard* of the account that the minister made yesterday. It's very difficult for the Speaker to rule on what comments were made at a press conference or were not made at a press conference, and I would certainly be reluctant to consider

what ramifications that might have for the Speaker in future contexts. As such, this is not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day Government Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier has the call.

### Federal Clean Electricity Regulations

16. Ms Smith moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve pursuant to section 3 of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act the following motion.

1. The Legislative Assembly is of the view that
  - (a) in accordance with section 92A of the Constitution Act, 1867, the Alberta Legislature has exclusive legislative jurisdiction over, inter alia, the development, conservation, and management of sites and facilities in Alberta for the generation and production of electrical energy,
  - (b) the government of Canada has proposed the clean electricity regulations (the "federal initiative") with the intent of bringing them into force in the near future and may consider amendments before that time,
  - (c) the federal initiative, by its pith and substance, seeks to regulate the development, conservation, and management of electricity sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy,
  - (d) the federal initiative mandates a set of emissions standards and timelines that are unattainable within the context of Alberta's electricity industry and available energy resources,
  - (e) the federal initiative is already having an extreme chilling effect on investment in Alberta's electricity generation industry and, further, is slowing investments in emissions-reducing technology and projects,
  - (f) the Supreme Court of Canada recently issued a reference opinion that the Impact Assessment Act (Canada) is largely unconstitutional as it is ultra vires the federal legislative jurisdiction under section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867, due to the legislative scheme intruding into areas of exclusive provincial legislative jurisdiction outlined in section 92A, which includes, inter alia, the development, conservation, and management of sites and facilities in Alberta for the generation and production of electrical energy, and
  - (g) the government is actively implementing its emissions reduction and energy development plan to achieve a carbon-neutral power grid and economy by 2050, which is in line with Canada's international commitments but does not align with the government of Canada's arbitrary 2035 net zero electricity grid targets.
2. The Legislative Assembly is of the opinion that
  - (a) the federal initiative is unconstitutional on the basis that it is not directed at a matter falling

within section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and impermissibly intrudes into an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, namely the development, conservation, and management of facilities in the province for the generation of electrical energy as set out in section 92A of the Constitution Act, 1867,

(b) the federal initiative will cause or is anticipated to cause harm as follows:

(i) the federal initiative is already having an extreme chilling effect on investment in Alberta's electricity generation industry and, further, is slowing investments in emissions-reducing technology and projects;

(ii) the federal initiative proposes to mandate a set of emissions standards and timelines that are unattainable within the context of Alberta's electricity market and available energy resources, and as such the implementation of the federal initiative in Alberta presents a substantial and material risk to the health and safety of Albertans by

(A) jeopardizing the safety and reliability of the provincial electricity grid and availability of sufficient electrical energy supply, which dramatically increases the likelihood of widespread blackouts and brownouts during severe cold and hot weather events stemming from a lack of reliable and dispatchable baseload electricity, and

(B) jeopardizing the affordable access to electrical energy, and

(c) the federal initiative threatens the economic well-being of Albertans and the economic viability of the Alberta economy by dramatically increasing the cost of access to electrical energy through mandating hundreds of billions of dollars of public and private monies to be spent within an approximate 10-year period in technologies still under development and yet unproven for the required commercial application and grid infrastructure and services.

And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to consider the following responses to the federal initiative:

- (a) ensure that the government and any provincial entity defined in the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act, to the extent legally permissible, refrain from recognizing the constitutional validity of the federal initiative, enforcing or aiding in the enforcement of the federal initiative, or co-operating with the implementation of the federal initiative within Alberta in any manner,
- (b) in consultation and collaboration with the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Market Surveillance Administrator, consumers, industry, Indigenous

- communities, and other relevant stakeholders develop electrical system reforms necessary to
- (i) ensure a safe and reliable provincial electricity grid to guarantee Albertans and Alberta businesses access to reliable electricity at all times,
- (ii) ensure access to affordable electricity for Albertans and Alberta businesses,
- (iii) work towards a carbon-neutral provincial electricity grid in alignment with the government's emissions reduction and energy development plan through incentivizing the advancement of emissions-reducing technologies and legitimate carbon offsets,
- (iv) ensure Alberta's electrical generation, transmission, and distribution systems will accommodate the expected high population and economic growth in Alberta over the coming decades, and
- (v) preserve the interests and value of the capital investments made in Alberta's electricity system by private generators, transmitters, and distributors, enabling continued competition for generation and attracting continued private investment in Alberta's electricity sector (collectively the provincial electrical systems objectives),
- (c) in consultation and collaboration with the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Market Surveillance Administrator, consumers, industry, Indigenous communities, and other relevant stakeholders explore the feasibility and effectiveness of the potential establishment of a provincial Crown corporation for the purpose of achieving and securing the provincial electrical system objectives.

And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to use all legal means necessary to oppose the implementation and enforcement of the federal initiative in Alberta, including launching a legal challenge in the Alberta courts and to otherwise advance the objectives and initiatives described in this motion.

3:00

**Ms Smith:** Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move Government Motion 16 on the Order Paper.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that Ottawa continues to attempt to remake Canada's electrical systems, and their plans to do so will have serious repercussions to Canadians and especially to Albertans, making life more expensive for families and putting the reliability of our power grid at risk. For anyone who chooses to take the time to look at and read section 92A of the Constitution of Canada, they would clearly see that legislating and regulating the development of electricity falls within provincial jurisdiction. Once again the federal government is trying to interfere in matters that are clearly under the purview of provincial governments, and that is why we brought forward the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act around this same time last year. We are committed to protecting Albertans from federal overreach. We developed this

legislation to shield the province from federal intrusions, and we're using it because the consequences of this particular intrusion and overreach would be so severe. That is why today we are debating Government Motion 16.

Ottawa's so-called Clean Electricity Regulations unnecessarily target Alberta. Albertans will bear the largest share of these expenses as their bills skyrocket. I do want to go through a bit about some of the regulations and why it is that some of the adjustments that the federal government is proposing are not nearly adequate and why we've chosen to take this measure of saying that we will not enforce them. Ottawa has already made the inflation and affordability crises worse with their carbon tax and their rampant spending. These regulations will only make it worse. Just in time for the colder weather to begin creeping in, the federal government will be leaving Albertans with electricity they can't pay for and they can't rely on as wind and solar are not yet reliable enough through long, dark, cold, in other words typical, Canadian winters. Let me be perfectly clear. Albertans must have access to affordable and reliable power. That is not a matter of debate. It is not open to questioning. As a provincial government it is our job to ensure it. This is a matter of life and death. It's a matter of paying for heat or paying for food.

If I want to be generous, I'd suggest that perhaps Ottawa is maybe simply looking to lose another court battle, having lost two already. We've seen them lose to the Supreme Court on their Impact Assessment Act, and only five weeks – five weeks – after that they lost in Federal Court over their plastics ban. I've never seen a government so willing to lose over and over and over again yet continue to persist. Canada's courts have made it clear that Ottawa cannot interfere in matters of provincial jurisdiction, and these electricity regulations are one more example of them doing just that. So we're saying enough is enough. If Ottawa won't listen to the courts, if they won't listen to Albertans, if they won't listen when we try to work well with them, well, then, we end up right here, where we are today, with a resolution under the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act.

Once again, Madam Speaker, let me just go through and talk about why it is we've structured this so that we will not recognize the federal regulations. We established a table with the federal government, with 10 representatives on our side, 10 representatives on their side, to work through each of these issues to see if we can get alignment around our plan to be carbon neutral by 2050. I'm sad to say that we have not made very much progress on this issue in particular. As I've mentioned before, we must reduce emissions, and we already have on our power grid by 53 per cent. But we also have to make sure that as we're continuing to reduce emissions, working towards a 2050 target of carbon neutrality, the system remains reliable and the system remains affordable. Unfortunately, the federal rules would not allow for any of those.

On November 1, 2023, we made a submission by letter to their consultation, as they're consulting on the first round of their regulations under *Gazette* 1, and they have remained committed to a 2035 target. That is just 12 short years away from now. The problem that we have is that what they are saying to us is that for any new natural gas, if it comes on stream after 2025, the emissions will have to be 95 per cent abated by 2035. Now, if we look around the world – and we're leaders in this. Canada and Alberta in particular are leaders in developing carbon capture technology. We have produced projects that are operating at scale, have already managed to sequester 11 megatonnes, so we know a thing or two about this. And when we talk to our industry experts, they say that we are at a point now where we can abate 60 per cent of emissions. That's pretty darn good, but it's not 95 per cent, which is the unrealistic target that the federal government has set.

Now, it's pretty clear, if you go on their website, that one of the ways they are asserting their authority is through their criminal law power, their Canadian environmental protection law, and if you look at that law, there are fines and jail time that are established as part of the penalty for not reaching these targets. I know that part of their talking point now is, "Oh, well, we don't actually really send people to jail," but that is soft comfort for any private-sector CEO who is contemplating trying to invest and make a decision on investing in natural gas. They're supposed to cross their fingers and hope that by the time they get to 2035, the technology is caught up to a point where they're able to meet these unreasonable targets and hope that the government of the day stands true to its promise today, that they're not going to throw them in jail or give them a massive fine. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, I'm telling you that CEOs aren't willing to take that risk, and their board of directors aren't willing to take that risk.

The other issue that we have is that the regulations are prescribing a 20-year lifetime for prescribed end of life for these investments, which is completely unreasonable. Most of these projects have a 40- to 60-year time frame. This matters because what happens when a company invests in a project? They build in a price over time in order to pay back their capital investment. If you have to pay back that capital investment in 20 years, that is very different than paying it back in 60 years. It means you're going to have to charge three times the cost of those 20 years in order to be able to recover it. So you're leaving money on the table. You're stranding assets.

We believe that there are three other solutions that industry is looking for. One is: let's work towards the best available technology. And who knows? By 2035 it might be 75 per cent, 80 per cent abated. Then we could be looking at having reasonable carbon offsets. We could be looking at direct air capture. There are some exciting projects on that front. Canadian Occidental just purchased Carbon Engineering and are now rolling out a thousand different direct air capture sites. That could be a future solution for us. Article 6 is something that we are actively pursuing in negotiations with other jurisdictions to see if we could export our clean LNG and reduce higher emitting fuels and be able to get credit back here, share the credit. That could be another option. So those are the things that are not on the table under the federal prescribed rules.

The other problem that we face is peaking units. One of the reasons wind and solar have been able to expand so much in our province is not only because we are the only jurisdiction with a private market, but it's because we have a backup to solar and wind, and it's the peaking units that are able to come on stream when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. Unfortunately, the federal government wants to cap the regulations around those so they can only operate at a size of 25 megawatts, which is too small for the typical peaking unit. They also want to regulate that they can only operate for 450 hours. Four hundred and fifty hours, Madam Speaker, would mean that they would essentially have to turn off around January 18 of each year, and then we cross our fingers and hope that we don't end up with days of a lack of sun and a lack of wind, which we know is very common all the way through the winter season.

We also know that the approach that they would take, which would force us to try to get to full abatement by 2035, would put a disproportionate cost on Albertans. The Public Policy Forum did an estimate of this cost. Anywhere from \$1 trillion to \$1.7 trillion is what they anticipate for the economy as a whole, but because Alberta is more reliant on natural gas than other jurisdictions, we would be looking at a minimum cost of \$200 billion between now and 2035 and much more likely \$450 billion.

In addition, when we look at some of the alternatives – and you know what? We would love to see other zero emissions alternatives

in this province if they were cost-effective. It's wonderful that Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario and British Columbia and Manitoba have access to hydroelectric resources, but we simply do not have the same capacity. If you look at the length of time it takes to get a hydroelectric project approved, just look no further than right next door on Site C. That's an 1,100-megawatt plant. The cost of it is now \$15 billion. They began the regulatory process for that in 1954. It finally began in earnest about 10 years ago, and it's nearing completion.

In addition, bravo to Ontario for having taken the lead in the 1950s to develop a nuclear industry. Sixty per cent of their power comes from nuclear. But if you want to look as well at what the cost of that would be, a typical 1,100-megawatt plant is now costing in the range of \$6 billion to \$9 billion to build. That's the cost that we would be looking at.

**3:10**

If you look at natural gas – and we are so fortunate to have a few natural gas projects that were approved years ago coming on stream next year, about 2,700 megawatts of power, one of them Cascade, which is pretty exciting because it has Indigenous equity ownership that has been enabled by the great work of my colleague in Indigenous Relations and the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. That's a 900-megawatt facility, so almost about the same size, and it cost \$1.5 billion. Even if we were to add the best available carbon capture technology to that, that would add another \$600 million. It is well more cost-effective in this market with our basin, the natural gas resources that we have to continue producing baseload electricity from natural gas, and that's what we want to do.

I should also mention that these unabated peaker plants: if they are expected to come off grid by the time we get to 2035, that would mean that we don't have the secure backup for the wind and solar. In addition, we are being told that cogeneration, many of these projects that would otherwise be behind the fence and are selling into the grid: they can go off grid and still continue providing electricity, but then we would be deprived of being able to have that stabilize our power grid.

Also – I guess this one must rank as my favourite – they've given us provisions if we have emergency use. If it happens like it happened seven times last winter or it happens like the three times that it happened this summer, when we ended up with a level 3 alert, meaning that our grid had become unstable, we were at the peak production of 12,000 megawatts, we would be able to get emergency use authorization for power to be brought on stream. All we'd have to do is call our friendly neighbourhood federal environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, and he would decide whether or not we would have permission to turn on our electricity in minus 30 and plus 30 weather. That is the structure of the regulations that they are putting in front of us.

You can understand why we have said absolutely not. They do not have the regulatory authority to make these decisions, and we simply will not abide by them. They have given us no choice. The way this motion would be structured is that we simply will not recognize the regulations. We will be asking our provincial entities that take their direction from us not to enforce the regulations in any way. That would be the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Market Surveillance Administrator, and any other agencies, boards, and commissions that would be empowered to assist us in stabilizing our power grid, the Balancing Pool being one entity and any potential future provincial entities such as a Crown corporation. We would protect provincial entities from legal repercussions, and this would require legislation.

This has happened before, where in our province we do have some legislation where agents of the provincial government are protected, shielded from legal liability. I gave the example in a press conference yesterday, for instance, that the chief medical officer of health under our Public Health Act is protected from any potential liability in the event decisions made cause harm to others. So there is legal precedent for this. In Saskatchewan they're already pursuing as well a similar type of approach as they are taking a direct challenge to the federal government on a different matter, which is on the matter of collecting the carbon tax. They are also creating architecture to protect their members of their Crown corporations from having legal liability. We will be looking at the same thing.

We want to ensure that we have a safe and reliable power grid, and as I mentioned, having seven alerts in 2022, three so far this year: part of the reason for that is that when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, that's when we end up with a tight grid. In a couple of those cases, two that I looked at in particular, even though we have nearly 5,000 megawatts of installed wind and solar in the province, on two of those days in particular in combination they were generating less than 100 megawatts of power. So the solution isn't just to build more wind and solar because whether you build 10 times as much as we have or 20 times as much as we have, if the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, it doesn't generate baseload electricity, and that's what we have to be mindful of.

We want to collaborate with partners to ensure that Alberta maintains an affordable, reliable electricity grid using the different entities that I talked about. We know that there is already participation in the market with government entities. I've mentioned the ones that are provincial – the AUC, the AESO, the MSA, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, the Balancing Pool – but also at the municipal level EPCOR is wholly owned by the city of Edmonton; Enmax is wholly owned by the city of Calgary. If we choose that we need to enter into this market to provide some stability as a generator of last resort, that's what we are prepared to do. As we continue to work towards a carbon-neutral power grid in line with the government's emissions reduction and energy development plan, we want to incentivize emissions reduction technologies and legitimate carbon offsets. We want to ensure that Alberta's electrical generation, transmission, and distribution can support Alberta's growing population.

Keep in mind where we find ourselves. The migration growth that we are seeing has not reached these levels since 2006. We had a period of time from 2014 until about a year and a half ago where we were seeing not only a decline in the economy but also out-migration. Now that's turned around. We're seeing growth in our economy and people want to move here, and when that happens, you're going to see a continued increase in the need for electricity. Migration growth has not been seen at this level since 2006. It outpaces every other province. The first half of 2023 alone saw about 30,000 Canadians move to Alberta, and we want to continue to enable competition for generation, continue to attract private investment.

To do this, Alberta will need sufficient baseload to prevent future blackouts and brownouts. The only foreseeable option for the immediate future is natural gas, but the clean electricity regs make private ownership of natural gas assets very risky. We can see that these regulations are already negatively impacting Alberta as there are no further pending applications. Imagine that, Madam Speaker. We have a power grid that is on most days 90 per cent reliant on natural gas. We have projections that say that we are going to continue growing in our population as well as continue growing our economy, we're going to need to double our amount of power

generation by 2050, and no one – no one – is interested in building natural gas? How can that possibly be?

The reason why is because of the federal regulations, which a lot of executives fear will make it illegal to be operating these plants past 2035. The next steps that we're going to take are that we're going to consult on the feasibility of a Crown corporation. It is absolutely not our first option because we would far rather continue to see our private-sector market work. It's been working so well for us. We've had tens of billions of dollars of new generation that has come to our province across the board, not only in natural gas but also wind and solar, increasing interest in geothermal and others. We want to continue that, but we also have to make sure that we are creating the incentive so that we can get the baseload that we need.

We'll begin next year doing a consultation on the feasibility of a Crown corporation. If there is some other option, if there is a way, now that we have demonstrated that we are prepared to stand with industry, that industry is prepared to put in submissions so that we can get the baseload that we need, we will happily choose that as our first option. We do also know that there is an opportunity for us to partner with other provinces – Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick, as we'd signed an MOU before; we are in the process of renewing that – so that as they develop the technology around small modular nuclear, we would be in a position to be able to roll that out.

Our Environment and Protected Areas minister signed a \$7 million granting agreement with Cenovus to explore the feasibility of rolling out nuclear at one of their sites. We've had four municipalities express an interest in also having small modular nuclear power their communities. We know that that has the potential in the future to be one of the options that we can choose, but it is a future that will probably be post-2035, not achievable by 2035.

I know that it may seem like from time to time we have these scraps with Ottawa. We like to work with Ottawa, and we can work with Ottawa. We have a number of examples where we have been able to work with Ottawa. For instance, on the issue of health care, we signed a \$24 billion health care accord. It confirms that we will uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act. During the epic forest fires we worked with the federal government to ensure that they had resources here to assist us, with the PPCLI, who did an amazing job of assisting us on the ground firefighting, as well as the work that they did in evacuating communities using Hercules aircraft as well as the continued work that they're doing in helping to rebuild. We can work collaboratively with the federal government on that.

We've been able to work with them on the development of a number of net-zero major investments in our province; for instance, Air Products and their net-zero hydrogen facility. That was a joint investment with us and the federal government. Dow Chemical: you may have heard that Dow Chemical announced that they are going to make the phase 1 investment in their net-zero petrochemical plant. We'll be doing a joint announcement with the federal government on that tomorrow. As well, De Havilland in providing water bombers: we're working with the federal government to make that one a reality.

3:20

We saw earlier last week that the carbon capture, utilization, and storage investment tax credit has been announced by the federal government. We announced ours just today, so it can dovetail with that proposal so that we're able to bring more investment here. We continue to have a table where we work with them on how we might be able to develop out the hydrogen economy. The federal natural resources minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, drives a hydrogen vehicle.

I think that there's a lot of opportunity for us to be able to build out our transportation infrastructure around hydrogen, and we have partnered on a number of different projects in supporting the hydrogen hub in the Industrial Heartland.

Then, of course, I've already mentioned small modular reactors. We have a working table on how we might be able to streamline the regulations around that. We are working in every area that we can to help the federal government and the provincial government align on a common approach, because we know industry needs certainty. The best way the industry could get certainty, however, is for the federal government to recognize that this is our area of jurisdiction, align their plans with our objectives so that we can go to international conferences like COP 28 together and have a great story to tell not only for Alberta but for the entire country.

We're not alone in our concern about the net zero by 2035 target, and I want to just read a couple of independent quotes from experts in the industry who have offered their opinion. Nancy Southern, ATCO CEO. Here's what she says: I'm a big believer in applying new technologies and advancing towards our net-zero target for 2050, but I don't understand why this would be accelerated without a discussion about costs, about public safety.

Duane Reid-Carlson is president of Calgary-based energy consulting company EDC Associates Ltd. This is what he says: we're being asked to rebuild our complete electric system, that took 130 years to build, in 10 to 15 years; theoretically it's possible; we can take a stab at all of this, but jamming it into a short period of time is really going to cause the bubble to burst in some places; it is going to be painful for the economy and for the consumer at large.

SaskPower have said: we're committed to achieving a net-zero greenhouse gas emission power system, and we're on track to do so by 2050 or earlier; we're also on track to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030; however, reaching net zero by 2035 isn't feasible, not technically, logistically, or financially.

Lisa Baiton, who is CEO of CAPP, says this: here in Canada we've taken a very complex approach; some may call it punitive; I think there's a stark philosophical difference here in Canada to how we can address equally important policy directives using greenhouse gas emissions, ensuring that we have energy security and national security; our vision shouldn't be regulating in particular our sector to the point of oblivion. Oblivion, Madam Speaker: that's what they are concerned about.

The evidence for this resolution is clear. I should just mention one more so that we can all talk about the kind of future that we want to have, because while we want to make sure that our industry has a reasonable time frame to achieve a target – that's why we've established 2050 as that guidepost – some of these companies are suggesting they could perhaps do it even sooner, by 2045. You know what? When industry sets their mind to something in this province, my goodness, don't they get it done? Look what we just announced earlier today with the methane emissions reduction. We set a target to reduce emissions by 45 per cent by 2025, and here we are having achieved that target two years early. That is what we do in this province. We set targets that are reasonable, we challenge industry to meet them or better them, and they often do, so let's put that out there as a 2050 target.

Even Capital Power, as an example, has said that they could very likely reach carbon neutrality by 2045 with a combination of things. Number 1 is carbon capture, utilization, and storage, that will be helped along with the joint federal-provincial carbon capture, utilization, and storage tax credit. Number 2 is a reasonable amount of solar and wind. They've also talked about battery backup, especially as battery technology improves. That's going to be another aspect that they want to do. Number 3 is small modular

nuclear when it becomes technologically feasible, making sure that that is rolled into their system. Number 4 is direct air capture or purchasing carbon offsets to be able to make up the difference, and that is a reasonable approach, Madam Speaker.

That is the approach that we're hearing from industry, and that is the reason why we have asserted ourselves in this area of jurisdiction so that we can continue to support our industry in keeping the lights on, making sure that we have affordable power, and also achieving our ambitious emissions reduction targets. We lead the country in renewable energy investment, but we still can't use it for the majority of our electricity needs. Alberta doesn't have the extensive hydroelectric resources of other provinces. We don't have nuclear, as I mentioned, as they do in Ontario, and there's nowhere near enough time to get the permits in place to design and build the required capacity by 2035.

Natural gas is the foundation of our electrical system, and it will be for a long time to come. However, there are simply not enough natural gas projects coming to Alberta. Ottawa's electricity regulations have not yet come into place, but they're already hurting investment in our province, and that means that risks to our reliable and affordable electricity grid are already on the horizon. I'd argue that they're already here.

I will reiterate that Alberta agrees that we need to work towards a carbon-neutral future, but we will not sign on the bottom line that demands we achieve this by 2035. It's just simply not rational. It would be irresponsible of our government to not act. We can't put the stability of our electricity grid at risk, and we won't watch members of the private sector go to jail for simply providing the electricity that Albertans need in the most efficient, cost-effective, and reasonable way possible. As I said, we'd prefer to work with Ottawa; we really would. Albertans and Canadians want us to work together, and we tried for months to collaborate, but the simple fact is that Steven Guilbeault, the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, is unwilling to listen and he has forced our hand. We are left with no choice but to react to the absurd, illogical, unscientific, and unconstitutional interference in Alberta's provincial jurisdiction.

So I encourage all members to stand up for Alberta, stand up for Albertans, stand up for our economy, and stand up for every family who cannot afford to have government make life even more expensive, and every member of this Assembly has that opportunity, Madam Speaker, by voting in favour of this motion.

Madam Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Government Bills and Orders**  
**Second Reading**  
**Bill 2**  
**Alberta Pension Protection Act**

[Debate adjourned November 23: Ms Wright speaking]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any members to join the debate? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that I'm pleased to rise, as I often do when I commence speaking to legislation, but in this case I'm quite disappointed to have to rise because I am today talking about a bill the very existence of which should not be, given the assertions and the assurances given by the Premier to the people of this province in the last election as well as, quite frankly, to the people of the province as recently, probably, as

yesterday. Pretty much the last time the Premier mentioned something about the UCP plan to gamble the pensions of Albertans, she made assertions that would make us question, therefore, why we have this bill before us since it is very much a pretty outrageous bait and switch from the kind of assurances Albertans have been getting from this Premier.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Nonetheless, let me unpack that a little bit, Madam Speaker. This Premier has long been part of a group of people who toy with separatism and various ways to get very close to separatism with respect to the role of this province in the country of Canada. Those groups have over the years, as part of their sort of extreme-right ideology, liked to talk about the possibility of using the pension retirement of Canadians and Albertans as a political tool in their unending demonstration of their anger at Ottawa. This is a long-standing trope in the world of pretty extreme right-wing Albertans, so of course the Premier has played with this idea off and on throughout her career, this idea of pulling the pension of Albertans out of the Canada pension plan.

3:30

Now, as a result of that, and in different times, the members of our party, the Official Opposition, the NDP, attempted to get the Premier on the record with respect to her plans in this regard leading up to the last election. We did that in terms of bringing in proposed legislation that would compel this government to have a referendum that needed to be adhered to before there was any progress on the Canada pension plan, and they, of course, rejected that opportunity and that guarantee. Then during the campaign the Premier refused, basically, in a very steadfast way to actually answer multiple questions going to her from Alberta voters about what her plans were with respect to the role and the security, quite frankly, of Albertans' pension retirements in the Canada pension plan should she become the Premier again; so very steadfastly and stubbornly refused to talk about it except to say, "Don't worry; no matter what happens, there will be a referendum," but that would only be when pushed.

Then once the election was over, almost immediately it seemed, there was nothing that this Premier could talk about except this pension. She lulled Albertans into believing it was a debt issue and then immediately did a one-eighty and started driving at breakneck speed down the road of gambling the retirement security of Albertans. So that's where we are today. Before we even got to this bill, this Premier engaged in what she euphemistically, shall we say, referred to as consultation with Albertans.

Let's just talk about that a bit before we even get to what this piece of legislation purports to do. The Premier has spent well over \$7 million, probably closer to \$8 million, at least, of Albertans' money in order to campaign to them on why they should let the Premier use their pension savings as a political tool against Ottawa and the federal government. She calls that campaign consultation. It's not consultation; it's campaigning. Why is it campaigning? Well, let's first begin with the advertising that this government has spent an unprecedented amount of money on. It is advertising that is full of fake facts. It is advertising that this government and people employed within the public service should really sort of question their career choices about. It is advertising that makes outlandish promises to Albertans about the benefit of pulling their long-saved, long-worked-for pension contributions out of the Canada pension plan and putting them into a UCP-run plan that the Premier has complete control over.

There are a number of facts that expert after expert after expert have acknowledged are not reliable. People should not under any

circumstances take a single piece of information, that we are currently spending over \$7 million providing to Albertans, to the bank. They should not allow themselves to rely on the publicly funded communication from this government because that publicly funded communication is full of facts which are utterly unreliable. That's the first thing; that's the first part of the Premier's consultation plan.

Now, the second part of her consultation plan is to have former Finance minister Jim Dinning engage in what the Premier, again, euphemistically refers to as consultation with Albertans around the province. As many members of our caucus have pointed out, you know, getting yelled at on the phone by Jim Dinning is not what most people would actually describe if asked to provide their understanding of what the word "consultation" means. Nonetheless, what the Premier claims is that they have, through this process, consulted with 70,000 people. Now, I don't actually have a dictionary with me, but I do know that if I were to grab one, it would say that to consult requires two-way communication, some form of two-way communication.

So let's just unpack what's happened with these so-called 70,000 people who Jim Dinning has consulted with on the matter of whether they want to go any further along the road with respect to gambling their retirement pension savings by allowing this Premier to pull them out of the CPP and give herself complete authority over how they are dispensed with. Well, the way they consult is that those 70,000 people – let's just be clear. What that is, actually, is about 70,000 demon dialers and 70,000 Albertans who didn't hang up fast enough, so their picking up the phone and not hanging up fast enough is counted in that 70,000.

We wanted to know roughly how many people were actually heard during those telephone town halls led by Jim Dinning where he often yelled at people. We added them up, and I don't have the exact number, but on average we had 25 people who got to actually say something when the telephone town hall occurred. There were five telephone town halls, so – simple math – on average about 125 Albertans have been consulted through this mechanism with Jim Dinning and his telephone town hall consultation.

Now, just for the record, we've already had – well, I'll talk in a bit about how many people we've consulted with. But I will say simply that that's about one-quarter of the people we consulted with in one evening in the riding of the member to my right, the deputy House leader and the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. So, yeah, not a super successful description or outcomes or performance in terms of actually consulting.

Now, I will say that in the midst of these telephone town halls, where 125 Albertans got to say words after they managed to get through the very curated telephone screening process, there were, in fact, two opportunities for people to press a button to answer a question that was asked on the town hall. Now, we've asked for the results of what happened there, and of course the UCP government has refused to disclose them. But it is interesting because here is the – I just want to run through for folks what people were actually asked on this consultation. I'm just looking for it. I had it right in front of me. Let's just see here. I've got to go back down to the bottom and keep scrolling while I'm talking. Oh, yes. Here we go.

The first question that people were told to press a button on was: "What concerns you most about an Alberta pension plan? Press one for how the fund asset will be managed; press two for whether my pension will be lower than CPP; press three for whether my pension will follow me if I move in and out of Alberta; or press four for I don't have enough information yet."

And the other one – this one was even better: "What interests you the most about an Alberta pension plan? Press one for the possibility of lower pension premiums for larger paycheques; press

two for the possibility of higher pension payments for seniors; press three for having our pension assets and options under Alberta's jurisdiction; and press four for the possibility of spinoff jobs and a stronger financial sector." That's great. Do you know what wasn't asked in that telephone town hall that went to, theoretically, 70,000 people? "Would you like to leave CPP?" No. Not once. Not once. So anyway, there you go.

3:40

Now, in addition to that ridiculous exercise, the UCP government also put out a survey, and I won't spend a lot of time going over the ridiculousness of that, except to say that once again that survey failed to ask people whether they wanted in or they wanted out. Complete failure.

So here we are: 7 and a half million dollars. We have heard from 125 Albertans through the communication supported by that 7 and a half million dollars, and we have otherwise done unending levels of communication and campaigning to them with information that experts say is not true. You know, I got elected in 2008, Madam Speaker, and this level of shameless misappropriation of public funds: I've never ever seen anything this bad.

Now, that being said, we did engage in consultations. We didn't spend 7 and a half million to do it. We put out a survey online. We have so far received a little over 37,000 responses, and of that, 91 per cent of people answered the one question that we put out on the survey, and the one question was: do you want to leave the CPP? The answer was no. Ninety-one per cent said no. So there you go. Maybe folks who are interested in actually living the word "consultation" would be interested in hearing about our consultation.

In addition, as I said before, we've had one in-person town hall, and we had nearly 500 people at it. We have five more scheduled. We'll have more after that. We've repeatedly asked the minister and the Premier to attend at least one of our in-person town halls, and they have refused that. Meanwhile there was a commitment that there would be in-person consultation by the Dinning group, and we are now a couple of days away from December, the month within which they said those in-person consultations would occur, and they have not been announced yet.

It is a cascade of broken promises on this, Madam Speaker. You know, one broken promise leads to another broken promise leads to another one. It is a cascade. We're on several; there are more to come.

We've got the fake facts. We've got the fact that this government paid for a report which claims that their formula is one we should take seriously, their formula for what Albertans could expect to pull out of the CPP, which suggests that we will get 53 per cent of what's in the CPP, that somehow that formula is one upon which Albertans should do their own financial planning. The fact that that formula applied equally to Alberta and to Ontario and, say, B.C. would result in 130 per cent of the CPP funds being drawn out and the obvious mathematical impossibility of that: the formula is that flawed. The Premier just walks right on through it, right past it. What are facts? Why should we worry about common sense and facts? Nope. We're just going to spend money telling Albertans things which no reasonable person could possibly believe to be accurate or articulated in anything bordering on good faith.

So that's consultation. I want to say that it is a profound failure, and it amounts to a broken promise by this Premier. Now, there's another form of consultation that one can engage in – and now I'm going to get to this act – and that, of course, is a referendum. The Premier has made a lot of noise about, "Well, I'm going to do a referendum, and you can count on me; you can trust me" and "What's wrong with the other guys? They don't seem to want to

have a referendum.” Well, first of all, as I’ve just stated, there’s absolutely every reason for us to distrust profoundly any referendum managed by these folks given the multiple broken promises and the way in which they have taken what, you know, the common person’s understanding of consultation is and turned that into a taxpayer-funded political campaign. Very few people trust them to run a referendum, and there is good reason for that based on their record on this issue so far.

But what’s even more intriguing, Madam Speaker, is that this piece of legislation that the Premier has stood up in the House and claimed will actually ensure that we get a referendum doesn’t actually do that. It is appalling. The Premier is out there repeatedly telling people that this bill will ensure Albertans get to have a referendum before anyone goes ahead with taking their pension plan money and gambling it for the sake of her political hobby horse. This bill doesn’t guarantee that there will be a referendum.

What this bill says is that the cabinet may have a referendum, and then it says that if they want to get to the third or fourth step in the process of gambling away Albertans’ pension funds, they have to have a referendum first. What it doesn’t outline is that there is actually a very strong possibility that once we get to the point where this bill says that there must have been a referendum, we have now gone past the point of no return, and the horses have left the barn, and Albertans are compelled to continue in the process of having this government gamble away their pension plans.

It is one of the most disingenuous things I have ever seen, that this Premier gets up day after day and claims that she’s going to give people a referendum when, in fact, the timing of the referendum that is laid out in this bill may very possibly be too late. That’s the first disingenuous broken promise embedded in this bill by one of the most disingenuous Premiers I have ever run across, one of the most disingenuous governments I have ever run across.

The second thing that is in this bill that is deeply disingenuous is the fact that it gives the cabinet the flexibility to determine that they are not bound by the referendum. I can literally imagine the Premier getting up to the – well, never in a room of reporters. I’m sure she’ll just be on her lovely little radio show, where she gets to, you know, answer whatever she wants to answer. But she will get up and say: “Oh, you know what, Albertans? I never told you we’d listen to the outcome of the referendum, did I? No, no, no. I promised you we’d have a referendum, and that’s what I did, and you just assumed that I’d listen to the outcome of the referendum.” This bill specifically makes it clear that they do not have to listen to the outcome of the referendum.

Madam Speaker, you know, again it is shocking the level of deceitful drafting that is incorporated into a bill put forward by this government. Albertans need to know that this is not a bill to have a referendum. This is a bill to maybe have a referendum, perhaps before it’s too late, perhaps not, which they may or may not bother to listen to. Very, very concerning.

Now, practical people who actually thought that they were talking about an actual need to have a referendum before they went ahead with the CPP destruction and the gambling of Albertans’ pensions would have then looked to this to say: well, why aren’t we actually having a conversation about the wording of the referendum in this bill? But no, no, no, no. Of course, sneaky, sneaky, sneaky. We’re going to frame this referendum as being the same as one that we can always change our mind on, which, by the way, we can’t. Once we get out of CPP and we’ve gambled Albertans’ pensions, it’s done. But we’re going to frame this as though that’s not the outcome of the campaign this government is on. As a result of framing it that way, we are not going to compel this Legislature to actually weigh in on the wording of the referendum.

So, you know, based on the way this government worded their so-called and inaccurately named survey, I think we can assume with great confidence that whatever the referendum wording is will be utterly biased and designed to achieve an outcome, one that many, many Albertans of course don’t want to see.

3:50

Let’s talk a little bit more about this bill as well. We’ve got a consultation that was promised that’s not happening. We’ve got the government ignoring the roughly 90 per cent of people so far who have said they – roughly 37,000 of them have said they don’t want this. We’ve got over \$7 million being used to spread fake information to Albertans about this in the form of a political campaign using their political dollars. We’ve got a bill that does not do what the Premier claims it does, which is really an issue that I think we should talk about a little bit more seriously in this House, the point at which we actually hold the Premier accountable for the words she says. But that’s a different issue. Now we have the possibility of a referendum that, if it’s binding at all, will come long after the horse has left the barn.

So why do they want to do this? Well, they claim it’s because they want to give Albertans more. But you know what, Madam Speaker? Once again words, letters, paper, those things coming together: it’s a way to actually find out when people are saying things that they mean or when they’re saying things that they don’t mean. Unfortunately, when you look at the words and the letters and the paper, you find that this bill does not deliver what the Premier claims to be meaning.

What we have in here is a guaranteed benefit amount that amounts to what the CPP offers the day that the transfer is made. Should CPP offer more, there is no guarantee that Albertans will get access to it. Full stop. The end. That’s in here.

The next thing that it does is it does not offer the promise of benefits equivalent to CPP for Albertans who begin contributing to the APP after the APP is created. So what we will create is two tiers of pensioners in Alberta. We’ll create a tier of pensioners who were part of CPP, and then younger people will only be promised the benefit levels and the contribution levels that this government believes they deserve on any given day. That needs to be made very clear. The language about better or more in terms of benefits only applies to those who currently get the CPP, and it does not apply to younger Albertans, who would be joining the CPP later.

On top of that, this bill does however mandate an ongoing contribution ceiling. There can never be more or bigger contributions than what is happening in the CPP at the time that the APP is created. Well, that’s a problem, my friends. It’s a problem for two reasons. First of all, right now the maximum benefit offered through CPP is about \$1,300 a month. I don’t know how many folks here have tried to retire on that or think about retiring on that, but I’ll tell you – that’s actually better than nothing. It’s a good base. It is not the kind of respectful retirement that people who would have contributed for 40 or 45 years into a pension plan would be able to build their life around. Someday it might come that there are an adequate number of political leaders across the country who believe that we can do better.

However, the other thing that’s even more worrisome on this – let’s face it. Benefit rates have grown very slowly over the last 30 years. I’m not suggesting that they’re actually going to grow a huge amount. It would be nice if they did. I was pleased to be part of having them grow when we were in government. However, the other thing that can happen is that if the fund itself gets into trouble because of investment mistakes, because of demographic changes, because of economic changes, well, if that happens and there is a need to increase contributions in order to ensure that benefits of



those already retired or those in the future are protected, this bill says: “No way. No way, my friends. Under no circumstances will we contribute more. We will just demand that people get less.” That’s the plan. It doesn’t say that in black and white quite as much, but the impact of what is in black and white is exactly that: we would like people to get less. That’s what it says.

Again, that’s another problem that we see with this bill. It reflects frankly, Madam Speaker, the fact that inherently this government doesn’t believe in the value of pension benefits for people who have contributed to them collectively over the course of their working life. You know, if you’ve got lots of money at the end of your working life, great. If you don’t, it’s cat food for you. That’s pretty much the overriding policy preference of most members of the governing caucus, clearly, through their support of this bill.

Another issue, of course, that is raised here is that many experts have talked about risk, the idea of taking Albertans’ pension dollars and moving them from a pension the size of the CPP to a much, much smaller pension, whether it be 50 per cent, which it will not be, or maybe 22 per cent, which it may be. Well, what we’ve done is we’ve just created more risk right there, black and white. There’s not a financial expert in the province, in the country who wouldn’t say: yes, the smaller your pool, the greater your risk. I guess we just want to increase our risk.

Let’s just talk a little bit about that. You know, yes, on occasion we’ve been the lucky beneficiaries of the fact that we have a lot of natural resources in this province, but it’s not always that way. One of the things I learned in my very, very first briefing when we first got elected was: okay, what you need to know is that revenue and expenses in most provinces go up and down by about this much every year, but in Alberta it’s five or six or seven times that amount. We are a unique province because we have an unprecedented level of volatility in terms of our fiscal fundamentals. As a result of that, we are much less able to predict our fiscal situation.

All you have to do is go over the last five years of this UCP government, and you can see that. I remember watching with awe the former Finance minister when he would come in here and he would project, you know, a \$5 billion deficit. Then suddenly there would be a \$20 billion surplus. Then: oh, no, I guess it’s actually a \$2 billion surplus. The variance in terms of what he and well-meaning Finance officials would project and then what would be delivered a mere 12 months away was shocking. Yet it’s in that environment that these folks over there think that we should create a much smaller investment pool for the hard-earned pension funds of working Albertans in lieu of being in one of the most successful and secure pension plans in the world.

Finally, the other thing that worries me in terms of the matter of risk, quite honestly, is the likelihood of this government playing around with contribution levels and benefit levels as we go forward. The formula for changing contribution levels and benefit levels in the CPP is onerous. It involves a very high level of consensus, not total but a very high level of consensus amongst provinces before a change can be made. As a result of that, it’s a rare occasion that you will find consensus amongst the requisite number of provinces for any change to be made in either premiums or benefits. It happens about once every 15 years or so, maybe less. With that comes certainty and predictability and not only certainty and predictability for beneficiaries and certainty and predictability for contributors, both employers and working people, but also certainty and predictability for those who are engaged in investment work.

4:00

With a UCP fund to gamble Albertans’ pensions, sometimes referred to as an APP, those decisions would be at the discretion of the UCP cabinet, and they could make changes to benefits and

premiums any time they wanted. So a pension plan which previously was subject to the political winds of change maybe every 10 or 15 years would suddenly be subject to the political winds of change, well, at least with this current government, every day. That, my friends, is the nightmare scenario for – I don’t know – at the last check about 69 per cent of Albertans. That’s why we can’t do it. It’s just too much risk. Too much risk.

Albertans want retirement security, Madam Speaker. Albertans work hard for retirement security. They want to know they can count on certain benefits when it comes time to stop working, when they get to 65 or a little bit later, whenever it is they can afford to stop working. Let me say that I don’t just mean current Albertans; I also mean future Albertans. The fact that we’re talking about moving to this exceptionally discretionary, risky, likely less generous plan of a pension plan means that we will likely find that one of the economic advantages that we have had in Alberta for so long, which was incoming migration, will start to disappear. It will dissipate. People won’t trust that they can come and work in Alberta and their pension will be safe. So we will, as a result, undermine labour mobility, labour migration, and immigration, and we will undercut our economic activity as a result.

Secondary to this, of course, and the uncertainty that all of this creates is the fact that this will have a drag on our economic growth for the same reasons or for part of the same reasons, for the fact that we will find it harder to talk people into coming to Alberta but also because employers and business owners will be unsure of the stability and the reliability of the fund to which they are compelled to contribute. In some cases, if the UCP really messes it up, like they have pretty much every other thing they’ve managed since they’ve been elected, employers may find that what they’re going to have to start doing is offering supplementary retirement benefits to make up for what the UCP managed to undermine through their decision to gamble the pensions of Alberta’s working people.

All of these things come together to create a real challenge and a long list of reasons why we should not move forward on this bill. I will mention two more, Madam Speaker, and then I think I will have done a reasonably good job of outlining why this is easily one of the worst pieces of legislation I’ve ever been forced to comment on. There’s been a lot of talk about, just flowing from the matter of labour mobility, the issue of portability. We know that portability – when Quebec started by not being in the CPP, it took well over a decade once that happened to actually negotiate portability agreements across the country. I think in one or two provinces it took significantly longer than that as well.

We also know that with increasing globalization, matters of portability are also important for people that are working internationally, and that’s particularly the case here in a place like Alberta. We know that Quebec to this day, even though Quebec’s plan and the CPP started at the same time, has negotiated I think about one-third the portability agreements internationally than the administrators of CPP have been able to do. So imagine starting out with an APP. Once again the matter of portability for an international workforce: it’d be a complete disadvantage to employers trying to attract working people both from around the country as well as internationally.

Finally, I will just identify a question that many of us have raised which is also very concerning – and we have not seen a lot of information coming from this government on this matter as it relates to this bill – and that is the matter of how people who are eligible for CPP disability would be treated were there an APP and how those rules would be governed both in relation to current levels of CPP disability as well as their interaction with EI disability and their interaction with AISH and other provincial benefits. These are really important matters because in these settings we’re looking at

people who are very, very vulnerable, who are low income, and they need answers.

We have heard from so many folks looking for answers on this, and with all the push polls and all the advertising of fake facts and all the Jim Dinning yelling at phone callers and all this stuff, we've gotten very little specific information provided about how this government sees the rights of people who are eligible for CPP disability being preserved or protected in a way that they can count on through this scheme.

So for all those reasons, Madam Speaker, Alberta's NDP opposition will continue to fight against this bill. This hurts the economy. This hurts working people. This hurts retirees. This is a drag on our economic future, and it represents a broken promise by the Premier to the people of Alberta on about five or six different levels already.

The substance of this bill does not align with the public statements made by the Premier about what her plans are. This bill does not in any way offer up a legal backstop for the empty promises made by the Premier. Quite the opposite; it gives permission for this government and any others to drive through multiple loopholes which would undermine the retirement security of working Albertans.

Given the number of times that this government has broken its promise to the people of Alberta on this issue in the last 12 months, there is no way Albertans will trust them with this issue, with an issue that is so important to them, based on a flimsy piece of legislation like this one, that so clearly lays out a pathway for significant attacks on the retirement security of working Albertans.

So we will fight against this. We will continue to have our town halls. We will continue to bring the voices of Albertans into this House. We will do all the work that we can, and there will be much more to come. Mark my words, Madam Speaker, you can be sure that Alberta's NDP opposition will not stop fighting to protect the pensions of Albertans from this government's desire to engage in a risky gamble of their hard-fought pension benefits.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to be able to speak to Bill 2. This is my first time speaking to the bill. You know, this is an issue that I think is probably the most important issue that we can be discussing in the province today because it speaks to the future and the benefits that Albertans are going to be able to receive when they enter into retirement. I also believe that it's a very important conversation to be having because we have historically seen the Conservative governments in this province go after the pensions of the working people in this province.

4:10

I say that because I experienced it. When the Progressive Conservatives were still in government under Redford, we saw this government, that government at the time, create what was then known to be Bill 9, which was the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, as well as Bill 10, which was the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act, 2014. What those two pieces of legislation were designed to do was to erode the benefits of those members who had pensions. It was to move away from what was classified as a diversified pension plan and to basically allow private-sector pension holders and the government for public-sector pension holders to redesign what those pensions and those benefits looked like.

When that happened, the now Premier was a member of the Official Opposition and the Leader of the Official Opposition, and that member was silent. Then what we saw very quickly over a short period of time was that that then member, now Premier, joined that Conservative Party, which was then under the hon. Premier Prentice, crossed the floor, and continued to have discussions around whether or not people had a right to a pension plan.

Past behaviour is a predictor of future behaviour. Albertans should be concerned that we now have a government, where the Premier was a part of that conversation when it came to public and private pension plans, trying to create a conversation around the CPP and removing the benefits that Albertans will have when they retire by messing around and trying to create an Alberta pension plan.

Albertans should be paying attention, and the reason they should be paying attention is because I do not believe that this government will stop with the CPP. We've seen the Premier's past behaviour when it's come to looking at public-sector pension plans and when it's come to private-sector pension plans in this province. The Premier has been supportive of messing around with the retirement security of Albertans.

So because of that and because of those concerns, Madam Speaker, I have an amendment that I would like to introduce. I have the original and the requisite copies, and I will wait to read it into the record.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, this will be known as amendment RA1.

Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will read it into the record. The Member for Edmonton-Manning to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill, if enacted, would not adequately protect Albertans' pensions."

Now, Madam Speaker, I think I've been already very, very clear with this, which is the fact that, again – and I will say this on the record, and I will repeatedly say this – past behaviour is a predictor of future behaviour. We cannot trust, Albertans cannot trust this Premier and this government to manage pension plans. It's as simple as that.

Albertans have been clear that they don't trust this government in managing pension plans. We have seen, with the Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act in 2014, the Employment Pension (Private Sector) Plans Amendment Act in 2014, that Conservative governments do not support pension plans. We know this. The firewall papers indicate this. The Prime Minister, that was part of Alberta, that was a mentor for the now Premier, the hon. Prime Minister Harper, did not support pension plans. It is a thread of continuous behaviour and ideology that this Conservative government has historically always had when it comes to pension plans.

Albertans have been clear, through the consultations that the Official Opposition have had face to face with Albertans, that they do not want to leave the CPP. I believe that Albertans understand and know that they cannot trust this government with this current piece of legislation as it is today to form a question for a referendum that would actually protect them and allow them to stay in the CPP. We haven't seen this government form a question through their consultation process that even speaks to whether or not Albertans want to leave the CPP. It has been a slanted consultation. It has been directed with an ideology to try to influence the conversation.

The facts and the numbers that have been presented are not even accurate. We have heard clearly from the Finance minister that he doesn't actually even know what the numbers are, and he's waiting for Ottawa to give him the answer to the question. This bill should not be in front of this Chamber at this time because it actually doesn't even speak to the fact that the government doesn't even know what it's talking about. [interjections]

I know the lovely members opposite are laughing about this, but I'll tell you what. Albertans take their pension security and their retirement security seriously, and when the members laugh about it, it speaks to their ideology, and it speaks to the fact they don't respect Albertans' opinions. [interjections] The lovely Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland continues to laugh over there. He thinks it's hilarious that Albertans want to stay in the CPP. He's laughing. He thinks it's funny. I can't wait for his constituents to hear about the fact that he's laughing. Maybe he would like to come to St. Albert and actually speak to the constituents that invited him there. It would be great to hear that.

In saying that, Madam Speaker, I support this amendment. I encourage all members of this House to support the amendment. With that, I will sit down and leave room for another member to speak.

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

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. Well, I really appreciate it, Madam Speaker. The member opposite was calling me out for laughing. It's hard not to laugh at some of the diatribe I've heard in here for the last little bit regarding what is going on with the pension plan. The member knows full well that the federal government now is doing an actuary because they actually believe in what is written in the contract, and they have to come up with a number. She knows that.

Moreover, the challenge about me talking to my constituents: I'll have you know full well, Madam Speaker, that last Thursday, 6 p.m., I had my town hall, called What Matters to You, on the APP for three hours. We had a discussion with 125 people, and there were only two that were against it. One was a former high school teacher. I don't know how he votes, but I would guarantee it's not on my side. He didn't stick all the way through it. And one other gentleman spoke out against it. Everybody else was applauding what we were doing, bringing out information, speaking directly. A lot of them were coming from the surrounding areas because, quite frankly, they'd been to a number of the NDP town halls and they were getting nothing but a political slant one way or the other.

I strongly encourage members to have the courage to vote against this amendment, allow Bill 2 to go in place, that in the event that we do go to a pension plan, we lock in people's payments so they won't be greater than – that the rewards they get from this will be either equal to or greater than and that if we do go to a referendum, we'll call the Referendum Act.

The fact that this member talks about consultation and she talks about messing around: the biggest thing the NDP messed around with was that blessed carbon tax. They did zero consultation, and they have the gall to stand up here and talk about what's fair for Albertans.

I strongly encourage members of this Chamber to not vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:20

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak for the first time on the amendment of Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act. First off, I'd like to acknowledge the wonderful

constituents for Calgary-Glenmore. I actually have been talking to many of them. I've been seeing them at events as well as in my canvassing time. They also have been e-mailing me, and let me tell you that Calgary-Glenmore pays attention. They have many opinions about this pension adventure that the UCP is taking us all on.

Specifically, I heard from Barbara Widdowson, who has been exchanging with the Minister of Finance for over a month now, actually. That's between October 24 and November 23. She e-mailed the minister, who sent her the website and sent her the talking points from the alleged reports. Barbara is actually a retired lawyer and a recipient of the Canada pension plan benefits, and she, for the record, strongly opposes the Alberta pension plan. I would like to read some of her notes here to the Minister of Finance.

While I appreciate the reply it is disingenuous. The "engagement" you refer to is at best a marketing campaign. You also continue to use "could" [and] not would. I could find a live unicorn but I doubt that I would.

I practiced law for over 45 years and know that experts certainly disagree on valuations sometimes significantly. Changing one number can significantly affect the estimated ultimate payout.

Perhaps more significantly I do not trust the UCP to manage my money given what had already proved to be a dismal track record.

To reiterate: I adamantly oppose any change to my pension. That's Barbara Widdowson, KC.

I also heard from Derek Jassman. Derek actually e-mailed the Alberta pension plan panel led by Mr. Jim Dinning. He starts his e-mail by saying:

I have read several commenters write that you should resign from the panel before you embarrass yourself. Too late.

I have listened to three of the telephone "listening/information gathering" sessions and it is clear that you have no intention of listening to anyone. I have heard you and your fellow panelists ridicule, debate and dismiss Albertans' thoughts and questions on this ridiculous proposal. All you and your fellow panelists are trying to sell us on the benefits dismissing any concerns . . .

For the record, I am not in favour of exploring this idea at all. We have a perfectly functioning pension plan in Canada. I do not believe for one nanosecond that Alberta could do a better job of managing my pension contributions. In fact, since the time when you were the Finance Minister, our Conservative governments have done nothing but make poor decisions and waste literally hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars.

Derek Jassman is very opposed to the Alberta pension plan.

Madam Speaker, our constituents are worried and concerned, and I want to add my voice. My biggest worry is that this pension adventure is another example of the UCP changing the rules on investors and businesses without proper consultations. It's actually similar to what's happening in the renewables sector. We have a moratorium in which the government changed the rules and slammed the business community with one big red tape without consultations and without warning. Exiting the CPP is more red tape to everyone. Companies need to figure out: what does this mean to them? People need to figure out if they need to file taxes twice, because, yes, we all love doing our taxes twice.

This is political theatrics, and these theatrics are sending waves of uncertainty to global investors and adding more red tape. I thought imposing red tape like the moratorium on renewables was the biggest red tape, but, my goodness, we have now the nationalization of our electricity system. Jeopardizing our free market breaks the record as well as, of course, creating a second pension plan, which is the Alberta pension plan.

I worry, Madam Speaker, about the message that the government delivers to the investor community. I worry about the image that

Alberta has on the global stage: angry, unable to work with others, fighting city mayors, fighting with the feds, fighting with everyone under the sun. My second worry is actually the investment strategy for this Alberta pension plan. The basics of investing is ensuring lower management fees. The Leader of the Opposition and Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has already explained the risks. Scale allows a larger fund to lower costs, which translates into better performance for the fund. That's why staying within the CPP is a good idea.

Now I want to really talk quickly on the public money spent here. I would like to highlight some of the waste of time and public money spent on this pension adventure. For starters, we have the \$7 million spent on the campaign trying to convince Albertans that an Alberta pension plan is a good idea. I want to remind us here that the government's job and our job as elected officials is to represent Albertans and their worries and best interests. We're spending all this legislative time here that could be better spent on Albertans' other priorities.

I did simple math, like, really basic arithmetic here; it's not abstract algebra, but please indulge me. The base salary of an MLA is \$121,000. I'm using the base salary, not the ministerial salaries here. There are 87 MLAs. Let's say that we have spent at least 30 hours since session started debating the bill, preparing our debates, asking questions at QP. Let's figure out the MLA hourly rate here: \$121,000 divided by 2,080 hours; that's \$58.17. That's the hourly rate of an MLA. Eighty-seven MLAs by \$58.17: that's \$5,061.06, the hourly rate of 87 MLAs in this House.

Now, for simplicity, let's say that we spend 30 hours debating this APP. Let's multiply. That's \$151,831 of taxpayer money spent in 13 days only, debating a very unpopular bill, the taxpayer money that pays us to have this useless debate on a very unpopular bill that has nothing to do with the daily priorities of Albertans. I kind of miss fiscal conservatives, actually. Madam Speaker, we're here to legislate and debate Albertan priorities, not an ideological adventure against the federal government. We're here to represent the best interests of Albertans, which is staying within the CPP. [interjection] I'm wrapping up. Thank you.

I have been door-knocking a lot, Madam Speaker, and I've heard a lot from my constituents in Calgary-Glenmore. They're puzzled by this adventure. We have a plan that works. We have a plan that is working, and people are receiving their benefits. They're very confused on why we're spending all this time debating and trying to create more red tape and more confusion in a system that works. Again I want to remind everybody that we're here to represent Albertans' interests, Albertan concerns and debate in good faith what is really important to our constituents, to Albertans. My colleagues here have introduced this amendment today, and I ask you all to support it to continue this representation of Albertans.

With that, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

#### 4:30 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 7 Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023

**The Chair:** I am seeking members wishing to speak to the bill. The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

**Mr. Glubish:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 7 and in support of these proposed changes to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act. I'd like to start by talking about the problem we are trying to solve and why it is so important for us to do so. To do that, it is helpful to discuss the state of Alberta's tech sector. For the last four years our government has been working overtime to make Alberta an irresistible place to start, build, and invest in a tech company. We've done that in many ways, one of which is by investing \$175 million in our first term into Alberta Enterprise Corporation, our venture capital fund of funds, a fund of funds that has such a great track record that for every dollar it invests into a venture fund, \$5 is invested into an Alberta tech company. That is a great multiplier effect, and that is why we committed to invest another \$100 million in our second term into Alberta Enterprise to keep that momentum going.

We also contribute over \$200 million a year to Alberta Innovates. We have given hundreds of millions of dollars in research funding in partnership with our outstanding universities and polytechnics. We have dedicated \$23 million for Quantum City at the University of Calgary, \$30 million in the last budget for the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute at the U of A, \$30 million into Alberta's virology institute at the U of A, and \$5 million into applied pharmaceutical innovation for the rollout of the Canadian critical drug initiative, which we then leveraged to obtain \$80 million of federal funding.

We also have dedicated over \$170 million in funding for postsecondary institutions to create over 10,000 more spaces in the areas of highest demand, many of which are in tech-related disciplines. The result: Alberta is building a reputation as a global tech hub with expertise in artificial intelligence and machine learning, quantum life sciences, ag tech, energy tech, and so much more.

We have more tech companies than ever before. They are growing faster than ever before. They are raising more money than ever before. In fact, in 2017 we only saw about \$30 million invested into venture capital investments in Alberta, yet in 2022 we saw \$729 million of venture capital funding. That is a record year, and we are on track to surpass that yet again in 2023, all at a time when the Canadian venture capital market was on the decline. In fact, here's evidence to that effect. In the Canadian venture capital association's third-quarter report we see that year-to-date number for Alberta is up 5 per cent while the Canadian market faces a 25 per cent decline. We are bucking the trend. The investments we have been making are working. We never used to be able to say that Alberta had any billion-dollar tech companies. Today we have 10 or 12 of them, companies like Neo Financial, Attabotics, and Jobber, and they continue to grow and contribute to our tech sector's momentum.

People often ask me why Ontario's tech sector seems more mature than Alberta's. Well, in a nutshell, I believe it is because they have had their BlackBerry moment. What do I mean by that? They have had a \$50 billion tech success story that created tens of thousands of jobs, created wealth for tens of thousands of employees through stock options, and created a ripple effect where many of those employees, now financially secure for life, went off with five friends and started their own company. BlackBerry spawned thousands of spinoff companies from the talent and wealth that it created, and we in Alberta are on the cusp of having our own BlackBerry moment as companies like Jobber and Neo and Attabotics grow. Once we unlock that momentum, we will have started an economic growth and diversification trend that will secure the financial health and economic opportunities for future generations of Albertans like nothing we have ever seen since the discovery of our oil and gas

resources. Our government is committed to maintaining this momentum.

When I listen to leaders in our tech sector, what I hear is that one of their biggest obstacles to growth is access to talent, access to the best talent. We train truly world-class talent in our postsecondary institutions, like the U of A and the U of C and so many others, but in order to grow from 10 to 100 to thousands of employees, tech companies in Alberta also need to attract talent from all around the world. The global market for tech talent has reached a consensus on using the title “software engineer.” In all the major tech markets around the world, including Silicon Valley, this term is used freely. Everyone knows that just because you call yourself a software engineer, it doesn’t make you a professional engineer and it doesn’t mean you can stamp engineering drawings for a bridge or for a skyscraper. It simply means that you are part of a global talent pool focused on building new technologies with software. So what’s the problem?

Well, Canada is the only major tech market in the world that restricts the use of this title, and up until today Alberta’s regulator has been the most aggressive at restricting its use. In fact, for the last year APEGA has been fighting a lawsuit against one of Alberta’s biggest tech success stories, Edmonton-based Jobber. Canada is the only major market in the world that has a legislative framework that permits its regulators to behave like this, and Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada where the regulator is interpreting and applying the legislation and regulation in this way. As such, Alberta is the least attractive place in the world to recruit software engineers. Quite simply put, APEGA was persecuting Albertans who were never engaged in the practice of engineering as defined in the act for using the same terminology and title as their counterparts in every other jurisdiction in the world.

This has caused significant hardship to the tech sector, causing many tech companies to hire in other provinces in order to grow. That is simply unacceptable, and this is exactly what this legislation will address. The amendments in Bill 7 will permit those who work in Alberta’s tech sector to use the title “software engineer,” and it will allow our tech companies to recruit globally for the best talent, using the terminology that the rest of the world uses.

Well, why is this important? Let me give you just one example of regulatory overreach that has been threatening Alberta’s tech sector. I referenced it earlier, the lawsuit between the Alberta regulator APEGA and Edmonton-based Jobber. For the last year or so this lawsuit against Jobber was intended to prevent them from using the term “software engineer,” and as a result Jobber had to drastically reduce their hiring of engineering talent in Alberta and has instead been accelerating their hiring in Ontario and abroad despite being headquartered in Edmonton and having raised \$100 million in funding at the beginning of this year. Jobber had to drastically reduce their hiring of talent in Alberta, accelerate hiring in Ontario and elsewhere.

What a shame it would be if that were to continue and if that would end up in us chasing away such a success story like Jobber, because of this regulatory overreach. After all the investments we have made and energy we have spent to make Alberta an attractive place to do business, for us to see one of our most successful tech companies grow from zero to \$1 billion in value only to leave for another province like Ontario to then grow from \$1 billion to \$10 billion and beyond – we simply cannot allow this to happen.

But there is some good news, folks. I’d like to reference the fact that just a couple of weeks ago there was a decision in that court case by the Alberta Court of King’s Bench regarding the usage of the term “software engineer.” In a nutshell, in layperson’s terms let me unpack it for you. The judge found that employees who use the title software engineer and related titles are not practising engineering as that term

is properly interpreted. In other words, just because they call themselves software engineers does not mean that they are claiming to practise engineering as defined in legislation. The judge further found that there is no clear breach of the EGPA which contains some element of possible harm to the public that would justify a statutory injunction. In other words, APEGA’s assertion that an injunction was needed because public safety was at risk was rejected by the judge. Ultimately, the court dismissed APEGA’s lawsuit and directed them to pay Jobber’s legal fees. Folks, this is great news, and my hope is that this decision will help to prevent further frivolous lawsuits.

4:40

This court decision is aligned with the principles in our proposed legislation, but the results in this lawsuit underscore just how important it is that we proceed with Bill 7. We need to make sure that this type of frivolous litigation does not happen again. Bill 7 provides the clarity that both our tech industry and the engineering regulator need for the future.

Our government is committed to making Alberta the most attractive place to do business in Canada. We aim to be the best place to start a business, to grow a business, and to invest in a business. We already have the lowest taxes in the country. We have a business-friendly approach to reducing unnecessary red tape, and now we will be the best place in Canada to attract tech talent from all around the world. This is a game changer for our tech sector and will assist our fastest growing tech companies to maintain their trajectory. To all the brilliant innovators, entrepreneurs, researchers, and investors who are working hard every day to make Alberta proud: your government has your back. We always will.

I know that since the introduction of Bill 7 there have been some who have raised questions about how these changes might impact public safety. Let me assure you that our government takes the safety of Albertans very seriously, and that is why I’m pleased to say that Bill 7 does nothing to exempt businesses in Alberta from treating Albertans’ safety as a top priority.

Let’s consider the following examples. I often get asked: well, what about a software engineer that’s working on a pacemaker? Don’t we want to make sure that that’s safe? Well, here’s the good news. Pacemakers and medical devices are regulated by Health Canada. We already have a robust regulatory framework to keep Albertans and Canadians safe. Well, what about the software engineer who is developing software that powers self-driving cars? Don’t we want to keep that safe? Here’s the good news. That is regulated by Transport Canada. We already have a regulatory framework to keep Albertans and Canadians safe. One final example here. What about the technology used in our oil and gas sector? Well, here’s the good news. That must comply with occupational health and safety legislation and regulation as well as any environmental or energy legislation and regulations that we may have.

Cam Linke, the CEO of the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute, had a good analogy to help drive this point home. He said something to the effect of: medical doctors are regulated in Alberta, yet we have a Rug Doctor, but nobody’s heart is getting steam-cleaned.

The fact is, Madam Chair, that in Canada and Alberta we have a robust legislative framework to keep people safe, and nothing in Bill 7 changes that. To all of our friends who are professional engineers in this province, let me say this. The P.Eng is and always will be the pinnacle of the engineering profession. Make no mistake. This designation sets you apart from anybody else, and we are committed to maintaining that.

To everyone who has completed or is contemplating a software engineering degree from one of Alberta's outstanding postsecondary programs: your degree is incredibly important and valuable and will continue to set you apart. Nothing in Bill 7 will change that.

In closing, I can confidently say that Bill 7 is an important step forward for our tech sector. Our government has been working overtime to ensure that Alberta is an irresistible place to start, build, and invest in a tech company, and through that work we have heard loud and clear from the tech sector that the regulatory environment in Alberta was making us the least attractive place to recruit the talent they need. To our tech sector I say this. Our government has heard you, and we are taking real action to support you and to address this problem by putting forward this legislation. As I said before, we've got your back, and we always will. To those watching from across the country and around the world, this legislation is a symbol of Alberta's desire to be the most innovative jurisdiction in Canada. Alberta is calling. We want you. To all the innovators, entrepreneurs, and investors: there has never been a better time to be in tech in Alberta, and we're just getting started.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 7, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023. Let me assure you that the Alberta NDP and I are committed to supporting economic growth and diversification in this province and that we are particularly vested in growing Alberta's technology and innovation economy. I think the minister is well aware of the last 10 years of my career working in the tech and innovation sector in Calgary.

Our investment is proof that we introduced the Alberta investment tax credit and the digital media tax credit when we were in government to support the tech and innovation sector. We had met with many stakeholders in Alberta's technology ecosystem to understand the support that they need in their recruiting efforts. We know that for the past several years the sector has struggled to fill much-needed positions in software development but also positions in finance, accounting, sales, marketing, human resources, and product development. I'd like to note that the use of "software engineer" in job postings is not the only solution required to support our technology sector in recruiting the skilled talent that they need to grow.

In the spirit of engagement, we have also been meeting with engineers and APEGA to understand their concerns. My colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Decore is going to bring forward an amendment to address their concerns. Madam Chair, APEGA has raised legitimate concerns to ensure that those practising engineering are licensed engineers. We should be paying attention to their very real concerns.

Thank you.

**Mr. Haji:** Madam Chair, I rise to propose an amendment, of which I have 95 copies. I will pass it on and then sit down until it gets to the members of the Assembly.

**The Chair:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

You may proceed and read it into the record.

**Mr. Haji:** The amendment reads as follows: I, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, move that Bill 7, Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023, be amended in section 3, in the

proposed section 3.1, by adding the following immediately after subsection (2):

(3) For greater certainty, an individual, corporation, partnership or other entity referred to in subsection (1) may not engage in the practice of engineering unless they are authorized to do so under this Act.

(4) The Council may request information from an individual, corporation, partnership or other entity referred to in subsection (1) for the purpose of confirming whether they are engaged in the practice of engineering.

It's evident that the proposed exemption of Bill 7 for the use of the term "software engineer" necessitates a thoughtful and measured approach. However, it is our responsibility as legislators to ensure that the growth of the tech industry occurs within a framework that upholds the highest professional standards, particularly in the field of engineering. Bill 7 in its current form, while addressing concerns in the tech sector, inadvertently opens the door to potential unintended consequences.

The Alberta NDP stands as stalwart advocates for the diversified economy and the flourishing tech industry. Our commitment is twofold: to provide the clarity that tech companies seek while ensuring public safety and the integrity of our professional designations. In response to the challenges presented in Bill 7, we propose an amendment aimed at refining the legislation and addressing concerns raised by various stakeholders that Bill 7 in its current form weakens the restrictions on the practice of engineering and thereby could risk public safety. Additionally, nobody is empowered to ensure unregistered entities do not undertake the practice of engineering.

Our proposed amendment directly targets the challenges associated with the use of the term "software engineer" in unregulated entities. First, it makes it clear that an exemption proposed in Bill 7 applies only to the use of the title of "engineer" and that those engaged in the practice of engineering must be licensed to do so. Second, it grants the council, otherwise known as APEGA, the right to inquire if an exempt individual is actually practising an engineering practice. This is important to protect public safety, Madam Chair.

4:50

Without the Bill 7 proposed amendments it is the restriction on the use of the title that gives the council the ability to inquire on the scope of work undertaken by an entity. This amendment to Bill 7 will allow the council, also known as APEGA, the ability to inquire and ensure that Bill 7 does not result in unintended consequences. I did provide the minister with a copy of this amendment well in advance, and I hope that the government supports this amendment. Doing so will ensure both the maintenance of the public safety and integrity of the profession of engineering while also continuing to support the growing tech industry in our province.

With that, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn the debate and rise to report.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Chair:** I also heard a motion to rise and report progress. Is that correct?

**Mr. Haji:** Yes.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Lundy:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments

considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

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

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

### Bill 5

#### Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 21: Member Arcand-Paul]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 5? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to rise today to speak on Bill 5, the Public Sector Employment Amendment Act, 2023, that was moved by the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance. I have found this bill to be the most perplexing. What is the problem that the government is trying to solve? With Bill 7, that was moved, I understood the problem trying to be solved with regard to software engineering. With Bill 5 I do not understand what problem the government is trying to solve. How did this become one of the top legislative priorities to help Albertans?

Agencies, boards, and commissions deliver and manage services and programs on behalf of the government. Bill 5 will remove all salary restraints for Alberta's various agencies, boards, and commissions and give all the power and discretion on compensation for people appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions to cabinet and the Premier. This bill will repeal the legislative protections that were in place to prevent the excesses, largesse, gifting, and cronyism that were common under previous Conservative governments.

It's difficult to not be cynical when I try to discern the problem this government is trying to solve. Restraints have been in place to stop government gifting by Conservatives since 2016. With this bill Conservatives will be unrestrained and less transparent when they appoint their friends and supporters to government agencies, boards, and commissions. They are creating a problem, not solving a problem, with Bill 5. While Albertans are facing an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis, the UCP wants to eliminate the limit on free perks, gifts, and handouts that benefit them, because they have the power to do so and it is inconvenient for them to do the work.

There must be checks and balances in our system. There must be transparency. Checks and balances have been in our government system since Roman times. The idea of checks and balances is a way to separate the power and give it to an individual so that statesmen can do their job properly. It prevents despotism. A big word for me.

In 2016 the province introduced legislation to regulate compensation of Alberta government CEOs. Then in 2016 the Alberta government, with that legislation, would put it forward so that it would regulate and reduce the growing discrepancy in the compensation practices amongst provincial agencies, boards, and commissions, starting with the salaries of the 27 highest earning CEOs.

Under the old system CEOs and executives had the authority to set their own salaries, bonuses, and severances with no government

regulation or oversight. There's not a public corporation in Canada where the CEO sets their own salary, bonuses, and severance without governance. The Finance minister at the time said that the government had few accountability mechanisms to find out how compensation was distributed. It was thought at the time that the public would think that it was unacceptable, and frankly they did, and that's why change was necessary and was long overdue. So good changes were made in 2016.

The Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act at the time dealt with the growing disparity in the compensation practices for agencies, boards, and commissions, and it made them consistent, fair, and transparent. It's reminding me of what we're seeing today. There is a move to be less fair in our province and less transparent with this government.

That framework has been in place, now, since 2016, and it had the best interests of Albertans in mind. It allowed the government to set and limit compensation of designated executives through the establishment of salary ranges and policies around benefits, bonuses, and severances. The Wildrose Finance critic at the time supported it and said that compensation for executives was long overdue. It was an important step forward in getting government spending on salaries in check. It is a grassroots Albertan notion to keep checks on government salaries.

The government of the day undertook to review all 136 agencies, boards, and commissions, looking for savings in every sector. It resulted in saving \$33 million just from the compensation of the CEOs and executives of the agencies, boards, and commissions, and they were able to reduce the number, a classic move by the Alberta NDP to bring less red tape in government and fewer agencies, fewer committees, fewer task forces commissioned by this government. In addition, the government of the day passed the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, and that is where we disclose the names and members of agencies, boards, and commissions who earn more than \$125,000 a year. It's known commonly as the sunshine list, to bring light into government.

5:00

Why wouldn't we want to be more transparent with our government spending? My understanding with Bill 5 is that it'll remove transparency. People that are appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions will no longer be on the government disclosure list. The sunshine list will not know who is being paid these large salaries on agencies, boards, and commissions.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let's review some of the agencies, boards, and commissions and the salary ranges that exist and that have been in place with restraints since 2016. There is our independent system operator; the CEO has a salary of almost \$500,000. The Alberta Energy Regulator; the CEO has a salary of \$396,000, just under the \$400,000 mark. Alberta Utilities Commission; the chair of their board, \$396,000. The Workers' Compensation Board; the president of their board, \$396,000. The Agricultural Financial Services Corporation, which got into a lot of hot water pre-2016 with their spending practices; \$300,000 for their president and managing director. The Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission, a famous place for failed candidates of the UCP to land; \$300,000 for the president and CEO. The Labour Relations Board chair; almost \$250,000.

This is the comparison that we're making when we talk about the affordability crisis in this province, where people that are earning \$80,000 cannot afford rent in Calgary. We are trying to understand why we would pass a bill that would allow a government minister and cabinet to then appoint their friends, without review by a proper

transparent process, to earn salaries in the range of \$150,000 to \$500,000 as they currently sit. This list of restrained salary ranges that is legislated will be removed, and they will be able to appoint and pay people as they want, with the notion: just trust us; we're the government. It's not how it works in a proper democracy, which is why on this side of the House we have regularly referred to this as Bill 1, choo-choo-choo gravy train bill.

Oh, I have an intervention. Thank you very much. Yes, Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** And I just forgot the member's riding's name because I blanked . . .

**Mr. Kasawski:** Sherwood Park.

**Ms Hayter:** Sherwood Park. The Member for Sherwood Park. You talk about trust and, you know, I'm just wondering when you are in your home riding of Sherwood Park, what other issues are you hearing from your constituents about trust or lack of trust and things that might also be impacting, maybe, the constituents of Calgary-Edgemont? I would love to hear more, kind of what you're hearing, you know, around the whole area of trust. Do you have time to share that? I know you're on a great roll right now, talking about the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, but I would be curious to hear more about trust.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you very much, Member for Calgary-Edgemont. You know, in Sherwood Park there has been a lot of discussion about some of the government boondoggles, and that's where we lose our sense of trust in the government. The notion that the way they spend money is in the best interest of Alberta because it was their idea or they feel good about it is not how Albertans want the treasury to be spent. I get a sense that on that side of the House they don't value checks and restraints on the power as the government. Grifting Albertans at the cost of the government treasury is something that Conservative members are far too comfortable with, and that leads to what you brought up about the trusting. It comes up in Sherwood Park. It came up at the doors; it comes up at events. People do not trust this government, and they do not trust it when there is no way to have public review of spending.

I detest government boondoggles. When I think of the war room where \$30 million a year is spent, and I'm not sure what their greatest achievement is. It seems like it could be making the Bigfoot cartoon movie more popular at the box office, that may be the greatest achievement for Alberta's war room; \$30 million a year. I think of that now. We could have easily built the Sherwood Heights K to 9 school in Sherwood Park with that \$30 million a year that has just gone to friends and family, I guess, of the government.

I think of the Keystone XL, a pipeline from nowhere to nowhere else, and that money, that \$1.3 billion – I think this government and all governments in Alberta will be trying to find ways to pay for that \$1.3 billion boondoggle for decades.

I look at the Tylenol – it wasn't even Tylenol – the Turkish acetaminophen for children that this government spent \$80 million on, and none of it will be delivered to help anyone that needs acetaminophen.

I think of the Manning report, \$2 million out the door with no tangible results on a paper that I understand was written before the commission was made to Manning. The Dinning pension debacle: over a million dollars a month is now being spent on, I guess, a sham of a consultation. This tells the feds about your can't-do attitude; \$8 million to put up ads across Canada to tell the world that the UCP government doesn't think they can get the job done.

That is a way to discourage people from looking at investing in Alberta, if you tell them you don't think you can get the job done.

In closing, the voters in Sherwood Park are really tired of the grifting. Bill 5 does nothing to address grifting. It seems to be opening up the gravy train for the government. Please stop wasting money on pet projects, boondoggles, and do-nothing sole-source contracts. Albertans need our government to lead and govern effectively. Please start doing that.

I would let you know that I oppose Bill 5 as it is written.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the rest of my time.

**The Speaker:** It's entirely impossible.

Are there others who would wish to join in the debate? Looks like the hon. member for Banff-Kananaskis is rising.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and share with you some perspectives on Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, which – surprise – I'm not a fan of. The main reason why I'm not really a fan of this bill is that it doesn't actually do anything to address the priorities of people in my riding. I've had many conversations with many constituents over the last few months since being elected as their MLA, and nobody has said to me that they really wish that the president of a board or a commission was making more money; rather, what my constituents are sharing with me is that they wish that they were making more money or that they were spending a little less of it. Utilities are too high, I hear. Rent is too high. Housing is unaffordable. It's expensive to drive a car because gas is so expensive.

What this bill does is that it just makes the rich richer. By creating a bill that removes all salary restraints for Alberta's boards and commissions, we're actually opening the door for a massive and shameful misuse of taxpayer money. That is problematic because the members opposite like to position themselves as fiscally responsible and fiscally conservative, but this bill does not do that. Rather, this bill allocates taxpayer dollars for people who are making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to be making much more money.

What I care about is the people working and living in Banff-Kananaskis who are making minimum wage and who are single parents making minimum wage and trying to cope with rising rent or an impossible reality of being able to purchase their first home as a young family. That's what I care about, and this bill doesn't do anything about that.

While Albertans in Banff-Kananaskis are struggling to pay rent and buy food, this government wants us to spend time talking about some of the highest paid executives in Alberta, who need to be paid a little bit more. What a waste of time.

**5:10**

It's really unfortunate to me because it's just another example of how this government is not actually focused on the priorities of the Albertans that we have all been elected to represent in this House. That is why we are calling this bill The Gravy Train, part 1, because it really is just about creating a UCP gravy train for the rich to get richer. Choo-choo.

The other thing that this act does is that it sets the stage for unbalanced collective bargaining, and the ministerial-appointed employer associations will collectively bargain on behalf of all employers. Once we start messing with collective bargaining, we reduce the ability of unions to function the way that they were meant to function.

Just to remind folks, unions are created to protect employees' rights, salaries, time for vacation, et cetera. If we go way back in



time, there's a reason why unions were created in the first place. That was because labour conditions during the Industrial Revolution were not appropriate for people, and people got sick, and they died, and they hurt themselves. Unions were created to protect employees from unsafe and unfair working conditions. Unions are the reasons why we have weekends, they're the reasons why we have paid vacation time, and they're the reasons why we are afforded so many of the luxuries or advantages that we have in our current work structure.

You start to mess with collective bargaining, and you start to weaken the power of unions to do their jobs. I think that that is where this bill also falls short and is a big disappointment for me. I am a person who has benefited from being a member of a union. I used to work in the Alberta public service, and I was thankful that that union existed for me. My husband works in construction and is a proud member of his union and always advocates for the strengthening of his union. I would definitely not be able to go home and look him in the eye if I didn't stand up and oppose this bill that tries to mess with collective bargaining, which is the foundation of why unions exist and how they help us.

The other thing is that this act does nothing right now. While the rest of the province is struggling with affordability today, putting food on the table today, paying electric bills today, this act does nothing to address what is actually important to Albertans today. It doesn't help with attracting or retaining people to live and work in our province as the current compensation structure will remain in place maybe for years, depending on how long the future directives and subsequent frameworks take to develop. People are in crisis today, and we're standing here talking about a bill to make the rich richer and also to just not really do anything about anything for the next few years. I'm pretty sure that that's not why anybody elected us to be in this House.

The other thing is that all of the guidelines in this bill will be in the hands of the minister. No legislation will be binding on employers or employer committees, councils, or associations. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I get very nervous any time all of the power is in the hands of a minister, and I'll tell you that it's because nobody gets to be minister forever, right? Even if you have a well-intentioned minister trying to do good things, it doesn't mean that that minister will always have the power. Whenever we create a bill that puts too much power in the hands of the minister, we have to recognize that the ministers change over the years, so their individual intentions may also change.

There is a compensation plan section in the bill which may require employers, employer committees, or employer associations to submit compensation plans to the minister for approval based on the directives. That's the part around collective bargaining that gets a little bit problematic. These employer committees can be created by the minister, but collective bargaining units are a voice for employees to have in the deal and the negotiations that they make. So it's changing something that's supposed to be bottom up into top down, and that's where I think we run into problems.

You know, mostly what I think is really problematic about this bill is that it doesn't address what is important in our ridings and what we're hearing from Albertans today. Nobody in my riding has said that they want presidents of boards and commissions to get paid more. Nobody in my riding has said that they wish there were more boards and commissions. Members opposite are big fans of creating a lot more boards and commissions and – I don't know – a whole bunch of groups of UCP-appointed people to make decisions. Nobody in Alberta is asking for this. Again, we are debating a bill that nobody in Alberta has asked for, and that is problematic for me.

It's not like Albertans aren't asking for anything. Albertans are asking for housing, and they're asking for help with food. They're

asking for rent supplements. They're asking for more affordable housing to be built. They're asking for children to be kept safe. They're asking for a better public education system that serves students. Members in my riding also are asking for support with tourism-related infrastructure. We're a riding filled with small municipalities that serve millions of people every single year, yet we don't have the provincial support we need to build better water treatment plants, better sewage treatment plants, roads, sidewalks, multi-use pathway systems, or public transportation. But, hey, let's not address any of those things. Let's just spend our time talking about how we can pay presidents of boards and commissions more. That feels like a really good use of our time. Obviously, it's not. That was me being sarcastic, just to be clear. I just want to make that clear. I wasn't being serious about that.

There are some amendments that I think are critical to this bill if we're going to see it move forward. One is to add back in the importance of collective bargaining into the bill preamble. That is critical to ensure the proper functioning of unions and to ensure that employees are represented and their needs are represented in unions. We also need to add in public reporting on directives and compensation plans – that's critical – and we need to require that ministerial appointments are confirmed by the Assembly. No offence, but I don't trust a single minister on the opposite side of the House, and I know that a lot of people in my riding don't, too.

If we're going to have ministerial appointments for any kind of committee, it should be approved by this Assembly as a whole. Let's remember that none of us in this House were voted in with a hundred per cent of the voters in our riding, which means that we all have a responsibility to represent everybody in our riding, and we all have a responsibility to represent the people who also didn't vote for us, because that's our job as MLAs. The reason why we have a government and a party in opposition is so that we can have a fulsome conversation where all Albertans feel represented in that conversation. We need to be able to do that freely, and we need to be able to do that to address ministerial appointments on these random committees that are going to be created.

We also need to remove exemptions from accountability legislation. If we're going to have legislation, let's make sure that it's effective and that it doesn't contain a whole array of exemptions from accountability.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to oppose Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, which I like to call Give More Money to My Friends and Not Tell Anyone about It Act, where this government basically, as my title explains, gives money to their buddies sitting on boards, commissions, et cetera – maybe this is their future employment planning – instead of properly funding early childhood development, for instance, implementing that evidence-based curriculum, gold-standard programming, or instead of investing in educational spaces, supporting teachers, learning, and, you know, the next generation of children. Instead, they would rather take away that transparency and accountability that Calgarians have been asking for, that Albertans have been asking for and have not received from this government. They would instead rather give the money to their buddies. Fully transparent here.

5:20

If we think about, "How does this bill possibly impact things like health care?" well, as the Member for Edmonton-City Centre had

said back on November 10: instead of investing in patient care, the UCP is embarking on a massive expansion of government bureaucracy; over the next two years they plan to establish 14 brand new government agencies, boards, councils, centres, et cetera. Well, that certainly sounds, to me, anyway, like a whole bunch of nontransparent money going to their buddies. Now, of course, that money could be used to – I don't know – support health care, support the actual workers, the front-line workers, my fellow front-line workers, who continue to support Albertans to the best of their ability.

Instead, this government has decided to split up Alberta Health Services and not share that power with the front-line workers, who, of course, are the ones doing the work. For a government that had been claiming that Alberta Health Services had too much power and took it away, well, it appears it wasn't so much the power that was the problem; it was about who held it.

What do Calgary-Acadians have to say about this? Where should these available funds go? Well, housing, for one. From one of my constituents complaining or sharing: this government has made cuts to affordable housing and refused to make actual impact on their bottom line, which is their rent and their utilities every month. As we know, there is a housing crisis, and we know that this government isn't particularly keen to address it.

When they put bills forward such as this one that removes the transparency and accountability, of course, I'm going to stand up because that is literally why Calgary-Acadia elected me, to stand up and provide some transparency and accountability inside this House back to my constituents. By putting bills forward such as this one, that literally removes the accountability piece, that removes the transparency piece, you are not serving Albertans.

Now, other things that, of course, I'm hearing from Calgary-Acadians: they're really worried about the cost of food, they're really worried about whether or not they can afford their utilities, and they're really worried that this government isn't listening.

Now, I could speak more to all of the stories I've heard from the Calgary-Acadians, but what I'd really like is for this government to start paying attention and putting bills forward that actually address these concerns. When we have wait times outside of emergency going hours and hours, when we have E coli poisonings inside our daycares, when we have students who are having their educational experience in a hallway, and when we have families having to make incredibly difficult decisions about whether or not they put food on the table, gas in their car, or pick up a transit pass, these are not decisions that Albertans should have to make if, in fact, their government cared about them and did their job.

On that – I almost said: yield my time – I just want to be clear that I am not in support of Bill 5. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the call.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my second time rising today. I spent time discussing Bill 2 and now Bill 5. You know, it's my pleasure to oppose this bill, actually, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, under the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance. I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken before me and my colleagues who have led lots of this work from Calgary-Elbow and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

For this bill, basically, the Premier and this government are removing all salary restraints for Alberta's boards and commissions, which opens the door for this massive misuse of taxpayer money, and it's shameful because from my experience door-knocking in Calgary-Glenmore, as my colleagues and my

colleague from Calgary-Acadia have also highlighted, the priorities are very different.

I actually remember during the campaign door-knocking in Cedarbrae. It's a beautiful area in Calgary-Glenmore. I will not share the names of my constituents because I did not ask for their permission, but I remember door-knocking in this apartment building, and they were moving out. I asked them: why are you moving out? And they said that the rent increased from \$1,400 to \$1,900, all that in three months. That's almost a 40 per cent increase. We know that people are struggling to pay rent and buy food right now while the government is giving the highest paid executives a raise they do not need, and I think that's shameful.

Albertans want to see new schools to address overcrowding in growing communities, they want to see more doctors to keep their family healthy, and they want real action on the housing crisis that we currently have. How does this bill actually help people every day? That's my question. The question as well is: which candidates and former ministers should we expect to see appointed to these associations and councils? Which friends and supporters will be appointed? There are many questions here, Mr. Speaker.

Another thing that comes up a lot in my riding is power bills, and we've seen a record increase of power prices that this government delivered under its own watch. Please tell me, Mr. Speaker: how does creating a Crown corporation and nationalizing our electricity system 15 years from now help Albertans lower their power bills today? How does it help their priorities right now? It's not the gifts. It's not the increase in salaries. It's not nationalizing electricity. It kind of feels like Cuba or Venezuela to me.

Moving along, we're spending a lot of time here. I want to go back to the concept of time, and I'd like you to indulge me here to explore how we're wasting a lot of time and public money debating and discussing useless bills that do not . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, if you choose to have personal conversations, I have no problem with that. However, they should take place in either of the lounges or the peace lounge so that the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia can conclude her remarks.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Going back to the concept of time and our time together here as elected officials focused on representing Albertans' interests, Albertans' concerns, Albertans' priorities, and not gifting friends on commissions and highly paid executives, again, this is about highlighting the concept of time and the waste of time and public money discussing bills and work that do not serve Albertans' priorities.

5:30

Earlier we talked about the pension plan and the \$7 million spent on a campaign trying to convince Albertans that an Alberta pension plan is a good idea. Right now we're having a conversation and a debate on a bill that gifts friends and highly paid executives. I want to remind this government that our job as elected officials is to represent Albertans, their worries and their best interests, and we're spending this legislative time here that could be better spent on Albertans' other priorities.

Again I would like to share some simple math of our time here together debating a bill that is not a priority for Albertans. And it's very basic arithmetic here; it's not abstract algebra or anything. Please indulge me. I'm using the base salary of an MLA, which is \$120,000 – and I'm using the base, not the ministerial, not the Speaker – and we have 87 MLAs. So, for simplicity, let's say that we have spent at least 30 hours since session started between debating this bill, preparing our debates, asking questions in question period. Let's go and figure out the MLA hourly rate here,

which is \$120,000 divided by 2,080 hours. That's \$58.17 per hour for an MLA. So that's the hourly rate of an MLA. Let's figure out . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** I know it's a shock. It's a shock to know that.

Let's figure out the full 87 MLAs' hourly rate, okay? That's 87 MLAs by \$58.17. I know; math. That's \$5,061.06; 87 MLAs. And, again, I'm not counting the ministers; this is just the base salary of an MLA. The hourly rate of 87 MLAs in this House is \$5,061.06.

As I said, for simplicity, let's say that we spend 30 hours debating this bill. Let's multiply that cumulative, collective hourly rate of \$5,061.06 by 30 hours. Mr. Speaker, that is \$151,831 of taxpayer money spent in 13 days only, sitting here at the Legislature discussing and debating bills that do not touch on any of Albertans' priorities. It's not discussing how we can help them improve their lives or pay their rent or buy their food, but we're discussing: how do we help the highest paid executives? Again, our job is to represent Albertans' interest, and that time we're spending should be reflecting their priorities and not gifting the friends and the highly paid executives.

This is taxpayer money that pays us here to have this useless debate on a very unpopular bill that has nothing to do with the daily priorities of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, we're here to legislate and debate Albertans' priorities, not ideological adventures like the pension or nationalizations or paying friends highly paid salaries.

In conclusion, really, I want to end by saying that we are elected to represent Albertans' priorities and interests. I have door-knocked a lot in Calgary-Glenmore for 18 months before the election, and I continue to do that. People are disillusioned with politics and politicians and government. This is what I'm hearing at the doors, and it's exactly bills like that, that serve friends and highly paid executives, that disconnect people from the system and from their governments. So let's represent our constituents, and let's focus on Alberta's priorities.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont has risen.

**Mr. Getson:** That was actually a good speech.

**An Hon. Member:** We're all looking for your approval.

**Ms Hayter:** Yeah. I guess. Yes.

Thank you. I have risen to speak also against Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing up door-knocking. I, as well, have door-knocked for four years prior to the election and have door-knocked since and during the election, and not once did I hear on any door: "Hey, you know what would be a really great idea? Let's do a Public Sector Employment Amendment Act and give more money to the people up above."

When I was asked by my colleagues to speak to this, I thought, you know: I'm going to check my mailbox. I actually went into the Calgary-Edgemont inbox, and once again I don't have one e-mail telling me that they really want me standing here advocating on behalf of this. What I'm seeing in my mailbox right now are people upset that we're not listening about the CPP. They want everybody to keep their hands off their pensions. What I'm hearing in my inbox is that they want schools built. They want smaller class sizes. I'm not hearing anything about wanting people up at the top to get paid more.

The Premier and the UCP, you know, with removing salary restraints on Alberta's boards and commissions and opening this door for a mass – and I really feel it's a shameful misuse of taxpayers' money. We saw that under the previous Conservative government, and I'm so disappointed to see that it's creeping back in. I thought that maybe with the change of name we would stop seeing this behaviour. Instead of caring right now about regular Albertans who are struggling to pay rent and buy food, Ms Smith and the UCP – sorry. The Premier and the UCP. I apologize. I know better.

**The Speaker:** I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

**Ms Hayter:** I apologize.

The Premier and the UCP are giving – you know, you guys are looking at giving the highest paid executives a raise that they don't need. But do you know who does need a pay raise? Educational assistants. I can tell you that educational assistants need a pay raise. They are in the classroom working with complex needs, they are working with individuals with second-language learning, and they're just making above what would be a living wage. Some educational assistants are working two jobs to be able to work with our future generation. They need a raise, not executives.

Nurses also need a raise. They would love a raise. They are keeping our hospitals running and have kept us going over the last four years. Not only a raise; I think we need to continue to thank them for their hard work.

What I'm also hearing, just with my own consultations, is employees at nonprofits. I don't know how many of the members across the way have ever worked as an employee of a nonprofit.

**Mr. Getson:** Oh, yeah. I have.

**Ms Hayter:** Oh, awesome. Awesome.

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. Owned companies, too.

**Ms Hayter:** Owned a company is a little bit different than working as a front-line worker.

**Mr. Getson:** No, no, it's not. That's how you start out. You start as an employee.

**Ms Hayter:** Okay. I have worked as a front-line worker. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Hayter:** I have worked at a nonprofit, and I have worked just above making a little bit more than minimum wage. I was close to having . . . [interjections] I can wait till you guys are quiet.

**An Hon. Member:** Okay; it's your time.

**Ms Hayter:** Okay. Thank you.

Employees at nonprofits are looking, because of their wages, at sometimes having to work two jobs. I've had it phrased to me by a few nonprofits that they are wife wages. To be able to work at a nonprofit or as an educational assistant, you either have to work two jobs or you need to be married to somebody or have a partner or have two incomes coming into that household. So people who are doing this work deserve a raise, not the UCP's highest paid executive friends.

**5:40**

The other thing, you know, that we're looking at: you're funding the executives, but what about funding women's shelters? The

Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is only receiving 25 per cent of what they need to run, and that's at a bare minimum. Their request is being ignored. They asked the government for an increase of funding of \$10 million a year, and that's just to cover their costs. Instead of giving them \$10 million a year, that's what they're going to get over four years. To be clear, that is not enough.

So I don't know why we would rather see money going to our highest paid executives than funding women's shelters, where thousands of women and children are being stranded in dangerous situations. It looks like, you know, we're just trying to help the UCP's friends get richer and richer at the expense of working Albertans.

Yes. I'd be happy to take your intervention.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thanks, Member for Calgary-Edgemont. This reminds me, if I take you back to 1992-1993, of the Deep Six, as they were called, which sat where the Member for Red Deer-South, the Member for Calgary-East, Calgary-Lougheed, Lesser Slave Lake, Chestermere-Strathmore, and Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville – the Deep Six sat back there.

They were members of a Progressive Conservative government under Premier Ralph Klein who were just dismayed. Mr. Speaker, they were dismayed by the spending practices of that Progressive Conservative government in 1992, where the expenses were so outrageous, \$1.3 million in allowances for MLAs, including some who lived less than 30 minutes away from the Legislative Assembly.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you to the Member for Sherwood Park for that reflection. You know, back then it looks like they were looking at getting richer and richer at the expense of Albertans, and we are back at looking at a province where we want to get richer and richer at the expense of working Albertans.

I hope, as we're making decisions, we think about the people impacted by our decisions and that we can reflect on, you know, looking at paying better wages to the people who are doing difficult work. We are in the middle of an affordability crisis, and the cost of living is skyrocketing, and it's critical right now that we're looking at where we're putting our money. Once again, do we want to be paying our top executives frivolously? Maybe we want to start looking again at maybe putting some vital medications and treatments available for individuals, say, like contraception. We could be spending for somebody \$25 a month on the pill every month, and that would save a person \$10,000 in their lifetime. We could also be looking at oral hormone pills at \$240 a year or hormonal injections at \$180 a year as well as IUDs, which can cost up to \$500. That could save people money.

So I hope that we – you know, people shouldn't be having right now to be making a choice between food, paying rent, and their health care as well as looking at – birth control is not a luxury item. If you also were to look at the fact that we're paying university executives so much money, we're paying postsecondary too much, but we could look at putting birth control in to advance women's educational opportunities, and that would help them stay in postsecondary and make those choices. There was a huge increase of women that had access to the pill before the age of 21 to be able to graduate, and with young women being able to have legal pill access, they were both able to have children and pursue higher education.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore had spoken to the fact that, you know, we're needing more schools to address our overcrowding in growing communities as well as more doctors to keep families healthy. I wonder how many members in here are getting those e-mails that are saying, "We need new schools" or "Our classrooms have 40 kids in them; we need to look at that changing" or getting the calls to say – I had a constituent come in

in tears because their child has ADHD and they can't get a doctor to help them. They don't know where to get the services, and you need to have a doctor to be able to prescribe needed medication. I wonder how many members in the House here as well are getting those phone calls, getting those e-mails.

You know, we're hearing about the housing crisis and affordability. I've gone door-knocking and had people crying because their rent has just gone up by \$500 and they don't know how they're going to survive. When I hear about increasing a payment to anybody, we need to also be looking at those funds and decreasing it for the people that are living at the poverty rate. I think our province is headed into this area right now where, you know, it's unbalancing. Our wages are unbalancing, and we're looking at lower wages for our workers and more pockets for the UCP's rich friends.

I think that, Mr. Speaker, I am going to wrap up my words, but I am speaking against Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has risen.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite really cheered loudly at the mention of Ralph Klein. What would Martha and Henry say? What would Ralph Klein – for those who may not be familiar, Ralph Klein often talked about putting forward policy that would appeal to Martha and Henry: the conversations around the kitchen table over a cup of coffee talking about the bread-and-butter issues that mattered to folks like Martha and Henry, the backbone of this province. So I asked the folks on the other side: what would Martha and Henry say about Bill 5 – sorry; I just want to make sure I don't misspeak here – the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023?

I don't think Martha and Henry would be too thrilled with a government happily raising any kind of limits or any kind of maximums on compensation for people who were not in need of a raise. Martha and Henry would be talking about making sure that their loved ones were cared for, making sure that they could, you know, maybe treat the kids to something special under the Christmas tree for the holidays. They would not be supporting six-figure increases to folks who were already well above the average, well above the median.

I think that now is a good time to remind ourselves of those folks who really have built this province to be what it is, because it is not the half-million-dollar salaries that the, you know, 10 people in Alberta earn as a result of being a president at the university. Those folks were not the people who built this province. It was the Marthas and the Henrys of the world. It was our parents. It was our grandparents. It was everybody who bled for this province, who toiled for this province, and who continues to toil for this province.

I alluded to this in my maiden speech, and it is something that I think about an awful lot now that I am in this capacity; I think probably a lot of us do here when we refer back to our previous days and our previous professional capacities. For about 10 years I worked for an organization in Calgary that supported some of the lowest income folks in our community. We worked to address systems and policy change related to trying to improve the lives of people living at or below or just about below the poverty line. Maybe some of those are like Martha and Henry. It's that image that we all bring to mind when we think about the folks who live pretty modestly, have pretty moderate requests: being able to take care of themselves, being able to take care of their families.

**5:50**

Frankly, unfortunately, as a result of a growing disparity in our communities, there are more and more people who can't meet those

basic needs, who can't put a little something under the Christmas tree. If we're not thinking about those people in our policies and in our every day, then who are we thinking of? I think that when we decide to prioritize who it is that we want to put front and centre in our policy-making, it's those folks.

When I worked for this wonderful poverty reduction organization, you know, sometimes it was people who were unable to work. Sometimes it was people who did work, but they worked for minimum wage. Sometimes they wanted to work, but as a result of restrictions around clawbacks when it came to earning Alberta Works or AISH, they really wanted to work, but they couldn't because for every dollar that they would get, so much of it would get clawed back. You can imagine how incredibly demoralizing that would be for anybody to go out and make a contribution and feel some purpose and then end up having that money clawed back. Again, I want to make sure that we're putting those people front and centre in our minds when we're talking about adequate compensation, salary conversations, and minimum wage conversations. Those are the folks that we really do need to be thinking about.

Frankly, if you're already earning, as my colleague here from Sherwood Park has alluded to, \$400,000 a year, I think you're probably doing okay. As it comes up a lot, I know how dearly we all love and cherish this province. You know what? It's not adding another \$150,000 or \$200,000 to a compensation package that is going to draw people to Alberta. It's everything else. It's a robust health care system. It's world-class classrooms for their kids. It's the natural beauty that we can see out in Banff-Kananaskis or in God's country, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

There are wonderful places and countless reasons about why people want to call Alberta home. I really struggle to think that adding another 200 grand on top of an already very generous package is in fact going to do that, but this government seems to be okay with throwing more money after what is . . . [interjection] Yes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. You made me think of something because, of course, what we're seeing with this new UCP government is that they're intending to blow up AHS – right? – building basically four more departments of bureaucracy to deliver health care, and then we see in concert with that this bill which opens up compensation for appointments all along the way. So I see a connection here. You can have a chance to quadruple the senior executives in our health system and open up wide open for how much they get compensated. We know that on the ground people who are actually working in Alberta Health Services: their biggest complaint is that it's top heavy, too many managers, too much bureaucracy. Imagine what those same workers would feel if, again: oh, by the way, their salaries, those senior executive salaries, are going to suddenly open wide open to hundreds of thousands of more dollars.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you. That's a good segue, actually, to another component of what I wanted to stand and speak to today, which is really the backbone of our health care system. I'm proudly married to a registered nurse, and as I'm sure there are lots of nurses and LPNs and health care aides in our families and in our midst, I think that my colleague here raises a really good point about: who are the folks that are actually running this system? Who are the workers on the front lines every day who are making sure that Albertans are getting the best, although it could be better, health care service?

I was curious in the debate this afternoon to learn a little bit about what some median salaries actually are in Alberta, what some average salaries are actually when it comes to particular sectors. Health care aides are currently in Alberta – this is before tax – making \$31,799 a year. Based on some of our sunshine list

statistics, gosh, there are people who can just kind of put a zero at the end of that and are probably doing just fine. Grocery store clerks: \$24,366 a year. Educational assistants: not a whole lot more at \$26,388 a year; \$26,388 a year for educational assistants to get into the classroom and do the hard work every day of supporting our children and their families. AISH recipients. Only after this government finally reindexed the income support, a cut which I find completely inexcusable, it is now up to \$21,444.

I was particularly curious as well that, if we're talking about nickels and dimes and, you know, that this government really does hold themselves to great fiscal standards, perhaps their constituents would also like to hear about who they are supporting as opposed to the everyday folks living in their constituencies. According to the CMHC the median income in Lac Ste. Anne is \$80,728; the Medicine Hat median income, \$69,500; the High River median income, \$78,988; and the median income in Peace River is \$86,000, well below half of what the vast majority of people on this sunshine list are currently earning and significantly lower than what this government would like to increase them to. [interjection] I'll hand the clock.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I thank my friend from Calgary-Currie for her remarks. It just puts me in mind of a few of the people who stand to benefit greatly from this legislation who will actually never set foot in the communities that they are hired to work in. I think about the president of Athabasca University, which I've mentioned before. That particular institution has had a string of presidents who haven't even bothered to set foot in the town of Athabasca. The last president, Peter Scott, made almost \$400,000 a year and refused to move to Athabasca. The president before him, Neil Fassina, worked as the president of Athabasca University for four years, I believe, and lived in Edmonton, thought that moving to Athabasca was just too far to go. That hour drive every day, you know: too much for the president of Athabasca University to do even though he was making \$400,000 a year. I'm just wondering if the Member for Calgary-Currie can tell us what you think the locals would think of presidents making those kinds of salaries.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you very much to my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think what it does is that it makes it very clear and spells out very clearly why Albertans are feeling terribly disenchanted with government altogether on both sides of this Chamber. I'm sure we all heard it when we were out canvassing and hearing from the folks in our constituencies about how they're feeling. And I know – I know – that everybody heard just a complete disenfranchisement, disenchantment: I'm done with the whole lot of you. That is because of decades of mistrust and entitlement that 40-plus years of Conservative government in Alberta have contributed to this level of disenchantment and mistrust.

This is a level of entitlement, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans are done with, and we have all got to contribute to bringing folks back to believing in government, to believing in good policy and the role of their elected representatives.

With that I will – oh, I will keep going. Let me tell you about Martha and Henry. I think the disparity is stark, the income inequality is glaring, and Albertans have really had an end with it. I have always believed that there is no such thing as voter apathy; it's just politicians who don't do a particularly good job of speaking to the things that matter to everyday Albertans. We have a responsibility to uphold . . .

**The Speaker:** While I hesitate to interrupt . . . [some applause] If you want to cheer like that every time I stand, it's okay with me.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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