



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 6, 2023

Day 19

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
Government Whip
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP),
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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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(UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
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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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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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Hunter
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Kayande
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Getson
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Boparai
Cyr
de Jonge
Elmeligi
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Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

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Ellingson
Ganley
Hunter
Ip
Lovely
Rowswell
Wright, J.

Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Yao
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Dach
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
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Batten
Boitchenko
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Lunty
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Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Getson
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 6, 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, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Greg Phillip Stevens

November 24, 1935, to October 24, 2023

The Speaker: Mr. Greg Stevens served as the Progressive Conservative Member for Banff-Cochrane from 1979 to 1989. He was the minister responsible for personnel administration from 1979 to 1986 and the minister of culture and multiculturalism from 1987 to 1989. While studying civil engineering at the University of Manitoba, Mr. Stevens trained during the summer to fulfill his dream to become a fighter pilot. He joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and then, after 1,400 hours of flight time, made a career change to allow him to spend more time with his family. He completed his master's in science and community planning in 1962. His work in municipal planning and management took him from Edmonton to Vancouver, New Westminster, Kelowna, Banff, Fort McMurray, and Calgary. All the while he contributed his time to organizing such as the Banff hospital board and other community organizations. After leaving politics, Mr. Stevens remained dedicated to public service and held public office as a councillor for the town of Cochrane from 1992 to 1995. Mr. Greg Stevens passed away on October 24, 2023, at the age of 87.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask that you remember Greg Stevens as you may have known him.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce to the Assembly today two guests seated in the Speaker's gallery. Mr. Edward Otto is a former member of the Ugandan Parliament. He also is a lawyer with a practice in Toronto and Kampala. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Otto through the Commonwealth Parliamentarians Association a number of years ago, and I'm delighted to introduce him here in the Chamber. He is joined by his brother-in-law, who lives in Calgary, Simon Okoya. I ask you both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has a school group to introduce.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 79 incredible future leaders, their teachers and chaperones from the incredible school of Baturyn elementary in Edmonton-Castle Downs. I would ask all the students

and grown-ups to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly my good friend Dan Porodo, president of Pro-Pipe Service and Sales. Two business associates from Korea are joining us today: HyoJeong Park, CEO of Nexteel Corp, and Jongwon Lee, Canadian president of Nexteel, as well as Vitaliy Milentyev, a member of the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Kishore Chowdhury, a leader from the Canadian Bangladesh community. Kishore has been one of the founders of Alberta Bonga Society and plays a key role in developing trade and cultural relationships between Alberta and Bangladesh. Kishore also represents Desjardins Insurance and is a top performer in western Canada. Kishore is joined by his son Rittik. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Suman Virk. She's a lawyer, mother of two kids, a community advocate, empowers women, a dedicated volunteer with Breaking the Silence for mental health initiatives. I ask Suman to please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House, from the mighty improvement district No. 9, vice-chair Jean-Marc Stelter and councillor Don Beaulieu. They join us in the gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you I'd like to introduce a gentleman by the name of Brian Murray. He's not only a general aviation enthusiast, social media influencer, part of Alberta Air Tours; he's also a programmer, been down to Oshkosh, Reno, and literally helps out a bunch of young folks get into aviation. I'd like everyone to give him a big, warm, welcome round of applause.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Nishan Singh Sandhu and Gurcharan Singh Gill from the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurudwara in Red Deer. This is the first Sikh temple in central Alberta. It opened three years ago. It took nearly two decades of advocacy and half a million dollars. Your contributions to central Alberta, to all Albertans, and the Sikh community are deeply appreciated. Thank you so much for being here. Please join me in welcoming them.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Frank Capello and Kelly Gray. Kelly is the daughter of Irma Gray, a long-time resident of Whitecourt who, sadly, passed away recently. Kelly now runs a catering business, which she and her mother both helped start up and run, and also the arena restaurant and lounge. I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Ranjit Bath, a father of three and a very supportive spouse to Ravneet. Ranjit has been the president of the United Aid Foundation, which works with the less fortunate and drug-addicted individuals working to come back to normal life. Please rise and accept the warm, traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two of my guests here today, Brandon Plaizier and Nathaniel Wyton, who are joining us from the Women's Health Coalition. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and welcome back my cousin Brad Sinclair; some good friends of mine from Beaumont, Chad and Jasmine and their kids Grayson and Hunter, who couldn't be here today; and then last is the deputy mayor of Slave Lake, my brother-in-law and best friend, Shawn Gramlich. He's such a strong supporter that he decided to dress like me today.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Mohan Ramasamy and Mr. Selvakumar from the International Society of Ancient Wisdom. The society is doing great work here in Edmonton, including helping the downtown homeless population. I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a statement to make.

Anniversary of l'École Polytechnique Shootings

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-four years ago, on December 6, 1989, a man entered the engineering building at l'École Polytechnique Montréal and killed 14 young women and injured 13 others. Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz: these are the names of the women that were massacred by an act of violence because they were women. This attack was not random; this man purposely targeted these women for being trailblazers in their fields.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, we honour those we lost in the winter of 1989, and today we recommit ourselves to ending gender-based violence. We must all work together to ensure we secure a brighter and safer future for the women and girls of Alberta and Canada. Alberta's government is working on an action plan to end gender-based violence in our province. This plan will engage with survivors, community groups, nonprofits and will promote a culture of consent, these being vital steps in securing a safer future for women and girls. The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women is

engaging with Albertans to hear their feedback on how we can create a future free from gender-based violence.

This is a solemn day, Mr. Speaker. No words or actions can replace the women we lost all those years ago, but if we work together and take collective action, we can ensure a tragedy like the one that took place in Montreal never happens again.

Official Opposition Sessional Retrospective

Ms Hoffman: As the 2023 fall session comes to a close, let's reflect on who's really focused on what matters to mainstream Albertans. Our party, Alberta's NDP, fought to lift the job-killing ban on renewable electricity. We proposed new schools be public builds that put children first, not corporate profits. We advocated that public reporting of class sizing become the norm again, brought forward a bill to ban membership fees to see a family doctor, proposed Albertans wanting prescription birth control can get it without having to go through private insurance or paying out of pocket, and we stood up for folks worried that they will be priced out of the housing rental market by proposing temporary rent caps like the former Progressive Conservatives did under Peter Lougheed.

Oh, how the UCP have turned their backs on the little guy, Mr. Speaker, ignoring the people struggling to find a doctor or keep a home over their heads. So what was the UCP focused on instead during this session? Taking the hard-earned pensions Albertans have worked their entire lives for – this scheme has been overwhelmingly rejected by mainstream Albertans, actuaries, and economists – and blowing up the health care system yet again, trying to pretend that if they hire just a ton more middle managers and executives and put more people on the org chart that can be their scapegoats, they can move forward on firing nurses and privatizing health care.

Well, Mr. Speaker, mainstream Albertans care about health care. They care about making sure that we have the staff we need to properly equip the new Misericordia ER, the Calgary cancer hospital, and making sure that the south Edmonton, Red Deer, and Lethbridge hospitals get back on the priority list. But the UCP priority has been removing the cap on gifts so that they can receive big ones from lobbyists. They also have a ban to jack up the salaries of executives.

A forward-thinking government would care more about Albertans who need housing, health care, and everyone's retirement security. But while mainstream Albertans wait for this government to realize that the UCP's entitlements are not their priorities, I am very proud to tell them that the Alberta NDP's priorities are to stand up for everyday Albertans, to make sure that their voices are heard in this place, and we will continue to bring forward good proposals to put Albertans first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Government Achievements

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

'Twas the last week of session, and all through the House

Members scurried to spend needed time with their spouse.

The greeting cards, recordings, and ads were all placed in hope that members could appeal to their base.

Alberta saw a sovereignty act launched

To keep Liberals on their toes and their haunch.

Unhappy Albertans not proud of the facade

Shout: elect Poilievre; elect that dad bod.
 Elimination of photo radar and a public health guarantee.
 Never pay for a doctor, Alberta, you see!
 Deception of the opposition runs deep in the land.
 Lies of the pension they hold in their hand.
 Alberta Is Calling – hey, what a plan.
 Canadians rush to join cowboy land.
 Our leader is strong; we're on the right track,
 Just need a Prime Minister to have 'Berta's back.
 Over 3,800 at our AGM,
 A record for sure. Well done, Conservative fam.
 Our Finance minister, with festive glitter,
 Balanced the budget – for Alberta, he delivered.
 ND debt coming due, double the rate,
 Balanced budgets we want; it's debt that we hate.
 Proud to lead an emissions reduction
 And a new plan to handle dreaded addiction.
 The Premier says Alberta will grow.
 That is certain for she's in the know.
 Consider Alberta; we're on the right track.
 All are welcome. UCP has your back.
 Merry Christmas and best wishes to all.
 If you want to be happy, answer Alberta's call.
 We have jobs and a bright future ahead.
 Give us a chance; we'll put on a nice spread.
 Merry Christmas, everyone.

Health Care Workers

Member Tejada: Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Klein is the home of the Peter Lougheed hospital, which has provided critical health care and services to the people of Calgary and Alberta since 1988. I'm proud to be the MLA responsible for representing this hospital and the front-line health care workers who work long hours to save lives, bring new children into the world, and care for people during some of the most critical moments of their lives.

I have personal experience with the Peter Lougheed hospital, as so many of us do. My daughter was born there, and I'll never forget the care and support I received from the staff at the Peter Lougheed and cannot thank them enough for their service. Albertans owe each and every front-line worker a debt of gratitude. We saw how they went above and beyond during the pandemic and how they support Albertans during this current health crisis. But more than gratitude and thanks, these workers deserve a government who will be there for them, support them, and work with them.

Unfortunately, as the last five years have shown us, this is not the UCP. The UCP tore up agreements and openly fought with doctors during the pandemic, they drove doctors out of Alberta, and then they suggested that nurses should face a pay cut, calling it reasonable, in a pandemic. Now on top of all of the other challenges and chaos this UCP government is imposing, they are telling nurses that a layoff might be coming. This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

We need to support health care workers, not threaten them. On this side of the House we support and value our health care workers. We will stand up against the UCP's attempts to further bully, demoralize, undermine, and insult the people who keep our health system going. I want to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all those who work at the Peter Lougheed hospital and assure them and all of their colleagues in hospitals and clinics across Alberta that the Alberta NDP stands with you.

Irma Gray

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, a few months ago West Yellowhead bid farewell to a remarkable soul, Irma Gray, or Mama Gray as she was affectionately known. Born and raised in the picturesque Connor

Creek area south of Mayerthorpe on August 31, 1937, her final chapter came on September 19, 2023, when she sadly passed away. Irma's roots ran deep in Whitecourt, where she was a resident for over 65 years. Alongside her beloved husband, Allan Gray, she nurtured a family of seven children. Their story unfolded against the backdrop of owning one of the first motels in Whitecourt, a place that offered shelter and extended a warm welcome to newcomers and those in need.

Beyond the business, Irma's commitment to community service was unwavering. In the '70s and '80s she devoted her time to leading Girl Guides, impacting the lives of young girls across our region. Her involvement in the Lioness Club, Meals on Wheels, Tennille's Hope Community Kitchen, and various town projects reflected a deep-seated dedication to the well-being of her neighbours.

Her passion manifested in a catering business, which she embarked upon with her daughter Kelly, a venture that spanned from 1990 to 2005. Her involvement in the youth justice committee and the community housing board reflected a commitment that extended far beyond her family and business. Irma's commitment to putting others' needs before her own was recognized in 2011 when she was awarded the volunteer citizen of the year award.

My personal relationship with Irma is something I will always cherish. Sometimes I would sit with her at the lodge, and she would hold my hand, ask about my family, and reminisce. Often I would get a hug and a sweet little peck on the cheek before I left. I will always smile when I reach in the cupboard for a recipe from her cherished cookbook. As we reflect on Irma Gray's life, let us carry forward the spirit of service, hospitality, and compassion that she so brilliantly embodied. Mr. Speaker, I believe that in celebrating the legacy of Irma Gray, we celebrate the very essence of what it means to be an Albertan.

Arts and Culture Funding

Member Ceci: Recently the minister for arts and culture said, "The best way to have a strong arts sector is to have a thriving economy," signalling once again the belief that trickle-down economics will do what this government seems unwilling to do; namely, invest in the creation of a strong arts sector. In my critic role for arts and culture I've been meeting with stakeholders and researching how the sector impacts the Alberta economy. In 2021 \$4.9 billion of economic activity and nearly 47,000 jobs were generated by the sector, serving as an essential part of our economy and cultural identity.

The 2023 Alberta arts and culture survey found that in the past year an overwhelming majority of Albertans attended arts and cultural events. Over half of the respondents participated in the arts activities or training, showing a desire to go beyond attending events to actively participate in the creation of culture. On top of this, most Albertans believe that arts and cultural activities make communities better places to live.

Mr. Speaker, there is a clear link between a thriving arts and cultural economy and people's desire to attend events and participate in activities, but Alberta is falling behind. Our provincial government is falling behind and failing this sector. Over a 10-year period between 2010 and 2020 Alberta lost a total of 26 per cent of direct economic impacts for arts and culture, the greatest loss of any Canadian province or territory.

1:50

I encourage arts and cultural organizations to reach out to my office. My door is always open to hear your concerns and recommendations. I've already heard from many arts organizations from across the province, including the Rozsa centre, Arts

Commons, the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, and many more, and I look forward to hearing more about how best to support the arts.

In the upcoming budget will the minister work to bring back the 26 per cent of lost economic impact, or will government once again ignore the sector and blame Ottawa for funding shortfalls?

Oral Question Period

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

Bill 2

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when asked about the UCP's plan to gamble away Albertans' pensions, the Finance minister said that their pension scheme would require a referendum to proceed. However, the minister failed to confirm whether or not the results of that referendum would be binding. Having a referendum and being bound by the results of the referendum are two separate concepts, but the minister has been conflating the two. To the minister once again: will he accept our amendments that make the results of the referendum binding?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to presuppose the outcome of any amendment that may come forward later today; look forward to seeing that amendment. I do find it a little rich coming from the opposition, though, when we're talking about referendums and whether the government will follow through on the question they asked the people. I think any government that doesn't do that: it would be at their own peril. But they have members on the record saying that they wouldn't recognize or acknowledge a referendum on Alberta leaving the CPP anyways. You can't suck and blow, folks. Figure out where you're at.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, by rejecting the amendment, the members opposite have just said that they will ignore the results of the referendum.

Now, another outstanding problem with this legislation is that there's no guarantee that contributions made after the establishment of the UCP's pension scheme are used solely for the purpose of pension investments rather than some other wacky project promoted by this government. Albertans deserve to know that whatever gamble this government takes with their retirement security would at least be used towards their retirement security. So will the minister commit to accepting our amendment to fix that problem? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, like I said, I can't presuppose what happens with any of the opposition's I'm sure very good-faith amendments or how anyone will vote on this side of the House. But I would say, back to what Bill 2 says, that a referendum is required, the entire asset withdrawal needs to be used for the set-up and operation of an Alberta pension plan, and it has to be beneficial, both on the sides of benefits and contributions. Like I said, we're very much still in the consultation phase. I look forward to meeting with Mr. Dinning, talking about next steps with Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we really have tried our best. We proposed amendments to make sure Albertans get the benefit of

future improvements in CPP to defend against two-tiered pension plans, to protect the quality of information being presented to Albertans as they make a decision, and to guarantee that this government is bound by the answer to a clearly defined question. In all cases they've said no. This is a bad plan. We will continue to fight on behalf of Albertans to protect their pensions, and there is no question about that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Horner: I'm not even sure if there's a question there, Mr. Speaker, but what I would say one more time for the Albertans at home that are watching is that very much we're in a consultation and engagement phase. We've struck a panel. We're using the best information we have, which is the LifeWorks report, formerly Morneau Shepell. We've engaged with the federal government, who has asked the Chief Actuary to get involved and say what their opinion would be on what Alberta's asset withdrawal number would be. I think this is all just a distraction from who is going to be the next leader, if it's not, never, or nearly, of the Never Democratic Party. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: Yesterday the minister called rent caps a socialist policy by the NDP. Fun fact: these are the policies of Conservative Premier Doug Ford's Ontario, they're the policies passed by Conservative Premier Tim Houston in Nova Scotia, and even Manitoba's former Premier Heather Stefanson wholeheartedly supported rent caps. Wow. So does the minister think that his Conservative counterparts are socialists, or will he retract that statement and admit that politicians of all stripes understand that rent caps protect renters in a housing crisis and are the right thing to do? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that the members opposite need to decide what direction they're going in. When they were in government, they decided rent caps do not work. That was the former minister under the current Leader of the Opposition that said that.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, we suffer from a tight supply of housing, and the only way to overcome this is to increase our housing supply, which is why this government is putting forward real working policies, including a \$9 billion investment with our partners until 2031 to make sure we have more housing starts, and it's working. Housing starts in September were up 21 per cent, 19 per cent in October.

Member Irwin: We're in an unprecedented housing crisis. Renters are watching. This minister tried to pin the housing crisis on the NDP. Let me be clear. It is the UCP that is behind on building housing. In Edmonton alone . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Irwin: . . . housing starts were down 50 per cent in October. That minister tried to claim the UCP is building affordable housing, but this government is going to miss its own targets, targets they set, by 4,000 units. That's right: they can't even do the bare minimum. Every Albertan struggling to keep a roof over their

head, struggling to pay their rent and put food on the table gets it. Why doesn't the UCP?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, in the time the members opposite had control of power, they did everything possible to make it more unaffordable to live as a family in Alberta. They introduced a carbon tax. They did nothing to try and grow our economy and put a roof overhead and food on the plate for average Albertans. This government has policies that are practical, and that's why Albertans choose again and again every time we ask them in an election: Conservatives work with us to solve this problem. That's why we're seeing more and more investment from this government on creating attainable and affordable housing.

Member Irwin: Unbelievable. This government is turning their backs on renters every time they stand up and say Albertans do not want action on rent. Even if the UCP started building the housing Albertans desperately need, it would take years for the volatile rental market to stabilize. A temporary rent increase cap would protect Albertans' housing security in the interim. We all agree that building housing is a huge part of the solution, so get to work and build it. But why can't this government commit to temporarily stopping astronomical rent increases, too? Albertans need support, and they need it now.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite need to figure out what direction they're going in. When they were in power, they said no rent control. The former . . . [interjections]

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

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the former NDP MLA Robyn Luff was excluded from caucus after she introduced a private member's bill to bring in rent control. I'd ask the members opposite to please not exclude the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood from their caucus just because she has a different position from them, from that government. The NDP position on this has got more plot twists than a soap opera. Pick a lane; you cannot inhale and exhale at the same time. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, over a year ago the Premier swore she'd fix our health care system in 90 days, but the fact is that under her government the situation is worse than ever as front-line health care workers warn that overcrowding in emergency rooms is the worst they have seen in 25 years. Yesterday emergency physician Dr. Paul Parks said that the situation is critical, with over 200 patients in Edmonton sick, admitted to hospital, but trapped in emergency because there are no beds available. Will the Health minister take responsibility for her government's repeated failure to prepare for respiratory virus season, support health care workers, and ensure Albertans' access to care?

2:00

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are in respiratory virus season. Yes, we're seeing an increase particularly in influenza. I'm in regular contact. In fact, I text regularly and speak regularly to Dr. Paul Parks, and he did share his concerns. I've also been speaking with Dr. Lyle Oberg, the new chair of the AHS Board and the interim CEO. They are working on it diligently. In fact, they have instituted surge capacity. Edmonton activated level 3 medicine load levelling on November 9.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, talking does nothing for families at the Alberta Children's hospital yesterday who faced 13-hour waits to access emergency care. The UCP government refuses to be honest with Albertans about the fragile, critical state of health care in our province and their continued role in making it worse. In fact, with their refocus all the UCP has to offer health care workers is a chance they might be laid off. Can this minister offer any plan to actually support health care workers, any actual hope for Albertans who are waiting to access care, anything that would make a difference today?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, we actually have 3,900 more nurses in the last year hired in Alberta. There's hope. I just finished speaking with the College of Physicians & Surgeons, who told me today that we have 514 more new doctors that have registered with them to practise in Alberta. Alberta is calling, people are coming, and there is hope on the horizon for our workforce. Not only that; I continually talk to doctors and nurses who are excited about the new refocus.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is suffering under the lack of action from this government, and it's not just me; that's folks on the front line. ER Doctor Steve Fisher tweeted: feeling helpless at 4 a.m. in the ER amidst a crumbling system; 40 patients in my waiting room as my beds are full of sick patients waiting to go upstairs to a full hospital. Dr. Paul Parks says that these are untenable circumstances, yet this minister, this government are doing nothing; they can't even muster the courage to endorse vaccinations that could save lives. Will the Health minister just admit that her government is content to simply accept triple-bunking, hallway medicine, exhausted health care workers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, what I admit is that the members opposite are more interested in political theatre than they are in actually fixing the problems, which we are focused on. The very overuse of our hospital emergency rooms is a reason we have to do the refocus. When we don't have enough family physicians, when we do not have strong primary care . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay.

Member LaGrange: When we don't focus on primary care and increasing our family physicians, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, that's what we end up with. We are on it.

School Construction Capital Plan

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, the 2022 annual report from the Ministry of Education notes that student enrolment rose by 3.3 per cent, or 23,600 students, yet Budget 2023 included only a 2.5 per cent increase in capital investment, well below enrolment growth. This includes full construction funding for only 13 schools across the entire province. Can the minister explain why capital investment for new schools falls far short of enrolment growth?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, building schools in our growing communities is a top priority for the government. The mandate letter for the Ministry of Education reflects that priority. In addition, over the course of the past four years we have moved forward on 98 school projects across the entire province. As my colleague the Minister of Health noted, Alberta is calling and the world is answering as more and more people flock to our incredible

province looking for opportunities, and we'll make sure they have the supports that they need to succeed.

Mr. Ellingson: Let's talk about those growing communities. Capital planning should give consideration to enrolment growth. The four largest school boards in this province, all in Calgary and Edmonton, experienced enrolment growth of approximately 12,000 students, or over 50 per cent of the enrolment growth in all of Alberta, yet of the 13 new schools in Budget 2023 only two are in Calgary and Edmonton. Why is this government ignoring the needs of Calgary and Edmonton when it comes to new school planning?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, that's not true at all, Mr. Speaker. The capital process that we have does evaluate school utilization rates and enrolment pressures as a key variable in scoring projects. In addition, in Budget 2023 there were 11 projects that were green-lighted at various stages for the city of Calgary and 10 projects that were green-lighted, again at various stages, for the city of Edmonton. Of course, projects need to move through planning, design until they can receive full construction funding. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The only one with the call is the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: I mean, if it isn't true, then your reports must be wrong.

Calgary is growing at a rapid pace. The Calgary board of education alone absorbed 7,000 new students this year, with similar anticipated numbers in the future. The Calgary and Edmonton boards consider all new schools – new schools – in their capital plans to be critical. Will the minister commit to fulfilling those capital plans in 2024, including the six full construction projects in the CBE capital plan? Can the residents of Calgary-Foothills anticipate the construction of Sage Hill/Kincora middle school in April?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the member just asked for the Sage Hill/Kincora middle school to be approved in the next budget. That project was put on as a new request by the Calgary board of education last year, and it's number 11 on their priority list, so I'm not sure if the member is advocating for me to fund the school division's number 11 priority. We're focused on funding the priorities that the school divisions have identified as the most urgent. There is, of course, a process that all projects will be scored and evaluated and awarded as we move . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Education Funding for Enrolment Growth

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's classrooms are bursting at the seams, and enrolment growth shows no sign of slowing down. The UCP seems suddenly surprised by this, but it was no surprise to growing school boards that have been experiencing this for years. Yesterday the Education minister proudly spoke of their paltry one-time funding injection for classrooms, yet after four years of underfunding public education teachers, parents, and students across this province remain disappointed. When will the minister prioritize long-term, stable investment in public education instead of relying on temporary and inefficient stopgaps?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we do have, of course, long-term planning, and we prioritize that in our funding model and arrangement. Over the last four years funding to education has

moved from \$8.2 billion to \$8.8 billion. The \$30 million in additional funding that the member is referring to is a one-time cash injection for this fiscal year to help school divisions that are feeling some of the significant pressure.

And the member is right. For years Alberta's population has been increasing. Our prospects have been increasing. It's surprising to see that's changed since the NDP was removed from power.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the \$30 million is too little and it's certainly coming too late – boards can't suddenly hire new staff or build new schools with this funding mid-year – and given that the Alberta Teachers' Association has been asking for data-driven accountability and decision-making since 2019 but the UCP has yet to engage with them in good faith and given that the UCP continues to rely on a funding model that does not fund every single student in these rapidly growing communities, how can the minister claim that \$30 million will make a difference for over 700,000 Alberta students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, if I heard correctly, I think the member indicated that we're not engaging in good faith with partners, including the ATA. That's an absolute load of rubbish. In fact, the first meeting I had as Minister of Education was with the ATA, and in fact I'm actually meeting later tomorrow with the ATA again. We meet regularly with all of our partners to hear their priorities so that we can help adjust our education system to meet the needs of teachers, parents, and students. I notice the member as well talked about the fact that the \$30 million cannot be used to build schools. This is an operational grant, not capital funding.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the UCP's weighted moving average funding model fails to accommodate for the real-time needs of school boards, leaving them financially unable to support thousands of new students, and given that growing school divisions are deprived of full funding for new enrolments each and every year, can the minister explain why he won't admit that the UCP's education funding model is a failure and work with educators and school boards to figure out a model that will support every single Alberta student?

2:10

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's funding model is not a failure. With my conversations with school divisions across the province I have heard both pros and cons. There are things that work and things that we can work to improve. Of course, one of the areas that we've heard about is areas where school divisions are experiencing some significant added enrolment pressure, which is precisely why we created the supplemental enrolment growth grant and further supplemented that this year to support those growing school divisions.

As the year comes to a close, I want to wish the member opposite all the very best in her future leadership run. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

2026 Alberta Summer Games

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Game on, Mr. Speaker. The 2026 Alberta Summer Games are coming to Strathcona county. Strathcona county has a long, successful history of hosting the Alberta Games, having hosted the 1987 Alberta Summer Games and the 2000 Alberta Winter Games, which means we are ready to host thousands of Alberta's best young athletes as they come into town for a three-day-long tournament to fight for sweet, sweet victory. While the competition of our children is fun, Strathcona

county will see endless benefits for hosting the games. To the Minister of Tourism and Sport: what are some of the benefits of hosting the games? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Schow: Well, I'm glad to see the members opposite are as excited as I am and the people of Strathcona county are about them hosting the 2026 Alberta Summer Games. There we go. Mr. Speaker, these games are more than just sporting competitions. For the host communities they certainly leave a legacy of enhanced infrastructure, trained volunteers, tourism revenue, strong community spirit, and an outstanding economic boost for local businesses, and for the athletes the games ignite the children's love for competition, teach teamwork and leadership. They also build confidence, create lifelong friendships, and promote healthy lifestyles that last well into adulthood. We are very excited about 2026.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that the games will help communities enhance the recreation infrastructure for the community to enjoy for years and given that our community spirit in Strathcona county will be stronger than ever, cheering on our local athletes as they compete to show that Strathcona county has the best athletes in the province, and given that the games also bolster local economies, to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: can you please highlight the economic benefits of hosting the Alberta Summer Games?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader and the Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I contend that Strathcona county has some excellent athletes, I will contend that the sunny south has some great ones as well.

The economic benefits of these games are going to be huge. Earlier this year with the Alberta Summer Games in Okotoks and Diamond Valley the community saw over \$9 million of economic benefits from hosting this multiday event. While the immediate economic benefits are astonishing, it also gives the opportunity for the community to show thousands of Albertans their welcoming hospitality and tourism attractions. This will lead Albertans to attend the games and keep coming back, staying longer . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given that the games inspire our youth, teach teamwork, build confidence, and promote healthy lifestyles all the way into adulthood and given that this supports our government's commitment to providing opportunities for young athletes to take their game to the next level and given that Alberta is home to many outstanding athletes, to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: can you please highlight the legacies left on the world stage by Albertans that have competed in the games?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. Every kid who plays in the Alberta Summer Games and Winter Games is going to go professional, whether it's in their chosen sport or in life in some other profession. But I tell you, the lessons that they learn in these summer games, like leadership, stick-to-itiveness, stress management, skill development, and so many more things, they'll take with them the rest of their lives. Since 1998 the lessons learned in these games

have helped 18 Albertans take their passions to the Olympic level, and that includes some who have won gold, silver, and bronze. Love of the sport lives on.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Hayter: To date we've heard from over 38,000 Albertans on the survey for pensions at albertasfuture.ca. We've also had overflow crowds at every in-person meeting while the UCP still hides from Albertans. The message from everyone is crystal clear: the UCP needs to keep its hands off the CPP, and no one is supporting gambling the CPP away. Can the minister tell this House how many e-mails and phone calls he has received about gambling with our CPP?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Always excited to talk about the engagement on a potential APP. I think what we've done so far is the first round of telephone town halls. Mr. Dinning, the rest of the panel: I expect to have a meeting with them very soon to discuss next steps. You know, something that's very important to Albertans is to have accurate information. I'm well aware of that and fully believe it, and I think that engaging with the feds, getting the Chief Actuary involved, even the work of the Canadian Institute of Actuaries will be helpful. We'll continue the conversation.

Ms Hayter: Given that I've knocked on a lot of doors over the last four years and I've talked to a lot of constituents in Calgary-Egmont and given the e-mails my office has received from residents overwhelmingly rejecting this government's plan to gamble with pensions and given that many are upset that the UCP hid their pension plot from them during the election campaign, can the minister explain why he doesn't respect my constituents enough to listen to what they are telling him loud and clear?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we respect all Albertans. I think the purpose of Bill 2 is to show that this government and any future government will respect the priorities of Albertans when it comes to the idea of starting an APP. That's why we've made clear that no government, ours or a future government, could ever proceed with this initiative without having a referendum first. We've also made clear that the entire asset withdrawal would have to be used for the set-up and operation of an APP and that it would have to be beneficial both in benefits and contributions. That's the conversation.

Ms Hayter: Given that I believe in in-person consultation, I am thrilled to be hosting a pension town hall with the MLA for Calgary-Foothills on January 23 at the Dalhousie Community Centre at 6:30 p.m. Given that the UCP MLAs from northwest Calgary are hiding from the in-person meetings, I would like to extend the invitation to the deputy minister, the Minister of Advanced Education, and the Minister of Education. Can any of those ministers confirm if they'll attend and finally start listening to Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we always listen to Albertans, and there was a little straw . . . [interjections] Oh, they're a little chirpy; leaders' row is a little chirpy.

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

Mr. Horner: Yeah. Well, before all of the potential leaders started chirping me off there, Mr. Speaker, what I was about to say was that there was a straw poll done in the spring. It was called the election. That's what put us on this side of the House, bringing forward an initiative that has the potential benefit of \$5 billion staying in the Alberta economy, staying in the pockets of families and in Alberta businesses. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents have immigrated to Canada in pursuit of certainty and stability, both in their personal lives and careers. They have invested their time and effort contributing to the economic growth and cultural diversity of our province, yet here we are with the Minister of Finance apparently running a high-stakes poker game with their pensions. Is this government's idea of a warm Canadian welcome a gamble on the dreams and stability they were promised?

Mr. Nally: Seriously? You haven't asked me a question in six weeks.

The Speaker: Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Order. Order. Order. [interjections] Order.

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

Member Boparai: That was my question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance, then.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. As we've said, nobody is gambling anything. This is obviously a very serious initiative. It's very important that Albertans know that their pensions are safe. That's the purpose of Bill 2, to communicate that to Albertans, to know that it could never happen by this government or a future government without a referendum, and as I've said a few times now over the last month, the asset withdrawal would have to go towards the set-up and operation of the plan, and it would have to be beneficial. Once again, we're talking about a \$5 billion idea. I think it's worth considering.

2:20

Member Boparai: Given that in the face of the government's enthusiastic Alberta Is Calling campaign there is an elephant in the room, the looming threat to the financial stability of those who choose to answer that call . . .

Mr. Nally: Come on. Just ask me one. Just one.

Member Boparai: . . . how does the minister justify inviting people to move to Alberta while simultaneously pushing policies that could see their hard-earned pensions gambled away? Why is this government committed to turning Alberta Is Calling into Alberta Is Rolling the Dice with Your Future?

The Speaker: I'm happy after the session to provide a heckling 101 course for the hon. members over there, but screaming at the top of your lungs isn't included in that course.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member asked the question and brought up the Alberta Is Calling campaign, a very successful campaign, one that we've since had to discontinue because it's so successful and people continue to choose Alberta and vote with their feet. They're looking for affordability. They're looking for opportunity. They're leaving other provinces at a rate we haven't seen since we were pioneers giving land away and

people were getting off the train. That's what they're choosing right now. Alberta is the place of prosperity and opportunity.

Member Boparai: Given that lots of my constituents have worked their entire lives but now they're in fear and lots of people are thinking to leave Alberta because of their hard decisions, will the minister justify that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of jobs, economy and innovation.

Mr. Jones: And trade, Mr. Speaker; that's all right.

First, I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for her service. [interjections] Thank you.

And to address the question, people are voting with their feet.

Mr. Sabir: Bullshit.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Jones: We've seen nearly 200,000 people choose Alberta over a 12-month period. I'm not sure why we're not celebrating 200,000 people choosing Alberta to take advantage of our world-class job opportunities, our low taxes, and our unparalleled quality of life that we offer to Albertans. We're going to continue seeing those trends. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:22. It's almost like it's nearly the end of session or something.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Air Ambulance Services

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. HALO Air Ambulance is a valuable service for those living in southern Alberta, especially in my charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. HALO is strategically based in Medicine Hat to improve response times to critically ill and injured patients in remote, inaccessible areas, and I'm proud of the great service that HALO provides. However, recently I've heard a number of concerns from my constituents about how HALO is dispatched. To the Minister of Health: why is HALO dependent on being dispatched by a competitor? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I'm convinced that the conversations that are taking place outside of what's happening with whoever has the call are not helping decorum this afternoon, and I encourage you to not have them.

The hon. Minister of Health to answer.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I want to thank all those who work for our air ambulance providers: HALO, HERO, and STARS. The service that they provide is critical, especially in our rural communities. STARS covers the vast majority of helicopter air ambulance missions, and their Emergency Link Centre is directly integrated into the AHS EMS communications centre. Every second matters when there is a request for dispatch, and we will continue to work with all of our air ambulance providers and partners.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that HALO responds to a wide range of service requests each year, including emergency medical scene calls, critical patient transfers, search and rescue operations, law enforcement incidents, and responds to all hazardous

disasters and further given that traditional ambulances take significantly longer and we know that during emergencies in rural Alberta every second counts, can the same minister share why land ambulances are required to be dispatched first, instead of ambulances like HALO, when time is of essence?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Many factors are considered at the time of dispatch. There is no requirement for land ambulance to be dispatched ahead of air ambulance, but a ground ambulance will always be dispatched for an out-of-hospital request for emergency response. As soon as dispatch determines the need for an air ambulance to respond, helicopters will be prealerted to prepare for launch. As well, any paramedic or medical first response agency on scene may also request a helicopter to be dispatched if patient condition warrants it on assessment. Of course, this is very important.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister for that answer. Given that in October there was a head-on collision on highway 41 and further given that a land ambulance was dispatched first and had to travel 45 minutes to the accident only to have an air ambulance from Calgary be dispatched even though HALO was closer, can the same minister share what is being done to address air ambulance dispatch in rural areas, where every second matters?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been working very closely with our partners in rural communities across the province to understand the individual EMS needs for their areas. This year our government is providing record funding for HALO, HERO, and STARS to ensure quality and timely access to emergency services for rural Albertans. Helicopter air ambulances offer a lifeline for rural communities in our province, flying Albertans in need directly to a hospital when it is required, dependent on their level of care. Predictability of funding and better integration means sustainable air ambulance services to help Albertans right across the province.

Provincial Taxes and Fees

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, it's been six months since the Alberta election, and already people in Calgary-Elbow and right across the province are getting used to the sad reality that this UCP government breaks its promises. The promise to protect pensions: broken. The promise not to cut jobs in health care: that's gone, too. I want to ask the Finance minister if his government will follow through on their day-one commitment in the election campaign. Is this government going to cut personal income taxes, as they promised, and when?

Mr. Horner: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. It's in my mandate letter. It was a campaign commitment of the Premier. You know, I think it's important to get through the Budget '24 process. We have some major pressures coming in the out-years. I could name a couple, but I'll probably focus on debt servicing, as I've mentioned in this House before, three major debt maturity stacks taking us out to \$25 billion, \$26 billion, \$27 billion. Just like every household that's had to refinance their mortgage, we're feeling the pinch. That's why it's so important to stay within our means, pay down debt in the good years.

Member Kayande: Given that the Premier also said that she would do what was necessary to lower the cost of living for Albertans and given that the Albertans I talked to have actually seen their costs go up and given that now the government is poised to start increasing taxes on fuel after they were cut to help people make ends meet, can the minister explain to Albertans why his cabinet buddies are giving themselves gifts while Albertans will get dinged at the pumps this holiday season?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the province, just like any household, has to manage its bottom line, watch the revenue stream. I don't know if anyone watched today, but oil dipped below \$70, as low as \$68, over geopolitical uncertainty. That's something that we watch closely, but I'd say that the important thing is to be diligent. I hear every day about all of the needs and challenges across Alberta. We take that very seriously, and we have to get it all on the table and talk about, you know: what are the trade-offs funding this at the expense of that? Taking more debt at 5 per cent doesn't help . . .

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

Member Kayande: Given that the UCP also promised in the campaign that seniors would receive a 25 per cent cut on various fees that they pay, given that they've had all session and have done nothing on this and given that instead this session has been about gambling pensions and gifting themselves ever more expensive gifts, can the Finance minister confirm if seniors will still get the promised reduced costs, and if they will, why did he spend so much of this session boosting perks rather than supporting seniors in an affordability crisis?

Mr. Horner: I know what the Premier would say is that all of her campaign commitments: she still is very committed. We had some very ambitious mandate letters that we're all working towards. Like I said in my previous answer, you have to look at everything at once, talk about the trade-offs, talk about the out-years, prioritize, do things in steps. It's a much different challenge than when the NDP were chasing people out of the province, telling them to get jobs somewhere else. We have to build for a growing . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

2:30

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, the Crowsnest Pass has a rich coal mining heritage. They had some of the first coal mines in western Canada. Recently Northback has applied to do test drilling on a previously mined Grassy Mountain. This application has raised environmental and economic concerns in the Crowsnest. Some of my constituents want the mine and the good jobs it provides, and some are worried about the water and the environment. Can the energy minister tell us how the government will deal with these competing concerns? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, we actually believe that we can balance the environment and the economy, and we can do both well. We can protect wilderness and protect water. We can promote good jobs and protect the viability of communities. The NDP wanted to turn Alberta's mountain valley into the disastrous Elk Valley, B.C. They wanted to mine close to provincial parks. They wanted to mine close to scenic waterfalls. They backed

thermal coal. We won't do to the Alberta mountains what the NDP did and still does in B.C.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Albertans care deeply about water and given that this government also takes water very, very seriously and given that many of the residents of southern Alberta are worried about the water shortages, what does the minister have to say about the complaint that Northback has applied to use water in their test drilling? Will the minister protect our water?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we will protect Alberta's water. Northback's application would not take any water whatsoever from any river or stream. It won't impact drinking water. The AER has confirmed that it won't use any water that Albertans use. Northback has applied to use a tiny portion of the water from the old mine pond on Grassy Mountain. They want to recycle old mine water. The NDP, as usual, is wrong when they say that we are harming drinking water. As I said, we won't do to the Alberta mountains what the NDP wanted to do and still does in B.C.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given the importance of our environment and the well-being of our communities and given the concern of many in the region that without good-paying jobs they cannot live where they would like to live and given that no one in Alberta wants mountaintop removal mining and no one wants the Crownsnest to become the Elk Valley, like in B.C., with coal mines in every direction, what will the minister do to assure Albertans that we won't have coal mining everywhere all of the time?

Mr. Jean: I'd like to thank the hard-working Member for Livingstone-Macleod, Mr. Speaker, for bringing this issue forward. This is not going to happen in Alberta. We won't have the B.C. style of coal mining ever here as long as the UCP government is in control. We won't allow mountaintop removal mining. We won't mine waterfalls. We will only allow coal mining at the existing coal mines and applications at the four advanced coal projects. No other applications at this time will even be considered by the AER until the environment minister proposes a new land-use framework. We won't bring the disastrous Elk Valley from B.C. to Alberta. We won't do to the Alberta beautiful mountains what the NDP planned to do here and continue to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Supports for Seniors

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government has made life hard for a lot of seniors with their decisions. They abandoned seniors during the pandemic and further cut health and other support services seniors benefited from for a long time. Now they are going after pensions, too, which many seniors rely on to live. Does the Finance minister agree that seniors deserve better than what the UCP government has delivered for them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, seniors built this province. I think everyone in this House should give them the utmost respect. When it comes to the initiative and the idea around an APP, like we've said, the LifeWorks report shows that we would have the ability at that asset withdrawal number to lower contributions. We also know that it would have the capacity to do multiple things and potentially increase benefits. I think that's why we think this is worthy of

consideration. Think of what that could do to seniors on a fixed income. If it helped in any way, it could be amazing.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP government has made cruel cuts to seniors' health benefits and given that they cut a program providing hundreds of dollars for lift chairs for seniors struggling with mobility issues and given that they also cut another benefit providing foot orthotics to seniors suffering with pains and other issues, won't this Finance minister agree that these cuts went too far, and will he commit to reversing them today?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that Alberta has one of the highest rates of senior benefits in the country. We've invested over \$9.3 billion each year into senior supports. We've indexed the Alberta seniors' benefits rates annually to keep pace with inflation. Seniors built this province. I have deep respect for all they've done. That's why we are putting seniors first and supporting them above everyone else to make sure they have the supports they need through these difficult times.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP policies are making the lives of Alberta seniors more and more difficult and given that seniors in the province have been struggling to make ends meet due to skyrocketing inflation and the growing cost of utilities and insurance rates due to this government's policies, will the minister confirm that there will be no cuts to senior services in the next budget and that all previous cuts will be reversed, and will he finally stand up and support Alberta seniors?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, to be clear – and seniors need to understand this – there have been no cuts, only increases in supports. What has cut into senior spending power is things like the carbon tax which we've seen the NDP opposition introduce and support. Seniors gave no social licence for this. No one in Canada did. The truth is that members opposite need to come clean with their attack on seniors' bottom line. It's an affordability crisis. They have contributed to it, and these sorts of misleading questions are doing nothing but harming seniors going forward. They need to understand the truth. We increased supports. We increased benefits to the tune of billions of dollars.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, my riding of Edmonton-Mill Woods is the home of the Grey Nuns hospital, the newest hospital in Edmonton, and it opened in 1988, 35 years ago. It took 29 years before another hospital was planned for this growing city, and it came finally under an Alberta NDP government with the announcement of the new south Edmonton hospital. Now, since then the UCP has had four Infrastructure ministers, three Health ministers, two Premiers but not one shovel in the ground to get the south Edmonton hospital built. To the current Minister of Infrastructure. Yes or no? Will construction begin on this important hospital in 2024?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new Edmonton hospital is a priority for our UCP government. We know that it's important to meet the growing health care needs of the community, ensuring timely and quality care for Albertans. A new hospital will enhance accessibility and promote overall well-being. We will continue to work with our partners to move health care projects forward, to the benefit of all Albertans.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Infrastructure just said that this is a priority project, to that same minister. I'm hearing that Infrastructure has told project contractors and other government departments that they have done all the planning work they can for right now until scope and budget are confirmed by this UCP government. They've notified everyone that the project is being put on hold starting mid-December. How can this priority project move forward if the project team is being disbanded and everybody is working on other projects now? Can the minister confirm the status of work?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what they say? Don't believe everything that you hear. Well, in the case of the NDP don't believe anything that you hear. Alberta's capital plan consists of \$23 billion over the next three years. This is orders of magnitude beyond what they built. There was \$1.6 billion for 79 schools. This is doubling or tripling the NDP's output. We have \$2.8 billion going towards 33 health facilities. They liked announcing them, just not actually building them. What they did do was punish Albertans by introducing us to the first . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't confirm anything, and the minister should be aware that the quality of information he shares with this House matters. Freedom of information requests will tell us what he refuses to tell us, and that is that pens have been put down, project teams are being disbanded, and more than 10 contractors are moving on to other work because everything has stopped until this government gives scope and budget authority to continue. Right now we have a crisis in our hospital system. The south Edmonton hospital is needed. Can the minister confirm when it will be complete? I'm hearing it can't be built till 2033.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP never fail to disappoint. You know, in the run-up to the last election they wanted to increase taxes, increase regulation, and in general just make life miserable for business. But give them kudos. This time around they were honest with Albertans with their desire to increase taxes. So the question that I would have is: will there be a leadership race because of this? Well, perhaps. A name change? Maybe. They can run but they can't hide their stripes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Electricity System in Rural Alberta

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, acknowledging the distinct difficulties experienced by residents and businesses in rural Alberta and the Alberta government's effort aimed at tackling the escalating electricity costs and implementing changes to the rural electricity system, it is very important that we ensure affordable and reliable electricity access for our rural communities. Can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities shed light on the government's approach? Is the government considering an overhaul of the provincial power market that considers the needs of rural Alberta?

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. Affordability is a top priority

for our government, and we are currently looking at all aspects of the electricity system, including in rural Alberta. We have multiple studies that are being worked on, and we have been engaging with regulators, industry, and consumer advocates on this issue. We are working to modernize a system that was neglected by the NDP government when they pushed through an early exit from coal, and we are designing a system that will deliver reliable and affordable power to meet our carbon-neutral goals of 2050.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we understand that changes are needed – we want to make sure that they work for us in rural Alberta – and given that distribution costs are much higher in rural communities, could the same minister please share some details about how the government's plans will make our electricity more reliable so that power outages and redistribution costs become less of a problem for our rural communities?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been engaging with regulators, industry, and consumer advocates on the transmission and distribution system for years. Results of that engagement I hope to make public in the very near future, and more affordability measures are on the way like better enabling of microgeneration for their own use, encouraging energy storage technologies, which will reduce the need for adding costs of new wires to the system, and improved overall distribution and transmission planning. What won't help are Justin Trudeau's clean electricity regulations, carbon tax hikes, and imaginary thinking that the budget will magically balance itself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given the distinct challenges faced by folks in rural Alberta – high electricity bills can be a burden, and power outages can be disruptive – and further given that Ottawa's proposed clean electricity regulation would make electricity less reliable and unaffordable, can the same minister tell the House what the government is doing to push back on the feds and make sure electricity remains affordable and dependable for us in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are standing up to Ottawa to protect all Albertans. We are going to make sure that electricity remains reliable and affordable through the use of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act. Our government stands on the Constitution of Canada and the responsibility of protecting our jurisdiction against climate activists like Minister Steven Guilbeault, who have shown little regard for the unique issues facing Albertans, especially those in rural areas. Both the opposition and the feds have shown they have no concept of the challenges faced by farmers or those living in rural and remote areas and the impact that these types of regulations can have on their very livelihoods.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is rising to apologize for unparliamentary language.

Member's Apology

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to withdraw and apologize. I think it was inappropriate, and that caused . . .

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

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

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a petition.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've worked through Parliamentary Counsel to make sure that the additional 101 signatures that we have on a petition that was brought forward earlier by my colleague the labour critic for the Official Opposition around nurses having presumptive coverage expanded to include posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic mental health injuries be added to the already more than 1,000 that we've presented.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council 2022-23 annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader, do you have a tabling today?

Mr. Williams: Yes. I have tablings for a number of different social media posts. I have tablings for an article that was referenced yesterday; yesterday's point of order discussion in which the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is quoted as using the phrase, quote: how one cannot suck and blow at the same time. Unquote.

I also have social media posts from a former Prime Minister and the current High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, quoting: I cannot suck and blow at the same time.

I also have three separate occasions in which the Member for St. Albert uses #suckandblow in social media posts.

I also have a tabling of social media from the potential NDP leader former Deputy Premier Thomas Lukaszuk in which he uses the phrase "suck and blow at the same time."

Next, I have a quote from the former Calgary mayor and potential future NDP leader using the phrase in a CBC article: you cannot suck and blow at the same time.

I also have a quote from the Green Party leader, Elizabeth May, the CBC article: you cannot suck and blow at the same time. Mr. Speaker, if it's good enough to print in the CBC and on social media, I believe there should be no problem.

The Speaker: Are there . . .

Mr. Williams: Just a few more, Mr. Speaker, if I may.

Next, I'd like to bring forward some tablings regarding a heckle in which the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said yesterday that the NDP has never talked about safe supply. First, I have an *Edmonton Journal* article, which the headline reads: NDP Calls for Safe Supply of Drugs.

Next, I have 10 social media posts from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that call for a safe supply, also two social media posts from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood calling for safe supply, three posts from Edmonton-City Centre calling for safe supply, not to mention the numerous from *Hansard* which I need not table, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for your time, and I hope these tablings are accepted.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the article I referenced during point of order debate yesterday, 'Suck and Blow Every Day': Appalled by Alberta's 'Disrespectful' MLAs, School Swears off Legislature Visits". I believe this became an article because what we say in the Chamber is different from what we can say outside of it.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the lyrics to a popular classic duet, which a large majority of Albertans hope the Premier and the Finance minister will soon be singing all over Alberta regarding their plan to replace the CPP with an unwanted and risky APP. It is entitled *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off*.

The Speaker: Some take direction better than others. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – and I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for his tabling.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of e-mails from my constituents, which I referenced in my debate yesterday on Bill 2, the Alberta pension act referendum. These are all e-mails from constituents who are very clear that they do not support the UCP's proposal to pull out of the CPP, and they want to protect their pensions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? Oh. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from the previous NDP energy minister instructing the AER to clarify that Ram Falls, Alberta foothills and mountains are open for surface coal mining.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations, Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Plus People 2022-23 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Nixon, Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, pursuant to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities 2022-23 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:52 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this point of order. At that time the Minister of Finance deliberately chose to disregard your caution about the repeated use of language that creates disorder, and we saw clearly in this House that it immediately riled up the entire Chamber, causing disorder and another point of order and, I believe, contributing to the raucous discourse that we saw throughout question period.

2:50

I called this point under 23(j), “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder,” and I would reference *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, unparliamentary language, chapter 13, page 623:

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, given that we spoke about this only yesterday – the *Hansard* is December 5, 2023, page 511 – I will not repeat the arguments that I made yesterday, but I do want to reference your ruling. I quote you as saying:

... as it is the first time in this legislative session that we have had a point of order called on the use of such language. Having said that, the repeated use of this language that creates disorder will, at the end of the day, eventually become, quite likely, a point of order, as we have seen on many occasions in the past.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in your ruling you were referencing the fact that this has been called a point of order. On March 20, 2013, a caution was found; March 14, 2023, a caution was found; and then yesterday a caution was provided, as I’ve just read to you. Given that we are now seeing in each case the Speaker providing a point of caution to the members of the Assembly and particularly yesterday’s caution, and now we see this language disrupting the Assembly multiple times within the same session, which seemed to be key to your ruling yesterday, I ask that the language be ruled out of order so that we can get back to parliamentary debate inside of this Assembly, as we saw the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction give an excellent example of as he tried to make the same point with different language. It’s more than possible for members to make effective debate without moving into the unparliamentary sphere.

I also just want to add, particularly given *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that there is a different standard applied to the language that we use in this Chamber than the language we use outside of the Chamber, and given the tablings that we saw today, I think there may be some confusion by government members about this. I will not criticize government members in this Assembly for what they might tweet and hashtag, but the language they use here needs to follow the rules that we are governed by here. When they table examples of this language being used outside of the Assembly, I see it as completely irrelevant because we are talking about parliamentary debate and ensuring we have decorum and order here.

For any additional context, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest you review the arguments that I made yesterday, which I have not repeated, as well as the tabling that I have made from the *National Post* story, that I have just submitted to this Chamber. I hope that you will rule this a point of order. Thank you very much for allowing me to make my arguments.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise and argue this point of order. A lot has been said already about the term “suck and blow.” I believe that it’s been used multiple times in this Chamber since 2008. The issue here, because I won’t go over the eloquent words from the hon. Deputy Government House Leader yesterday, but what I will talk about is the precedent. In this Chamber if something is offensive, that is subjective. If it continues to cause disorder on the opposite side, I believe that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s a point of order. I don’t understand why.

If the members are offended by this term “suck and blow,” which means to inhale or to exhale, which you cannot do at the same time, maybe they’re attributing a different meaning or connotation to it than they should be. To the members opposite I’d say: maybe get your minds out of the gutter.

But, Mr. Speaker, what I am going to say is that using this term and calling a point of order means that in future if there’s another term that they just don’t like and they deem that it creates disorder, then we won’t be able to use that term. How often are we going to continue to add words and phrases that are displeasing to the members opposite until we can no longer debate legislation in this House freely without being called out of order because something is disruptive to the members opposite?

As I said, I’m not going to go over “suck and blow,” but what I can say is that it’s been used five times since 2007: first, on May 12, on page 654 of *Hansard*; then again, June 4, 2007, page 1494; November 25, 2009, page 2041; December 1, 2016, page 2243; and February 21, 2012, page 219.

So it’s been used, Mr. Speaker, a number of times in this Chamber without being called a point of order.

The members don’t like it. There is certainly context. If they were talking about something sexual in nature and then used the term “suck and blow,” I could see that the context would be inappropriate for this Chamber. But in this instance the members were saying one thing, believing another thing; inconsistency in their arguments. I would suggest that it’s not a point of order. It just makes them frustrated on the opposite side.

Now they’re calling points of order every time they hear it so that eventually, Mr. Speaker, you will rule it out of order. I find that to be a dangerous precedent to set for this Chamber. I also find that, in my opinion, my humble opinion, it’s not a point of order and ask that we move on from this.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

I am prepared to rule. Who knew three little words could create such lengthy debate here inside the Assembly? I do appreciate the submissions from both the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader as well. I think there are a number of things that are important to the Speaker with respect to the ruling today. The first being that yesterday I spoke specifically – and I have a copy of *Hansard* here in my hand. The important piece of the ruling yesterday, from my perspective, is when I provided caution to the members on the context in which something is being said, and I went on to say that something may not be out of order today but potentially could be out of order tomorrow.

I will just say that when the hon. Minister of Finance used the language, it almost felt in a not provocative context and has already been debated but a provocative context in that the Speaker had issued a caution yesterday. It felt as though the minister was testing the water to see if the Speaker actually meant caution, or if he was only providing caution because it was raised as a point of order.

The other thing that I might add, with respect to the Government House Leader: I was a member of the Official Opposition at a time when the government of the day – and perhaps the roles were reversed – continually made remarks with respect to certain things that the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont called a point of order at every opportunity, and, much to the chagrin perhaps of the current Government House Leader, it eventually created so much disorder that in fact it was ruled out of order. But I’m very convinced that that isn’t a slippery slope to every single phrase being ruled out of order and preventing us from debating anything here in the Assembly.

The other correction to be made is that just because it’s ruled out of order today, in light of the context in which it was used, which it

will be momentarily, doesn't mean that it can never be used again. We don't create a list of things that are parliamentary or unparliamentary. It concluded in approximately 1993. We don't have a list. The context in which language is used here in the Chamber is what creates disorder or not, and that is what the Speaker rules on.

On this point, on this particular occasion I do believe that it was a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, in this instance I guess I'm going to have to suck it up and blow an apology. I apologize and withdraw.

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

At approximately 2:16 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Indeed, I did, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the Member for Calgary-Edgemont was asking a question to the hon. Minister of Finance, and the question the member asked, "Can the minister explain why he doesn't respect my constituents enough to listen?" This certainly imputes false motives against a member, which should be in line with 23 (h), (i), and (j). I believe this is a point of order given that the remark was directed specifically at an hon. member of this Chamber, particularly the Minister of Finance. Of course, I know that the hon. Minister of Finance respects all constituents of each member of this Chamber. I ask that that member apologize and withdraw.

3:00

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just submit to you that I think this is a matter of debate. Given the many, many, many questions that we've had around either Bill 2 or the pension debate and the concern around Albertans not being heard, I believe that this comment was simply continuing that line of debate, and this is not a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Member for Calgary-Edgemont said the following: "can the minister explain why he doesn't respect my constituents enough to listen to what they are telling him loud and clear?" I think that the more significant challenge here is asking questions in the first person, of such nature specifically, and not through the Speaker. It would have been much more appropriate for the member just to say, "Can the minister explain?" and then proceed, as opposed to directly to him. While I think it may be a matter of debate as to whether or not he does respect, I don't think that it's an allegation of the hon. the Finance minister. I don't consider this a point of order, but I do consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

Member's Apology

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker, just to quickly address my previous apology. At the time I thought I was being cheeky, but in reality that might have been out of order. So I want to take a lesson from the book of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and just apologize for the poor apology and sincerely apologize and withdraw for the "suck and blow" comment.

The Speaker: I appreciate the correction. That is well done.

Hon. members will know that I don't judge the quality of an apology, as we've seen, but I think we have two very good examples now of apologies inside the Assembly. I hope no one ever has to apologize again, but if you did, perhaps you would use these as models of apologies.

I consider all of these matters dealt with and concluded.

That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, before I move that motion, I do have another unanimous consent request before I move to Government Motion 19.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader for a request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the remainder of the day, including the first division of Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for clarity's sake, this is a departure from our standing orders, in particular the portion of the request with respect to no 15-minute bells upon entering into Committee of the Whole. I want to make sure that everyone knows what they are agreeing to.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Time Allocation on Bill 2

19. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 21(1) and (3) this is a debatable motion. The hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone would have been able to read this motion as drafted on the Order Paper, but it would have been really nice had the Government House Leader explained what this motion does. I will try to do that. What this motion does is that it shuts down debate, it curtails debate by using their majority in the House. It's a heavy-handed, undemocratic tactic that the UCP government has resorted to more often than any government in Alberta's history. In fact, they have used it more often in the last four years than any other government in the history of this province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

While I was looking at this motion, I was trying to look it up on the Internet, and I came across some documents from the House of Commons, which I started reading. As much as I was able to read, it stated that from 1913 to 1932 that motion, that kind of heavy-handed, undemocratic tactic, was used only 11 times. From 1932 onwards for 24 years no government used that motion.

I'm giving this context to highlight that this UCP government in the last four years have used it as a matter of course and often on

issues that matter to Alberta. In this case they are doing it on one of their bills, Bill 2, about pensions. They're gambling with the retirement security of Albertans, have been refusing to have in-person consultation with Albertans, have been refusing to attend town halls, have been refusing to take any reasonable amendments such as making referendums binding on them. And when they can't get through, they're resorting to these heavy-handed, undemocratic tactics to push their agenda through this Legislature.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I urge all members of this Legislature that take this matter seriously – in particular, this motion will curtail debate on a serious matter, pensions – ask your constituents. Don't be silenced with this motion. Speak out on behalf of your constituents on this important motion. Stand up to this government. I urge all members of this House to vote against this heavy-handed, undemocratic motion that's before us.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 19 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:08 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

3:10

Against the motion:

Batten	Elmeligi	Metz
Boparai	Eremenko	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Renaud
Ceci	Hoyle	Sabir
Chapman	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kayande	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Loyola	
Totals:	For – 43	Against – 20

[Government Motion 19 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 8

20. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every

question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the members over there, I guess, can't wait to get this bill through so they can get better and fatter gifts. What this motion is doing is that it brings closure on Bill 8. It curtails and ends debate on Bill 8 or limits it to one hour. Again, what Bill 8 does is that it removes the current cap of a \$200 gift limit, moves it into regulation so that government can decide behind closed doors what a good gift value is or what is reasonable for them to get in terms of gifts.

Two or three things, Mr. Speaker. Albertans elect us. They send us here to represent them on issues that matter to them, and what we have seen in this session from this government are self-serving pieces of legislation that make their gifts better, that make pay and perks better for their friends and insiders instead of focusing on what matters to Albertans: the cost of living, hospitals, school systems, their pensions. Now the government is using their majority to shut down the debate in this Legislature. We only had nine pieces of legislation this session – just nine pieces of legislation – and less than 21 hours of debate time for 21 stages. There are 87 members in this House, which means that that's two to three minutes each. I'm sure they will be proud to tell their constituents that we only participated for two to three minutes and that then we brought in closure motions to shut down the debate so we can ram through our agenda, get better gifts, get fatter gifts, and all those things. That's the pattern of behaviour from this government. They will take every opportunity, every tool in the book that's available to them to limit debate and limit accountability.

We will be voting against this motion, and I ask every member of this House: if he or she is not worried about the size of their gift, they should vote with us. Let's debate these things in the Legislature, because Albertans want transparency. Albertans want to see accountability, not bigger and better gifts for their representatives. With that, I urge all members to vote against raising your gift limits around Christmastime.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 20 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:17 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

3:20

Against the motion:

Batten	Elmeligi	Metz
Boparai	Hayter	Phillips
Brar	Hoyle	Renaud
Ceci	Ip	Sabir
Chapman	Kayande	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Loyola	Wright, P.
Ellingson		

Totals: For – 45 Against – 19

[Government Motion 20 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 9 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 9, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, again. Some members are really in a rush to get to the question and get to gifts, but we will try our best and take whatever it takes to stop this UCP gravy train in its tracks, because we think that Albertans are more concerned about the cost-of-living crisis, chaos in health care, chaos in our schools, about their pensions than the gifts their MLAs and ministers are receiving.

So I have another amendment, Madam Chair, and I will move that. I will wait until it's distributed, and then I will give an overview of what this amendment does to stop the UCP gravy train.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The hon. MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be amended in section 1 as follows: (a) by striking out subsection (3) and substituting the following:

(3) section 12(e) is amended by striking out "having a value greater than \$100";

(b) in subsection (7), in the proposed subsection 47.1, by striking out clause (e).

Madam Chair, what this amendment does, in very simple terms, is that there is a disclosure requirement for all gifts over \$100. What this government is doing: they are removing that limit so they can raise it later on via regs and giving cabinet, their ministers, the ability to determine what will be a reasonable amount. This amendment will simply take that ability away from the UCP government, to set a new limit for disclosures, and will keep the value of the gift that's required to be included in disclosure at \$100. That's a pretty reasonable amendment; a \$100 gift is still pretty reasonable. I hope that all members of this House will give serious consideration to this amendment and help stop the UCP gravy train.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. I find it absolutely unfathomable that we are in this Legislature at this time and that we are debating actually taking limits off the gifts that stakeholders are actually giving people in this government, members of this cabinet. To me, the fact that we're just debating this at all is unconscionable.

An Hon. Member: Democracy.

Member Loyola: It may be democracy, but what it reeks of is corruption. It's about stakeholders. What it looks like to the Alberta public is that wealthy, rich stakeholders will then have cabinet members in their back pocket. That's what it looks like. That's what it looks like to the Alberta public. And we've seen it before, with previous Conservative governments, not only here in the province of Alberta but across this nation and in other jurisdictions all around the world.

Now, setting a \$100 gift limit I think is very practical. Having to disclose if you're getting a gift from a stakeholder of over \$100: what's wrong with that? It's about being transparent to the Alberta public, because it's the Alberta public that we're here to serve, not only the interests of stakeholders. That's why I find it unfathomable that we're talking about this particular bill at this time.

I highly encourage members on the other side to actually take a deep look into what it is that they're doing, how they're voting, and how it's going to look to each and every one of their constituents. You can bet that once this bill, if it were to pass in this House – we don't want to assume that it will or won't at this time. However, you can bet that this is going to be one of the issues that I'm going to be going back with to not only my constituents but the Alberta public as a whole to let them know how each member of this Legislature voted on this bill.

I highly encourage the members on the other side to re-evaluate, to reconsider, and to vote in favour of this amendment, at least when it comes to this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to also join debate on Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I know that we're on I think you called it amendment A3, that's before us, and that amendment does give a specific value to a gift that can be received and reported.

3:30

As my hon. colleague just spoke about, it is disturbing, especially at a time when Albertans are struggling with significant affordability issues, that the government thinks this is what's important to

bring before our Legislature. If you're looking at the bill that they bring out, everything is very nebulous; everything is not clear; it's not transparent. It says that they want – I just want to read from the document.

If the value of the fee, non-monetary gift or other non-monetary benefit given to the Member or the Member's spouse or adult interdependent partner or minor child does not exceed the prescribed amount . . .

The prescribed amount. What's that? Then it goes on. It says: in accordance with the regulations.

Okay. What are the regulations? Later on it talks about:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations.

May. That doesn't mean they will or they shall; they just may do it.

This amendment gives specifics so that Albertans know. You know what we call that? We call that transparency, and that is a principle of democracy. I know that the current government likes to talk about how much they care about democracy, but this is an infringement on democracy. We know that democracy – there are many principles to it: free and fair elections; we know that people have guaranteed rights such as freedom of opinion, religion, expression, that people are treated as individuals equally regardless of their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Guess what? Another component of democracy is accountability and transparency. Of course, this bill is not being transparent at all. We know that public reporting even, you know, what we do every day when we're in session, question period, public meetings, and independent press: these all create transparency for Albertans so that they know what's going on. It's incumbent on governments who respect the principles of democracy not to erode them. Of course, that's what this legislation is doing.

I know that the hon. members on the government side have said repeatedly that they believe very much in democracy and want to enhance it, so I ask them all to be in support of this amendment. It does create more transparency, which is one of the principles of democracy, and gives a specific limit. It just makes a lot of sense at this time, when so many Albertans are struggling with affordability, that the government is not tone deaf and that the government actually sees what's important and, really, is not so disrespectful of what's important to Albertans right now, ignoring it completely and sort of, you know, opening government, any members to receive gifts that they're not accountable for, where we don't know how much they're for.

I ask all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise before this House to speak in favour of this amendment to Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Much like my colleagues who spoke just before me, it's really incredulous that we're in this sort of a situation. This is truly just another example of our UCP government staying on that proverbial gravy train that we have talked about. While it doesn't fix what is inherently an unpalatable bill, this amendment will at least make an unpalatable bill somewhat more palatable by a wee bit.

Madam Chair, folks in my riding have priorities other than making sure that we can all enjoy the blessings and bounty of stakeholders and other folks who might want to take us to some really cool events. Folks in my riding are incredibly concerned about simply being able to have enough money to afford groceries, to be able to afford fresh fruit, to be able to afford things like kindergarten fees for their child who is newly in school this year.

Folks in my riding are worried about being able to afford their rent. I did a bit of a quick scan the other day just on some of those online rental sites that we have now. What was a couple of years ago a \$1,000 townhome – a three-bedroom, one-bathroom kind of townhome – is now in excess of \$1,200, \$1,400 a month. Folks simply can't bear it. And here we are talking about lifting a cap on gifts to ourselves, those of us who really could afford to go to the hockey games or to go to the banquets, to go to all those other places that we might want to go to.

My constituents are struggling. The mean salary, kind of with all of the things taken into consideration, in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is \$66,000 a year. That average is less, of course, if you're a single parent with children. That average is less if you're a person without a high school diploma. These are the things that this government should be talking about, Madam Chair. We should be talking about this affordability crisis. We should be talking about the need for affordable housing. We should be putting more money into affordable housing projects to make sure that the folks in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview have decent, more than adequate places to live and spaces to be.

I think about a constituent I spoke with a few weeks ago who is actually a foster parent. She was lamenting the fact that as a foster parent, of course, she was thinking that she was doing the right thing. She wanted to do the right thing on behalf of those kids that she's fostering. But she, like everybody else, is having a really, really hard time providing for those kids, just making sure that they have lunches that are nutritious as they go to school every day.

I think about my constituent who I met as I came out of a Read In Week event, almost in tears because she has to work two jobs as an educational assistant. She is a single parent, and she's having a really, really hard time making those ends meet. Yet here we are in this bill, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, talking about lifting all of those constraints that we have on gifts. Again, as I said, it's unconscionable, and I really don't understand why we're even having this discussion.

I think about the struggling nonprofits and not-for-profits that exist in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that are having their funding cut off this year, which means that the folks, the community that they have served, in some cases for over 20, 30 years, will not be able to avail themselves of their services because they won't be able to continue serving the kind folks in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

A limit on gifts is inherently and entirely reasonable. It's one of those just-because-you-can-doesn't-mean-you-should things. You can act as if you're a person of good character in a thoroughly transparent way when no one is looking. That's kind of how I view this particular bill. It's one of those things where no one might be looking, but the people of Alberta really do expect us to act as if we're people of good character. I am not convinced that this bill actually gives the people of Alberta what they expect to see in their leadership.

As I mentioned before, folks in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are concerned about their rent. I've got people who have talked to our office about the fact that they can't make it on the AISH payments that they are getting. They're worried about having to leave the apartment that they've been in for a number of years because those payments aren't increasing enough. They're worried about simply having a dignified life. Yet here we are talking about something we should not be talking about. We just shouldn't be. People are facing an affordability crisis. People are facing a housing crisis. People are facing, quite frankly, a jobs crisis. We should be doing better on their behalf. The vast majority of folks in my riding want us to be debating other things, not this.

As I mentioned, I'm hopeful that my colleagues across the way will support this amendment. This amendment is reasoned, and this amendment has value.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment. I have won three elections, and never once has a constituent told me that their most pressing priority or their number 8 priority, as this is Bill 8, is politicians getting bigger and more expensive gifts. Never once has it ever come up. Strange, that.

The Premier said that her reason for this bill and the reason why we have so vociferously opposed it – indeed, the Premier's stated reason for this bill was that she was sad that she couldn't accept free access to private parties at Stampede. Albertans should know – probably a lot of folks don't know this because they don't get invited to these slick corporate suites – these suites are worth a lot because they're full of free, expensive food and booze. The Premier did not even hide the UCP's intent with this bill. It should be renamed: we feel the need to change the law to allow no limits on gifts to MLAs because the UCP want the right to get cracked on work time on someone else's dime. So we are trying to amend this bill.

3:40

I want to make one additional point. The most important resource in government is time, the Premier's and the ministers' time, specifically. This bill allows people to buy time. Instead of just booking a meeting in a simple meeting room, the government is saying, "No; I have to be drinking expensive booze and chowing down on steak and lobster in order to have a meeting during Stampede," and the priority is the slick, high-paid lobbyists and their wealthy corporate clients who can afford to buy the government's time. That's what the bill's stated intention is. We should be aware that this is wildly offside of Albertans' current priorities. We should demonstrate that we take our job seriously and that the honour of public service is something that we respect from our constituents. We should be aware of the affordability crisis gripping so many families right now. The rent crisis, the housing crisis, school fees, insurance: people cannot catch a break. They're not feeling the economic statistics and the so-called good times. We should demonstrate that we understand people's real priorities.

Instead, it appears that we have entered an era of postshame in politics, where the Premier just says: no; I need to be able to go to fancy meetings where people are buying really expensive food and booze. There should be guardrails. This is a scandalous reason for introducing a bill. We as MLAs have a duty to conduct ourselves and give our time in a way that is sober, considered, and thoughtful. That's what we should be aiming for here, and the extent to which conservatives have abandoned these norms is the extent to which we allow or encourage a deepening public cynicism about our motivations for wanting to pursue public service. That is why I support this amendment to disclose gifts, but I do not support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. I just want to get on the record that I, too, support the amendment, don't support the Bill 8 that's before us. I have not found, in the time I've been here, the involvement of the Ethics Commissioner to be onerous. I have staff who know the rules in terms of the amounts, the limits on things like gifts, like conferences, like other things that we get invited to from time to time or get given from time to time. I think the fact

that the prescribed amount is being put in here to allow cabinet to go behind doors to set whatever amount they wish is not transparent. It's not in the interests of Albertans. It is in the interests of, unfortunately, cabinet members and government members.

When we were government, we did not spend – and my colleague who was the environment minister was talking about this just a second ago. Cabinet time is precious, and to spend time, as that government cabinet will do, to set an amount that's not transparent for all of us or talked about in this House, to take time away from the many important issues that Albertans, especially low-income Albertans, have before them and need government to address is, in my view, the wrong thing to do, unconscionable, and I just wish that this government would get the message that Albertans don't see this as a priority. It's a priority for them as cabinet and government. It's not a priority for regular Albertans, who are finding it far too difficult to live at this point in time with the affordability challenges that they have before them and all the other issues that are before them.

I think, with those things said, I'll sit down, and we'll go on. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Elmeligi	Metz
Boparai	Hayter	Phillips
Brar	Hoyle	Renaud
Ceci	Ip	Sabir
Chapman	Kasawski	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kayande	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Loyola	

3:50

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 20	Against – 44
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: I'm seeking speakers wishing to speak to Bill 8. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It looks like the government is totally determined to keep this gravy train rolling, but I can say that this is not a good bill. The changes that this bill is bringing forward are not good. They are very self-serving, and I can see some members very excited about getting onboard gravy trains and their gifts. [interjection] In particular, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake can't wait to get bigger and better gifts.

But I do have another amendment, a pretty reasonable suggestion. I will wait until it's distributed, and then I will explain what it does.

The Chair: It will be known as amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, it's a relatively long amendment, so I don't have to read it into the record, I take it. I will explain what this does in a nutshell.

The Chair: Only because I'm in the Christmas spirit.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. This one doesn't impact their gifts much but just puts in another hurdle, that before setting the gift limits, they just double-check with someone else if they got that right or not. We are suggesting that before making regulations about gift limits and disclosure levels, they ask the Ethics Commissioner to weigh in. The Ethics Commissioner's office has weighed in on many occasions on the UCP's dealings. We are asking that they put that in legislation, that the Ethics Commissioner provides a report with respect to gift limits. And since they are worried about these limits, we can also include in the legislation that every five years the Ethics Commissioner reviews these limits.

One of the bizarre arguments that was provided in favour of this change was that Alberta is not keeping pace with inflation in other provinces. Not true. Alberta gift limits as they exist now are in line with other provinces with the exception of a couple of provinces which have a \$250 gift limit. Most of them have a \$200 range or even less. The only jurisdiction that brought any change to their gift limit was one province, where it was \$500 and they brought it down to \$200 or \$250. So I think many MLAs will agree with me that having the Ethics Commissioner look at these limits and rules around disclosure before government making regulation is a reasonable amendment. I do know that the Minister of Finance would like it and many other MLAs would like it.

I urge you all to vote in favour of this amendment, which is very common sense and will bring accountability to the gift and disclosure limits. Thank you.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure sort of to rise today to talk about this gravy train that appears to be gathering speed as it's heading down the tracks out of control. As somebody who lives in the Rocky Mountains, I can tell you that when a train starts gathering speed going downhill, very scary things can happen, and I'm pretty sure that's what's about to happen here. So I, of course, am rising in support of this amendment. I do love gravy on my mashed potatoes, but I prefer them to come not on a gravy train, as we're seeing here.

Mr. Schow: Who paid for it?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. I prefer it when I pay for my own gravy, actually.

That's one of the points I wanted to raise here today, that there is nothing in this bill that says a member cannot go to a hockey game

or cannot go to a concert or cannot even hang out with stakeholders at a hockey game or a concert. We all make enough money to buy our own tickets, and we could and should do that. In fact, this summer I was invited to go to the Canmore Folk Festival and they offered me and my husband a ticket to go, and I said, "No; I will pay for my husband's ticket," because that didn't really seem very fair that I would rely on Alberta taxpayers or a nonprofit organization to treat me when I can afford to pay for a ticket myself.

Part of what I find the most disturbing about this bill is that it actually changes the Conflicts of Interest Act so that the Premier or anyone else in her caucus can't be held accountable if they're found breaking the law or taking too much in gifts. This is a huge problem around accountability and transparency. The lack of transparency in this bill does threaten the foundation of democracy, as my colleague pointed out earlier. We need to be accountable to addressing the needs of Albertans. I know many of my colleagues have said this already, but not a single one of my constituents has come up to me and said they wish they could give me a more expensive gift. Actually, that's fine with me because the only gift that I really want from my constituents is their vote. That's it. And maybe also a little bit of their time to door-knock with me.

I really feel quite strongly that we are not addressing the needs of Albertans when we spend time talking about them needing to give us more gifts. The living wage in the town of Canmore is currently \$38 an hour. I don't even make \$38 an hour, I don't think, if I broke it down. We are talking about making sure that MLAs can have better gifts and that MLAs don't even have to report on receiving those gifts or how much their value when people in my community are struggling to pay rent, they're struggling to put food on the table, and they're even leaving town because they can't afford to stay in the town that they grew up in anymore.

This bill feels like a colossal waste of time, and it also feels like a massive slap in the face to every single Albertan who voted for all of us to sit in this Chamber. It doesn't feel like we are showing them gratitude for the opportunity to stand in here and represent them; rather, we're saying: "You know what? If you want me to eat steak and lobster and hang out at your hockey game, you need to pay for me to be there." That's nonsense. So I support this amendment and, obviously, oppose this bill in general.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

4:00

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am appalled. I am absolutely appalled that in a cost-of-living crisis this is one of the nine bills that this Legislature, this government has chosen to take on: the crisis in members having to disclose their gifts and having a maximum on the amount of gifts that they can accept. This is not what the people of Calgary-Elbow elected me to be involved in. This amendment: what it does is that it brings a little bit of sanity to it by allowing the Ethics Commissioner, you know, somebody who is responsible to the Legislature, to set the limits on gifts that MLAs are allowed to accept rather than the government itself, the same government that is eliminating the gift limits in law, contrary to any other practice in any other Legislature in Canada. I do not understand why this is the highest priority for this government.

It's not just other governments either. I came from the private sector. I remember presenting a really good presentation to a large pension fund and receiving a gift certificate to a fine restaurant in Calgary as a thank you for that. I looked at that. I'm just like, "Oh, my Lord; these people have created so many problems for me now" and having to go to the CEO of my company and book time with him on whether I could accept this gift certificate or not. That's very

common in the private sector. In Walmart a buyer cannot so much as accept a cup of coffee from a supplier, never mind a \$100 gift, never mind a \$200 gift, or never mind an unlimited gift, maybe a new car.

Companies in the private sector know that these gifts and events and entertainment are proposed with a return on investment. That's why they do it. Now the government is participating. They're saying: "You know what? Your ROI calculation? Goose that. If your ROI is, like, 20 per cent on that, 100 per cent on that, 200 per cent on that, great. Slam it up. Let's have more."

And to put time allocation on this budget and prevent members from getting on the record as far as how appalling this is and how much this disrespects the role of members and how much this disrespects the people of Alberta – if it were not for the colossal disaster that Bill 2 is, this would be the story of this session, completely removing any sort of brake on the members who are most likely to care the least about why these limits exist in the first place.

I think this is awful, and I urge all members to support this amendment and reject this bill because we don't need this in Alberta. We do not need to go back to 40 years of PC grift in one session. Let's just take a little bit of a break here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment proposed for Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. While this bill has many aspects that are problematic, it's particularly troubling that this government is still looking for ways to flout any requirement to be transparent, trustworthy, and accountable to Albertans. In its current form Bill 8 introduces changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act that open the door for members to accept more perks without any scrutiny or accountability. This government is fostering an environment where personal gain trumps public service. If I've said it once, I'll say it a hundred times if I need to here in the House; this government is out of touch with the needs of Albertans.

How does this bill help Albertans put food on the table, keep the lights on, pay their rent or their mortgage, help students pay their tuition, afford housing? Albertans want a government that is responsive to their needs, that meets their challenges, and that is listening to all of them. Madam Chair, I haven't heard from a single Albertan who feels that this is something that will help them and their families. Instead of championing the urgent needs of the people, this government seems more focused on indulging in perks like free food, extravagant gifts – who knows what else? – all at the expense of those struggling to put a roof over their heads and food on their tables.

I know I've spoken on the need for accountability many times in this Chamber already, and I will continue to do so because what Albertans are truly worried about is trusting this government to serve them well. Bill 8 is unethical and self-serving. It opens the door for more backroom deals, quite frankly. Without this amendment there is little preventing the Premier and her cabinet from continually increasing the limits MLAs can receive for nonmonetary gifts and doing whatever she can to keep this UCP gravy train rolling and rolling and rolling.

As a relatively new member in this House I can unequivocally say that monetary limits in place now have in no way made it difficult for me to do my job and represent the people of Edmonton-South really well. The current maximum of \$200 in nonmonetary gifts and \$400 for tickets is more than enough to enable members

to serve Albertans to the best of our ability. If this government feels that they need to make changes to have gift limits more in line with other jurisdictions, then this amendment would ensure that this is the case.

There needs to be a process in place to provide assurances that any increases on nonmonetary gifts are truly necessary for members to serve their constituents well. Without this amendment there is little stopping this government from going well beyond the limitations of other jurisdictions. Honestly, the current limits are in line with many other provinces. If we look at Saskatchewan, they're at \$200; Ontario, \$200; Quebec, \$200; and P.E.I. is at \$200, which was actually amended in 2021 down from \$500.

I think my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall said it best, that the government trying to limit the value of gifts is like allowing a teenager to set their own curfew. Madam Chair, if the members opposite truly believe that Bill 8 is critical to their ability to serve Albertans, then they should be in full support of this amendment. They should be in full support of being as transparent and accountable to Albertans as possible. They should show Albertans they can be trusted. But I think we all know that this government is not focused on those things. They are focused on themselves.

As it stands, this bill is a blatant attempt to introduce ambiguity, potentially shielding unethical practices. It's a deliberate step backwards in terms of transparency. You know, it begs the question: why does this government believe that the disclosure amount should be stipulated behind closed doors? What are they trying to hide from Albertans? On this side of the House we will continue to put the needs of everyday Albertans first, and we'll continue to advocate for full transparency from this government. For this and so many other reasons, I'm in full support of this amendment. It aims to increase accountability and serve Albertans well.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise to speak in favour of this amendment and certainly against this bill. As members of this House we are afforded incredible privileges and the honour to represent the good people of our respective constituencies. I think we would all agree that good governance dictates that there should be limits to power. Why are we all here? We all took an oath. We all decided to run because we are here to serve the good people of Alberta. That's what, you know, I think about every single day: how do I serve Albertans in the best way possible?

This bill not only lacks transparency and accountability, but it nullifies the checks and balances in place. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act are simply self-serving, and frankly, Madam Chair, it is tone deaf. There is no reason for this other than to make it more convenient and less accountable and transparent for members to receive gifts.

I want to ask members opposite: what benefit does that bring to Albertans? It doesn't. The current limits are very much in line with other jurisdictions, as my colleagues have already mentioned, so why does this government feel that Alberta needs an exception? You know, the cynical part of me simply thinks that it's because of entitlement. I'd like to think that actually there are some very practical and technical reasons for this, but I can't seem to find them, and I haven't heard from the members opposite a single reasonable rationale as to why this is needed.

Need I remind the members opposite that we are in the middle of an affordability crisis, in fact the worst in 40 years? I mentioned this in the House yesterday, but I'll mention it again. Utility bills have doubled in the last year. Auto insurance is up 30 per cent. University and college tuition is up nearly 30 per cent. Municipal taxes are going up because of funding cuts and costs downloaded to municipalities. The number of doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent over the past four years. School and bus fees are up. Alberta students get less funding than anywhere else in the country, and we're short thousands of educational assistants after this government dismissed 20,000 of them.

Frankly, these are the concerns and the problems that I hear from my constituents and everyday Albertans. The reality is that if we pass this bill, it will be a slap in the face to ordinary Albertans who are struggling to put food on the table. This should not be a priority, Madam Chair, and I say to members opposite that it isn't too late to withdraw this bill and vote against it. This bill simply serves no purpose for Albertans.

I would find it difficult, regardless of where I might sit in this Chamber, to look constituents in the eye and say to them that we passed this bill because I wanted to go to a hockey game or I wanted to be able to accept tickets and not have to report it and go through the inconvenience of having to fill out forms. I would find it difficult to be able to say that to any constituent, frankly.

This bill should not be passed, certainly not at this time or any time, frankly. The sentimental part of me will say that, frankly, the best gift I can receive in this House is to know that I've served my constituents well. Madam Chair, I once again encourage members opposite to vote down this bill and to withdraw it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta – do I have it right?

Mr. Getson: Yes. The Great Seal.

Mr. Kasawski: Great Seal. Yes. Great.

I think I watched the original press release on Bill 8. I think the reporters asked a question, and the claim was that these changes are just bringing Alberta in line with other jurisdictions in Canada. So my staff did some research – is it canlii.org? Sounds right?

Member Batten: Yeah, that sounds right.

Mr. Kasawski: That would be someplace where you gather legal research, I think. Okay. The keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta knows this. And my friends found that there are similar provincial statutes and limits across Canada, and the limit seems to be – \$250 seems to be standard for this country. So what jurisdictions are we falling in line with? It's not question period; you don't have to answer. But it is, I hope – I see the wheels are turning, and I'm glad I have your attention because I do not know that there are other jurisdictions we need to get in line with on this.

As my friend, I think, from Edmonton-South brought up, there were other jurisdictions – I think she identified that B.C. was at \$250; Saskatchewan, \$200; Manitoba, \$250; Ontario, \$200. Ontario, where the Premier Doug Ford is in a lot of hot water for his efforts on his jurisdiction over land use, probably is really glad that there are limits like \$200 in place for gifts in that province.

I think it's worth while asking ourselves: how do we future-proof this? Remember that in the future there will be a New Democratic

government in this province. Imagine when the electric vehicle lobby comes to town.

Mr. Getson: How long is their extension cord?

Mr. Kasawski: Can you just imagine, "An extension cord for you; an extension cord for you"?

We need to future-proof. Hon. members, of course, there's a great deal of trust put in you, and we appreciate that you have good judgment. We need to future-proof for future governments and future situations that may not have the hon. members in the House that we have today.

I think we've brought forward some great amendments, excellent amendments for how we create guardrails around stakeholders inviting us to consider their ideas when we are making decisions, and I just want you to consider some of the things I've brought up. At this point I would like to just say: let's vote in favour of the amendment. We have an opportunity to have success like we did yesterday and work together in this House to create guardrails.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Madam Chair, thank you so much. I'm happy to rise in support of amendment A4 to the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. My concern here is that this bill puts transparency at risk. Not that I agree that we as MLAs should be allowed to accept any gift at any amount, but what baffles me is why we would not record the acceptance of those gifts. I wasn't in government in 2015 – I know all the challenges that we face today are because we were in government in 2015, but setting that aside, I wasn't here – but I'm going to go out on a limb that if in that period of time we had introduced such an act, I'm confident that you on the other side would ask: what are we trying to hide? So what indeed are the members of the UCP intending to hide with the passing of this legislation?

I'm going to thank my friend and colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington for pulling this quote up. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Truth never damages a cause that is just." Our cause here is to respond to the needs of Albertans; to respond to their needs for health care when and where they need it without looking for the hospital that has a waiting list less than 12 hours; finding a school that isn't over capacity, with the teachers and educational assistants needed for their children to flourish.

4:20

As my colleagues have stated earlier in debate, I've also had no challenges in doing my job with the limits that are in place. I, too, was invited and spent 20 minutes in the infield during Stampede. What did I do during that 20 minutes? I tried to make useful time in chatting with the other guests that were there, learning what their concerns were, exchanging business cards, and agreeing to follow up for one-on-one meetings or round-table discussions afterwards should it be necessary. I'm confident that the Premier could do the same. I'm confident that everybody there would feel that they had their moment to meet the Premier, that they, too, could share the concerns that they have, and that they could follow up for further discussions at another time.

Minister Amery stated that these changes are needed to meet the changing times . . .

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Ellingson: We're done? [interjections] Oh, sorry. My apologies.

The Minister of Justice – my apologies – stated that these were to meet the changing of the times, but as my colleagues have pointed out, in fact, the times are not changing in any other province. Every other province has a gift limit. Every other province requires those limits to be recorded. Why would any MLA – if those recordings were not required, would we not voluntarily record gifts that are over \$100? Would we be concerned? Would the members on the other side be concerned that their constituents . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt.

Mr. Ellingson: Hmm?

The Chair: Now you're done.

According to Government Motion 20 the question must now be put on amendment A4 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:22 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Elmeligi	Loyola
Boparai	Eremenko	Metz
Brar	Hayter	Phillips
Ceci	Hoyle	Renaud
Chapman	Ip	Sabir
Deol	Kasawski	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 21 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 2, the government's attempt to gamble with Albertans' pensions. I have an amendment here that I will circulate to the table and to the members assembled, and I will explain what the amendment does when it reaches the table.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A5. Please proceed.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in support of amendment A5. Once again, we are trying to make a very bad bill, roundly criticized and opposed by the vast majority of Albertans, just a little bit better by draining it of some of its disingenuousness, and that's what this amendment does.

As it stands right now, Bill 2 allows for notice to be given under the Canada Pension Plan act prior to holding a referendum, and results are not binding on the government. So we are going to make sure that when Albertans say no to this terrible idea, the government cannot just turn around and do it anyway. Why would we have to do that? The level of disingenuousness in the engagement process from day one has been just an absolute mess. Albertans have no level of trust that when they tell this Premier and this UCP that they don't want her gambling with their pension, the government will actually listen.

4:30

I just went into my Lethbridge-West e-mail, Madam Chair, just to see what was going on on the CPP file. About a thousand new e-mails in the last few days: this is normal. I just go in, and – oh, look at that: 1,018 in the last 72 hours or so. I try to go through and find those where people have made some really original points. It's really interesting to me, just the level of detail and sophistication from ordinary Albertans who have dug in to the fake facts in the LifeWorks report, that has no author, that have dug in to the disingenuousness of the engagement process, that have tried at every step of the way to make their voices heard.

There's one point that has not been made, and it goes to the fact that we can't trust anything that gets said on the CPP, not the binding nature of the referendum or anything else. One writer named Peter writes – and I know that the Finance minister has received this correspondence because he was CCed on it. Of the many bullet points in this e-mail:

Finance Minister . . . does not seem to be on the same page as [the Premier]. [The Finance minister] was quoted as saying that the APP monies would NOT be used to stimulate the economy, only to maximize return to pensioners. [Premier] has said quite the opposite. She stated that she wanted the pension fund monies to be invested so as to stimulate the Alberta economy, using the Quebec model. Definitely not the risk I want you to take with my pension!

This highlights the extent to which this APP fiasco is being directed out of the Premier's office for political reasons, to get their mitts on our CPP money to do heaven knows what with it. If that's the motivation, then we need to make sure that when we say no, the government knows that Albertans mean no, and hands off our CPP. That's why the referendum needs to be binding, Madam Chair, and that's why we are encouraging all members of the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I wish to speak to this because I really cannot support this bill and really feel that we need to try to improve it if we're going to get anywhere with it. As a geek who likes data and facts, I want to bring forward a few bits of data that my colleague from Calgary-Foothills has brought to our attention.

Demographics are really important in terms of looking at what Alberta has contributed to the Canada pension plan and what has been paid out on behalf of Alberta because the calculation that was in the report really was very incomplete. The LifeWorks study looked at overall contributions from Alberta as well as what was paid out to us, but it really didn't look at how many people were contributing when they were under the age of 65 and then where the money was pulled out afterward.

When we dig into this a little bit deeper, it certainly appears that most of the contributions are coming in from people that are, of course, in the working age but that the out-migration of Albertans is largest in the people that are age 50 and over. We really expect that the money paid to people on CPP is going to be paid as if they lived in British Columbia or as if they lived in Atlantic Canada rather than the fact that they were contributing as Albertans and pulling out when they lived somewhere else.

I think that we need to be very aware that the data that went into these calculations was rough and that Albertans are contributing, but some of the people that are Albertans maybe originally came from the Atlantic provinces and came here to work and contribute but then go home, yet we're being told that they're pulling out money and being paid as if they're from the Atlantic provinces.

We really don't have a good picture from the LifeWorks report, and I expect that we're going to have more accurate information that we need to share with Albertans for whatever reason. We already know they don't want this plan. Nonetheless, let's get on with getting them good accurate information.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's always an honour to get up in the House and speak to bills that we have before us, and when we do that, it's very important that we are in this House being the voice for Albertans. Now, my colleagues throughout question period, throughout debate have gotten up a number of times to express how there is a high level of Albertans that don't even want to consider this. They don't want out of the Canada pension plan. We've been trying to state that numerous times within this House, expressing it to the cabinet members on the other side, specifically the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. Now, with all due respect to the hon. member, he's saying: well, we just want Albertans to consider it.

But let me put this forward to you, Madam Chair. With false information that's getting out to the public, this government has spent 7.5 million of taxpayer dollars to put that information out to Albertans. And it's false information. Now, I completely agree with the minister that, yeah, with big questions like this, we want to put it forward to Albertans. I agree. Okay. This is what the government has decided to do. But it has to be with correct information, Minister, correct?

That being said, also, we have to listen to the public, and if they're telling us – if more than 90 per cent of Albertans, at least the ones that we have consulted through actual public town halls,

where people have actually shown up in person – if the majority of those people are saying: hey, we do not want out of this Canada pension plan; leave our pension plan alone.

The truth is that Conservatives have had a despicable track record when it comes to dealing with Albertans' pensions. Let's talk about what happened with the teachers and how the last government that we had before us decided unilaterally that they were just going to take teachers' pensions and they were going to administer them themselves. Then what happened? Well, they ended up taking a devastating loss if I'm not mistaken.

Of course, Albertans are going to be concerned when the track record has been abysmal that they're just going to give up their pension money, their hard-earned dollars that they've been putting away over a lifetime, from paycheque to paycheque to paycheque, putting that money away little by little. It's absolutely essential that this government listen, listen to the people of Alberta. Get your hands off of their pensions.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A5.

Mr. Horner: Actually, I had spoken.

The Chair: Oh. My apologies. The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have some comments on amendment A5, but I would just like to take a moment and address some things that were raised by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. I thought there were thoughtful comments about data and population, and I'd say that she's not wrong in her assumptions. The LifeWorks report has to use publicly available data, and that's why there's a range in the report regarding the asset withdrawal formula.

Now, my hope and I think the hope of everyone in this Chamber in receiving clarity and better information, as many of you said, is that the Chief Actuary will actually have a data set that can look at the personal level as opposed to LifeWorks, that had to take some broader data and then have assumptions around inflows and outflows on other publicly available data when it comes to interprovincial migration. So I just wanted to say that you're not wrong. I hope the Chief Actuary shows, with a better data set, a clearer picture, but that is correct.

4:40

When it comes to this amendment though, Madam Chair, I'm afraid I won't be able to support amendment A5. The Premier and I have been clear from the start of this process that the choice will be up to Albertans. We've committed time and again that we will not move forward with an Alberta pension plan unless we have approval from Albertans in a referendum vote. Our government will respect whatever choice Albertans make in a referendum, whether that be a yes or a no. This is their pension and their choice.

The amendment language is vague, confusing, and repetitive. I know some Albertans have concerns about an Alberta pension plan, but I want to assure them that their pension is safe, full stop.

Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, if passed, will do four key things. First, it guarantees that Albertans will have the final say on a provincial pension plan. It guarantees that Albertans would receive the same or better benefits under an Alberta pension plan and pay the same or lower contribution rates that they do under the CPP. Third, it guarantees that all funds transferred from the CPP to Alberta could only be used to set up and operate an Alberta pension plan. Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, would ensure the

pensions and benefits of Albertans and their financial security will be safe for generations.

Madam Chair, members opposite have said on the record that they will not support Bill 2, no matter what. I'm here advocating in support of Albertans' choice and ensuring them that this bill will keep their pensions safe. For those reasons, I encourage every member of this House to vote against this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A5.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:42 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Goehring	Metz
Boparai	Gray	Notley
Brar	Haji	Pancholi
Ceci	Hayter	Phillips
Chapman	Hoffman	Renaud
Dach	Hoyle	Sabir
Deol	Ip	Shepherd
Eggen	Kasawski	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Tejada
Elmeligi	Loyola	Wright, P.
Eremenko		

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Schow
Boitchenko	Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	LaGrange	Sinclair
Cyr	Loewen	Singh
de Jonge	Long	Stephan
Dreeshen	Lovely	Turton
Dyck	Lunty	van Dijken
Ellis	McDougall	Wiebe
Fir	McIver	Williams
Getson	Nally	Wilson
Glubish	Neudorf	Wright, J.
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Yao
Horner	Petrovic	Yaseen
Hunter	Rowswell	
Totals:	For – 31	Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. We are now going to move on to yet another amendment and attempt to make this unfortunate bill just a little bit better. I would like to give my amendments to someone. We'll let them get up to the table, and then I will speak to it.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A6. Please proceed.

Ms Phillips: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, this amendment will clarify that not only are past contributions and

assets limited to use for the operation of a provincial pension plan, but future contributions will have this limitation on them as well.

Why is this? When this bill was first contemplated and when the announcements were first made, we witnessed the extraordinary and quite embarrassing spectacle of the Premier busting out with: oh, yeah; we're going to use the Quebec model, meaning, you know, that these pension funds would be my personal piggy bank to do what I want with. Then we saw the Finance minister go on the Ryan Jespersion show and say: oh, no, no, no; we're not doing that. Then within 48 hours he had to reverse that statement and put out a statement affirming that, yes, the direction from the Premier was, in fact, piggy bank.

We are seeking to avoid that calamity for use of our pension funds for heaven knows what purpose, and with that, I move this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am so pleased to rise in support of this excellent amendment, moved by my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West, which does what we refer to in this Assembly as closing a loophole. As it is currently drafted, Bill 2 is extremely flawed, has many, many problematic aspects to it. Specifically, this amendment makes sure that not only will assets held by the provincial pension plan be used for their intended purpose, but additional contributions and future contributions will have this limitation on them as well.

Right now, the way the bill is drafted, that is not part of what's happening in this piece of legislation. That loophole would allow any future government – and I have talked about many times in this House that even though the current government may trust themselves, think of future governments and how you may need to constrain them. Allowing a government to politically interfere with people's pensions is the wrong thing to do now and into the future, and passing terrible legislation is the wrong thing to do. The Member for Lethbridge-West is attempting to improve this piece by, again, closing the loophole.

4:50

Now, Madam Chair, I have not had the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 in this Assembly. I have very, very strong feelings about it. In fact, I just had the opportunity at the end of last week to talk to the good people of St. Albert at their seniors' facility as I hosted the pension town hall there, and by hosted I mean I made some bad jokes on the microphone and then let most of the seniors do the talking. But I tried to keep the energy up. Then I did the same in Red Deer. I heard from both groups 95 per cent opposition to essentially the contents of Bill 2, the idea of this government attacking their pensions.

I don't know if during the debate we've had the chance to really get on the record some of the concerns that the seniors had and some of the history of what's happened with this particular file, but I do want to make clear to all members of this Assembly and to Albertans at home that there has been a lot of work done on this. This idea is not new to this Assembly. In fact, it is 20 years old, starting with what were called the firewall letters back in the early 2000s and an all-party committee that was formed at that time that looked into these issues and was led by MLAs who wanted Alberta sovereignty, who wanted Alberta first, and who wanted to like these ideas but who, after digging in and investigating them, realized that they were of absolutely no value.

In preparing for this debate, I found an article from the *Edmonton Journal* from 2019, right around the time the UCP started to kick

this can again: Former Chair of Alberta 'Firewall' Committee Weighs In on UCP-appointed 'Fair Deal' Panel. Of course, the Fair Deal Panel is where this has started again. In the Fair Deal Panel, to be clear, in the appendix you can see that the majority of Albertans reject an Alberta pension plan, even in the cherry-picked Fair Deal Panel process. Kind of like the cherry-picked telephone town hall process, this gets rejected everywhere.

Former MLA Ian McClelland, chair [for the] 2003 committee that looked into – and ultimately rejected – ideas contained in the famous “firewall” letter, said he was “terribly disappointed” by the announcement of a new panel that will study many of the same issues and concepts 16 years later.

He called it “an exercise in blowing off steam.”

This has been debunked over and over and over. In this Assembly we've had multiple private members' bills. I had a private member's bill relating to these topics. The Member for Lethbridge-West had a private member's bill. These have been through committee, where we had experts come and present to committee members. I will tell you, Madam Chair, that I have listened to these debates intently, and what I keep hearing over and over and over is what a terrible, terrible idea it is. The seniors don't like it. The business community doesn't like it. Experts in these issues do not like it. Universally, we know that the CPPIB is considered a world-class investment vehicle and that people trust the Canada pension plan, and they trust keeping the UCP away from their pensions.

This amendment, I think, would help to improve something that needs desperately to be improved. It would close a loophole that otherwise, if left unchecked, is going to put Alberta's pension funds at risk for political interference, something that this government has expressly said that they are not interested in. I find this very, very difficult in the debate, Madam Chair, because the government says one thing, the legislation is doing another thing, and when we present them an opportunity to fix that, to make sure that their actions align with their words, they vote it down. They're not interested in this.

We quite literally hear them saying: trust us; we have said these things. Well, they also said in the election that they were not going to come after people's pensions, and then they did. So the trust is really missing when it comes to this issue for good reason. The number of pieces of correspondence I have received from constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods shocked that this issue has come up again, because they heard during the election that it wasn't an important issue and that it wasn't going to be happening, has been astronomical. I think I've received more correspondence on the pensions issue alone in my time as an MLA than on any other issue. And we have been through a pandemic. There have been some other big things that have happened in this province, but it is pensions that generate the most interest, because people are concerned and people are scared.

Today in question period I heard one of my hon. colleagues talking about the real concern that people will leave Alberta rather than have their CPP put at risk, and I saw members of the government's front bench, some of their ministers, guffawing as if this idea was ridiculous when I have literally had this conversation over and over and over again with people tapping me on the shoulder and saying, almost surreptitiously: I'm really worried, and I'm thinking about leaving. This is a genuine sentiment that exists, and it is the absolute opposite of what we want for our province, what we want for people to feel when it comes to their retirement security, Madam Chair.

Through the work that I've done on my own private member's bill, through the work that I have seen done on other private members' bills and the discussions in committee and now here on Bill 2, through the telephone town halls that we have listened to – and listened to people being yelled at, which was more than

interesting – through the in-person town halls, that I'm so proud the Alberta NDP are hosting, the message has been a hundred per cent clear.

Then the question becomes: why would this government not listen to the voices of their constituents? We are hearing from their constituents as well. I appreciated that one of the Red Deer members was at the Red Deer town hall, where, again, 95 per cent of the room, including pension experts who had previously sat on the board of LAPP and had been involved in the pension debates over many, many years, spoke against pulling out of the Canada pension plan and against this exercise made up of fake numbers, Madam Chair.

The information being shared by the supposed experts would show that if the same formula was applied to the money they say Alberta should get to other provinces, well, gosh, we'd have 125 per cent of the monies. Like, the math doesn't work. It's not a reasonable, credible offering that this government is bringing to Albertans. Yet they don't want a binding referendum in the legislation even though they say that they will listen to the referendum. They don't want Auditors General to look at the spending that might go on around this type of project. I imagine so, not after spending \$8 million on their campaign, on bad numbers.

Madam Speaker, I support this amendment. I think they should close the loophole, and I think they should take their hands off CPP.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm rising to support the amendment on Bill 2 but not the bill itself. People have worked hard their entire life and hope that they can enjoy their retirement life, spend quality time with their family and friends.

Well, even during the election, before the election, after the election I have done lots of door-knocking. People in my riding, as all over Alberta, are facing lots of challenges. People have to choose between a prescription or rent. People can't afford three meals a day. In my riding, Calgary-Falconridge, families are barely making, as I said, ends meet, and this government wants to steal their future. Residents of Calgary-Falconridge don't trust this government. Not at all.

During the election period there were different commitments. They were told that if they form government, they won't steal their CPP, but the opposite happened. I'm receiving lots of calls from concerned residents about this. I don't know. The system is working fine. Our CPP is world renowned. While the system is working fine, why does this government want to play with that?

And what would be the guarantee on the returns? Like, in the past we have already lost \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion. The last government gambled with those funds, and we have lost that money. Why should Albertans trust this government with their pensions?

5:00

If the government wants to gamble, they should gamble with their own money, not with my money, not with my residents' money, not with Albertans' hard-earned money. We are celebrating that lots of people are moving to Alberta, but they are being pushed by the other provinces, not pulled by this province. Due to this bill people are feeling forced to go back to those provinces, or long-time residents of Alberta are planning to move out of Alberta.

That's all, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. Our government has been clear. We will not proceed with an Alberta pension plan without the

approval of Albertans. The intent of Bill 2 is to protect Albertans' pensions no matter what, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

Albertans have built up their pensions throughout their working careers. Their pension belongs to them, which is why Bill 2 guarantees that the entire asset transferred from the CPP to Alberta would be used solely for the set-up and operation of an Alberta pension plan. The proposed amendment is redundant and unnecessary because Bill 2 already provides the necessary protection to pensions. The proposed amendment also uses language that does not align with the Canada Pension Plan act. As written, the member opposite's amendment will only apply to employee contributions, not employee and employer contributions, which does not make sense, Madam Chair.

I've been clear. Assets transferred from the CPP to an Alberta pension plan and future contributions of employers and employees would solely be used to set up and operate a provincial pension plan.

For all of these reasons, I advise the House to vote against this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A6?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A6.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:02 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Goehring	Metz
Boparai	Gray	Notley
Brar	Haji	Pancholi
Ceci	Hayter	Phillips
Chapman	Hoffman	Renaud
Dach	Hoyle	Sabir
Deol	Ip	Shepherd
Eggen	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Elmeligi	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eremenko	Loyola	

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Schow
Boitchenko	Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	LaGrange	Sinclair
Cyr	Loewen	Singh
de Jonge	Long	Stephan
Dreeshen	Lovely	Turton
Dyck	Lunty	van Dijken
Ellis	McDougall	Wiebe
Fir	McIver	Williams
Getson	Nally	Wilson
Glubish	Neudorf	Wright, J.
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Yao
Horner	Petrovic	Yaseen
Hunter	Rowswell	
Totals:	For – 32	Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: I'm seeking members to the bill, Bill 2. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I guess we've just learned that the UCP don't really care if the referendum is binding, because it won't be. They absolutely will give themselves the right to spend our future CPP or retirement contributions, APP contributions, in any way they see fit. They will issue political direction to how our retirement savings, if they ever get their mitts on them, would be invested. So we've learned that this afternoon. Those are things we've learned.

Now we're going to see with this amendment, that I will provide to the – there you go. I'll wait for that to get to the table, and then we'll chat about it.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A7.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. Amendment A7 proposes that if third-party advertisers advertise during the referendum, they must state whether they are for or against the question. In referenda opponents and proponents can skew the outcomes, and Albertans deserve to know who is spending the money so that this UCP government can realize their goal of gambling with our CPP retirement security. So we have once again an opportunity for a bit of public transparency during the referendum process, ensuring that this is an on-the-level debate, because we have certainly seen an attempt to influence the process and to make it as disingenuous as humanly possible since mid-September, when this bad idea once again surfaced in its current form.

With that, Madam Chair, I have moved this amendment, and I encourage the House to support it.

5:10

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a few brief comments. As noted, this is the seventh amendment that the Official Opposition has put forward in regard to Bill 2, the pension bill. Certainly, we are working in good faith to try to scramble together something here that's workable. Certainly, having a referendum that is binding is absolutely necessary. The notion that this government, you know, has now been exposed to perhaps having a referendum but not even necessarily honouring the results of that referendum: I think that tells Albertans a lot about what this government is really up to in regard to this.

The whole idea of political direction on investing, which was, again, a very reasonable amendment and certainly foundational to any public investment body: to reject something like that should raise alarm bells right across this province. It does and will, for sure. I have sat on the heritage trust committee for a number of different terms, and this was a foundational element to that entity, to make sure that there were experts making investment choices and not political choices on that same money.

It heads back to some of the worst suspicions that Albertans now have in regard to this attempt to take over Albertans' Canada pension contributions, and I find it to be absolutely despicable, Madam Chair. You know, the worst thing that you can do is to breach the trust of the public towards the government. That's exactly what this play is. It's deeply cynical. I know that it's rooted in internal politics that exist across the way in regard to different factions fighting amongst each other and this government not showing any bottom at all. There's no low that they're not willing to descend to. It's willing to put people's Canada pensions on the

table in order to satisfy some right-wing notion about sovereignty and separation that is harboured within this UCP party as well.

We saw them with the national police force. We see them, you know, grabbing and grasping at anything that resembles the nation of Canada. And then suddenly one of them maybe sees this O Canada pension plan. Let's take a run at that, you know. And here we are, then, with literally 2 and a half million or more, probably 4 million people, that are absolutely freaked out about this, Madam Chair, here in this province of Alberta, that the government will have the audacity to take a run at our Canada pension plans. I can only say that, again, it defies the basic notion of what a government is here for, which is to provide security and surety for the population. This undermines both of those things.

Quite frankly, these amendments are trying to salvage something that otherwise should be just thrown out. Albertans are making their decisions. I'm sure the rest of this UCP government is, just as we've been, receiving literally an unprecedented negative reaction to this whole pension fiasco.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to amendment A7, and I'll be brief in case there are other speakers on the other side. Currently the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act already includes a number of requirements which are imposed on a third party during an election. For that reason, it's not appropriate for the details of subsections (5) and (6) to be included in the Alberta Pension Protection Act. Additionally, the imposition of third-party advertising around an APP would not be extended to any other referendum held in conjunction with the Referendum Act.

I recommend members of this House not support the amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Disappointing to hear. Of course, the former Wildrose Party was very big on transparency, and we were hoping that maybe some of those same tenets had seeped into the new party that we are facing here today, the United Conservatives. But it seems like there is a lack of transparency, there's a lack of openness, and there's a desire to increase personal rewards and compensation. It is absolutely appropriate for somebody running a third-party advertising campaign to have to be open and honest about where they stand on that campaign rather than trying to be manipulative or deceitful with people who are looking at their future savings.

I just want to be very clear that pension money is not government money. These are the deferred wages that belong to people. It does not belong to whoever happens to be sitting in the Finance minister's chair at that point in time. It does not belong to the 87 of us. It belongs to every single Albertan, and when the current government decided they wanted to wage war on Ottawa, they actually chose to wage war on everyday Albertans.

Last night I had the opportunity to swing by Matheson seniors, one of the great retirement buildings in my riding, and there were hundreds of seniors at the Christmas dinner. The number of people who said to me, like: "Why are they even doing this? It's not broke. Why are they trying to mess with it? We count on every single dollar we get to have stability and security and certainty. We've mapped out our income," this guaranteed income that seniors get through their CPP to make sure that they can make ends meet. One of them said to me: "You know, I wouldn't trust this government to hold on to my lottery ticket. I definitely won't trust them to hold on

to my monthly payments that I use to provide for myself, for my family, and to have a little bit extra to be able to pay to go to the Christmas party once a year." Like, these are the things that are at stake, Madam Chair.

I have to say that it's incredibly frustrating to me that the government continues to try to steamroll ahead with this CPP scheme that has been overwhelmingly rejected by definitely ordinary Albertans but also many economists, actuaries, and others. We know that there are economies of scale that come with a CPP. We know that there's safety and security when you're in a larger pool to be able to use those resources to get greater returns. At a minimum we expect the government here – oh. The other thing a lot of seniors said is: can you please tell them to stop using my own money to try to convince me of something that's a terrible idea? They are so frustrated with government using public money to try to push something that they have no interest in, no time for, and no patience for.

It would be really nice if the government would just listen to the seniors, listen to the ordinary people of this province. Mainstream Albertans have rejected this overwhelmingly. It's time for this government to at least pass one amendment to say that they'll have some transparency on the manipulation of third-party advertising, which is clearly something that many people are concerned about.

With that, Madam Chair, I encourage members on both sides of this House to vote for the amendment.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe this is the first opportunity I've had to speak to Bill 2, of course in this case speaking to the amendment to Bill 2, but I will note that I think I can likely count on one hand the number of e-mails I've received from constituents in support of the government's pursuit of this idea, in support of an APP. I've received literally hundreds of e-mails from constituents who are absolutely against this government's plan.

Yet at every stage of this process it's been very clear that this government has been heavily looking to put its thumb on the scale. They are using Albertans' money – 7 and a half million dollars they are spending of Albertans' money – to try to convince Albertans of their plan using their made up numbers, the report that they bought that puts out numbers that are absolutely unfathomable and have no bearing on reality, Madam Chair. But they are working to spend Albertans' money to force those ideas down their throat, advertising across the province.

This amendment I think is a prudent one because it's quite clear that this government is not willing to play straight with Albertans. It's quite clear that this government does not intend to provide the truth to Albertans. It is quite clear that this government intends to use every trick in the book to try to fool Albertans into giving them the opportunity to gamble with their pensions. It's quite clear as this government turns down amendment after amendment that would require accountability, that would require clarity, that would require the government to be accountable in how this money is invested, in fact that would prevent political interference in that investment. The government has voted down every single one of those amendments.

Now we have an amendment that at least if we get to that referendum question – and we don't know if we will because, again, this government tends to be a bit dishonest here, to play games, not willing to really tell us which way it's actually looking to go – this amendment simply ensures that they will be honest about it. I think Albertans have seen how this government operates, and it's pretty clear that they need something in writing. They need clarity in this legislation to protect Albertans' pensions that they have worked for

and that they have earned and that quite clearly a vast majority of Albertans do not trust this government with.

To echo what I have consistently heard from my constituents, Madam Chair, the UCP needs to keep their hands off Albertans' CPP. This amendment is an important part of that.

Thank you.

5:20

The Chair: Any other members to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the amendment regarding third-party advertising and transparency around the campaign that the UCP looks to engage in to convince Albertans with their own money to opt for an Alberta pension plan and ditch the Canadian pension plan, which is working well. Obviously, throughout debate we've heard from many of our colleagues on this side of the House, in the opposition, who are reporting without exception how high a number – up to 90, 95 per cent – of our constituents that we're hearing from in our e-mails as well as in our town halls oppose this risky plan.

I think during every stage of this debate of my grandparents, now deceased, and my father, deceased as well, who, starting when the CPP originated in 1966, saw it as a safety net that they could rely on and that they worked hard for. Veterans both, my grandfather and father, you know, served overseas and in the Canadian Army in World War II and then retired and were able to rely upon that as a source of income, that supplemented whatever savings they might have invested, to be able to have a retirement that was at least comfortable, if not enjoyably comfortable.

Now, of course, people who are of my age and the age of a few members in this House who are actually eligible to receive the Canada pension plan: we wonder if the rug is going to be pulled out from underneath our feet and whether that's going to be something that we can rely upon. Now, I'm living a life of privilege. I don't require the CPP for my sustenance, but certainly people who are, you know, born in 1958 and thereabouts are looking to know whether or not they actually can rely on the Canada pension plan. They're scared because they've saved all this time for it, and it may be coming to an end. Indeed, those people are willing to vote for us; maybe not for them.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I'm pleased to stand and support this amendment, but I'm certainly disappointed, like many of my colleagues, to have to discuss Bill 2 when it's very clear that Albertans are so firmly against this, as we have heard countless times in our many town halls and in correspondence that both sides of this House, I'm sure, receive in regard to Albertans' real disdain about why this government continues to persist.

But I do want to speak to this particular amendment because I think information is power, Madam Chair. When the government uses 7 and a half million dollars of taxpayers' money to present a terribly biased perspective on whether or not an Alberta pension plan is, in fact, something that people want, whether it's actually good for Albertans, I think that we are asking people to go and vote and weigh in on a decision where they are not provided with the information that they deserve to make an informed decision. That is ultimately our responsibility. All of us here have a duty to our constituents and to all Albertans to make sure that they have all the information they possibly can to make an informed decision. That is what democracy is about, and it is our job to facilitate democracy.

I want to just point to a couple of things that I think are incredibly important when we talk about the referendum and what is in fact going to be improving participation. Calgary's recent general election had a voter turnout of 46.3 per cent. Alberta's general election in May was 59.5 per cent. We can all predict that probably referendum numbers are going to be slightly less than that.

I look overseas to a recent referendum that I think we all can be familiar with, Madam Chair, which is the vote with Brexit, to decide whether or not they would leave or stay with the EU. Of course, as anybody might have paid close attention to, they did vote in a small majority to leave the European Union. Guess what Google's most frequent U.K. search was after Brexit? What is the EU? We vote. With a small majority, there is a life-changing decision about the future of the U.K., about the future of their economy, about the future of their trade, immigration, education. Life changing.

I think you could put this decision about CPP on par with that kind of a decision. And what is the top search after the referendum? What is the EU? This is my fundamental concern about a referendum with information that is not assured and guaranteed to be unbiased. That is our fundamental responsibility here, to make sure that the information that is put out – despite all of the push-back thus far that pulling out of the CPP is not something that Albertans are interested in, this government insists on going down that road regardless of what Albertans have already told us.

Okay; let's go down that road. If it's not the public town halls, if it's not the virtual town halls, if it's not the surveys that have not quite clearly communicated the message to this government, then okay. Let's go down the road of the referendum, a number of amendments of which we have tried to put forward today, that this government has completely turned down, in an attempt to make the referendum accessible, equitable, and transparent. Then maybe the referendum is what finally is going to get this point across, and the government is going to pay attention.

But that referendum can only be successful if it is binding and if the people who participate in that referendum actually have the information that they need to make that decision. It would be a tragedy if the top Google searches after the referendum in Alberta are: what is the CPP? That is possible with the level of misinformation and with the kind of bias that is coming from this government, that is being paid for with taxpayer dollars. It is entirely possible that Albertans come to that process, to that vote without having the absolutely bare minimum information that they need to understand what is, in fact, at stake and why this government for some reason insists on continuing to gamble with their retirement security.

I don't understand when they will listen, if . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but according to Government Motion 19 the questions shall now be put.

We will deal with amendment A7, as moved by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:28 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Goehring	Metz
Boparai	Gray	Notley
Brar	Haji	Pancholi
Ceci	Hayter	Renaud

Dach	Hoffman	Sabir
Deol	Hoyle	Shepherd
Eggen	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Irwin	Tejada
Elmeligi	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eremenko	Loyola	

5:30

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 29 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: Now for the question on Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?**Hon. Members:** Agreed.**The Chair:** Any opposed? Carried.**Bill 5****Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023****The Chair:** Are there any members that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my dubious privilege to speak to this bill and propose an amendment to the bill, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.**The Chair:** This will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed.**Member Kayande:** Thank you. The Member for Calgary-Elbow to move that Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, be amended in section 5. This amendment adds public reporting on directives and compensation plans. Part of what is the disaster that is Bill 5 is that it repeals all of the directives on compensation that were previously in legislation. Bill 5 moves that all to Treasury Board and Finance. What this amendment does is that it requires Treasury Board and Finance to add back some of that disclosure.

So if a university president can make a million dollars a year, people deserve to know. If the chair of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation gets a \$750,000 salary, the public deserves to

know. I bring up those examples because those were examples from previous PC governments, that the act that Bill 5 repeals, RABCCA, was designed to eliminate. Unfortunately, it seems as though we're going back to permission for 40 years of Progressive Conservative grift, all in three hours of legislative sessions, and it is appalling. I urge every member of this House to support at least a little bit of reporting around this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Minister of Finance.**Mr. Horner:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The proposed amendment to require posting of compensation policies is not required as the policy would be implemented through ministerial order and therefore published publicly as a result.

The proposed posting of compensation plans is, frankly, a bit premature as the process and content of compensation plans has not yet been determined through consultation and engagement with public agencies.

The government maintains its commitment to transparency in this work, and any ministerial orders related to compensation matters under this legislation would similarly be published publicly.

Compensation plans will likely contain additional details about compensation matters for all non-union staff that would not normally be captured through transparency legislation or compensation reporting processes. The commitment to transparency is understood and forefront as the processes are being developed.

For those reasons, Madam Chair, I would encourage everyone in the House to vote down amendment A3 on Bill 5.

The Chair: Are there any other members to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Goehring	Loyola
Boparai	Gray	Metz
Brar	Haji	Notley
Ceci	Hayter	Renaud
Dach	Hoffman	Sabir
Deol	Hoyle	Shepherd
Eggen	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Irwin	Tejada
Elmeligi	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eremenko		

5:40

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk		Johnson Schow
Boitchenko	Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	LaGrange	Sinclair
Cyr	Loewen	Singh
de Jonge	Long	Stephan
Dreeshen	Lovely	Turton
Dyck	Lunty	van Dijken

Ellis	McDougall	Wiebe
Fir	McIver	Williams
Getson	Nally	Wilson
Glubish	Neudorf	Wright, J.
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Yao
Horner	Petrovic	Yaseen
Hunter		
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 43

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: I'm now seeking speakers to Bill 5. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm extremely disappointed that simple disclosure requirements have been defeated.

Unlike the commentary from the hon. Minister of Finance just recently, there is nothing in Bill 5 that requires the minister to make any order associated public, so I would like to propose an amendment that does just that.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4. Hon. member, please proceed.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Member for Calgary-Elbow moves that Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, be amended in section 5. What it does, the substance of the amendment, is that it requires the Ministry of Finance to make public any orders under this act. Obviously, we see that the disclosure, at least, will provide some discipline, you know. Because a sunshine act is basically retrospective, this provides taxpayers with proscriptive information.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on amendment A4? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for this thoughtful amendment and the fact that it is yet another attempt to promote transparency and accountability on the matter of cabinet directives for salaries for those folks who occupy the world of agencies, boards, and commissions. You know, for those folks over there who maybe are a bit newer to the House and who maybe, prior to the creation of the UCP, tended to identify themselves more with sort of the Wildrose wing of the party rather than the PC wing of the party, I just wanted to run you through just a little bit of a history lesson around this bill and why there was this thing called RABCCA before.

Back in the day, when I shared a very small corner of this side of the room with a much larger Wildrose opposition, many of us spent a great deal of time, particularly in 2014, being very concerned about the excesses of the former PC government and the way in which they would appoint people to agencies, boards, and commissions, often friends and insiders but, more to the point, people whose salaries were double that of the most senior public officials within the direct government of Alberta public service. It was scandal after scandal after scandal with this kind of excess. I stood beside the now Premier, and we argued passionately for the need for there to be more transparency and more control around these kinds of arbitrary excesses.

Fast-forward to just a few months after that. Former Leader of the Official Opposition, now Premier, becomes Premier, and one of the first things that she and her cabinet do is that they rush to get rid of the rules that we spent a lot of time putting into place in order to

avoid things like having a president of a university who earns twice the President of the United States, which is exactly the situation we were in back in 2014.

Frankly, I don't know why anybody over there would support Bill 5 because it runs very much counter to the excesses that the old Wildrose used to be so concerned about. This goes right to the heart of some of the key concerns of many of your grassroots members. Nonetheless, you're all coming together to make sure that cabinet has all the control around these decisions. There are no longer any transparent rules and structures that provide discipline. In the meantime all we're trying to do with this amendment is ensure that there is transparency when those inside, backroom deals are made.

I would urge those over there who see themselves still aligned with the grassroots of their party, who still want to be able to go back to their ridings at Christmas and say: "No, no. We haven't lost everything that you thought we stood for. We actually do care about transparency and making sure that we don't line the pockets of our friends, of insiders in a way just like the old PCs used to." I urge you. I want you to be able to make those statements to your constituents and to your supporters, and to do that, you should therefore support this motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take an opportunity to rise and speak on amendment A4 for Bill 5, just to clear a few things up. These committees or associations are collaborative bodies of existing public agencies and would likely be resourced from existing staff. The work of the committees or associations would be to co-ordinate compensation decisions and processes for alignment across similar agencies and within the common subsectors of an industry. The proposed consultation would be of little interest or application in this context.

You know, for those reasons, Madam Chair, I would encourage everyone in the House to vote against A4. But speaking more broadly about Bill 5, I would just remind everyone in the House that if truly you are in favour of this move – and I would take you back to estimates, March 15 of last year, with the Member for Lethbridge-West speaking with the former Finance minister and encouraging him to move quickly to move away from RABCCA because of the recruitment and retention challenges it was creating. Many previous MLAs have also heard these stories.

The transparency will be there as we move to compensation plans, mimicking B.C., and will be protected rigidly through a ministerial order till we get there.

Ms Notley: Ministerial order.

Mr. Horner: That's correct, Edmonton-Strathcona.

All I wanted everyone to know is that we will ensure that there is strict oversight. Everyone wants to see that, but I would just remind everyone that this is about 30,000 out-of-scope, public-sector employees from AHS to AFSC has been mentioned and many others. For those reasons, I can't support amendment A4, but I'm very supportive of the bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Chair. This Assembly is very interesting. On day one we find this UCP government talking about the gifts that they want to receive; on the second day we see the UCP talking about the gifts that their friends want to receive. We don't see the UCP standing up for Albertans and the issues that

matter to Albertans. I'm not sure when they will plan to do that, but on this side of the House we will continue to stand up for the issues that matter to Albertans.

You can look at that from our record in this session. Albertans want us to focus on schools. Albertans want more schools in their ridings, more schools in their communities, and we have been advocating for that. I'm thankful to the Member for Calgary-Foothills for asking the questions and his advocacy today in this Assembly.

5:50

I also want to thank my colleague and Member for Calgary-Beddington for putting forward Bill 202, that would have addressed the issues that Albertans are facing.

Albertans want us to focus on housing issues. They don't have a roof over their heads. They're struggling to pay the rent. They are struggling to put food on the table. I'm thankful to my colleague and Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for her advocacy, and I'm proud that she introduced the bill today to address this issue.

Albertans wants this UCP government to keep their hands off their CPP. We are listening to Albertans. We have held in-person town halls. We have listened to our constituents. They're writing to us, and we are meeting with them. That's exactly what we are telling this UCP government to do, and they have refused to do so. They have not held in-person town halls, they have not met with Albertans, and they haven't listened to them, and that's shameful.

It's unfortunate that members on the other side have voted against all these important issues, all these important bills that we have put forward by all our colleagues. Instead, from the other side we have seen the bills that want to remove the gift limits, that want to gamble with pensions, that want to, I mean, give all the power in their hands – like, you name it – that will make the few people on the other side more powerful.

We have heard loud and clear from residents that they feel betrayed by this UCP government. The Premier tried to appoint the failed Edmonton candidates to advise her on Edmonton issues while we have amazing colleagues from Edmonton here on this side that have better things to share. This is disappointing.

I'm glad that my colleague and Member for Calgary-Elbow has put forward this important amendment, and I request that all the members of this Assembly to please support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll speak just for a moment. We just saw a demonstration of old-style Conservative politics in Alberta, where the Minister of Finance with a very genuine, earnest, heartfelt honesty said, with hand over heart: "Just trust us. It'll be made public. That's good enough for you, and you should be willing to accept that." Well, we don't want to accept that. We want things written in black and white, and that's why we're proposing this amendment. That's what the public demands, that trust be actually shown and embedded in the legislation and that the government demonstrates that they're worthy of that trust by putting things in black and white.

I mean, as other members have recently stated, the focus of this province should be on looking at affordability issues like rent, like groceries, like school boards not having enough educational assistants in their classrooms, class sizes ballooning. Nurses being threatened by this government is no help to the safety net that we all hope to rely upon. Housing issues and homelessness are causing

great anxiety throughout the whole society. The government here, now looking across the House, saying, "Just trust us," having Albertans being asked, "Just trust us; we'll do the right thing" isn't acceptable.

We've been putting our trust in governments to do the right thing on the affordability issues that face this province, and they haven't been coming forward, Madam Chair. Not at all. They failed miserably, and they're doing so again. To ask us to trust them to do the right thing when it comes to transparency and paying outrageous salaries to their pals that they appoint to positions is something that we're not prepared to do.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak to this important amendment put forward by my hon. colleague the MLA for Calgary-Elbow. He has moved some important amendments to improve this bill; unfortunately, we have not seen any co-operation from the other side. My colleague has work experience spanning over decades about these matters. He understands the value of accountability, and the amendments that he put forward are very common-sense and sensible amendments.

The reason for that is that we have a government where we have seen a long history and pattern of behaviour where they will avoid accountability, where they will make it difficult for people to access information and access data. Madam Chair, that was the reason that this government in 2019-2020 was given an award for secrecy.

Ms Hoffman: The most secretive government in Canada.

Mr. Sabir: The most secretive government in Canada.

That's why I think these amendments are important, and I urge the members to support this amendment and accountability.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My colleague's remarks just reminded me: I think that it was two years in a row where the media across the country, who have an opportunity to engage in selecting who should be recognized for things, did indeed vote the UCP government as the most secretive government in Canada.

This is an opportunity, of course, to demonstrate a willingness to try to set a ship in a better direction and increase transparency even if it's ever so slightly through this very small amendment, Madam Chair. I think that we have an opportunity to show the people of this province that the government will listen to some of the concerns that have been raised.

This would be an excellent opportunity to do such, Madam Chair, as the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, is something that I think – again, the requirements that are currently under legislation, that the government is trying to strike out and change for only certain people to have the opportunities to benefit, of course. They're not talking about striking out the impacts that they've had on folks who had the minimum wage rolled back after this government took over. They aren't talking about the fact that the only people who they're fighting for getting raises are people who are already making substantial incomes. They're talking about the fact that children, 16- and 17-year-olds, formerly used to have the same minimum wage because if you do equal work you get equal pay. That's a principle that on this side of the House we deeply believe in. No; the government decided to go after toonies from teenagers, taking two bucks an hour out of teenagers' pockets to make sure that others could have the opportunity to benefit but not those teenagers.

Instead of focusing on folks who are struggling – people say: well, it's just about gaining work experience, Madam Chair. I know many teenagers who work to support their families. I know many teenagers who work to support themselves. I know teenagers who are working to build up money to be able to pay for the tuition that's being jacked up by the UCP year after year after year after year. That \$2 an hour made a real difference for those folks. Instead of focusing on people like that, who are struggling, the government is choosing to focus on their own entitlements, choo-choo-choo, as well as the entitlements of folks who are already making very comfortable salaries, wanting to make it only even more divisive,

wanting to make sure that executives who are already making \$500,000 a year have an opportunity to make a million dollars a year.

These kinds of changes don't reflect what mainstream Albertans are asking for. They don't reflect a government that's caring, that's compassionate, that's putting the needs of ordinary folks first.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The committee stands recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca