



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 25, 2024

Day 30

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 25, 2024

[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, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Michael Peters. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please remain standing.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of this history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We further acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you today a number of visitors who are with us. This week Alberta is hosting delegates from the Midwestern Legislative Conference, which is part of the Council of State Governments. The delegation consists of the immediate past chair and co-chair and vice-chair of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee.

This is the first visit by the Council of State Governments' Midwest delegation since before the pandemic, and they're eager to learn about Alberta's leading practices in our many sectors. I had the opportunity to meet with them just prior to question period, where we focused on the importance of good, healthy bilateral agreements and relationships.

I ask that you would please rise as I say your name: the past chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, Senator Roger Victory of Michigan; co-chairs of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee, MLA Kelvin Goertzen from Manitoba and Representative Amos O'Neal of Michigan; co-chairs Representative David Monson of North Dakota and MPP Ernie Hardeman from Ontario. They're

joined by Mitch Arvidson, senior program manager with the midwest office of the Council of State Governments. Lastly, from the government of Alberta Bin Lau, the U.S. midwest Chicago office, Washington trade office. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a school group visiting.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and through you and to you introduce the Edmonton home-school ARPA. I had the chance to meet them before; these kids are strong and free, Premier. Also, a point of note. It says, "Hi, mom," from the head page. Andrea Veldkamp: apparently the mom of our head page is here, too, with that group. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you a home-school co-op in the Edmonton area who I'm very excited to welcome to the Legislature, some of whom are streaming in right now. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation has an introduction.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kurt Kinnear, CEO of 4-H Alberta, and Christine Suominen, board chair of 4-H Alberta. I want to thank them both for the incredible work that they do fostering leadership, citizenship, and life skills that shape Alberta's up-and-coming agricultural leaders. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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 a group of over 20 concerned citizens from the greater Edmonton area who are here in opposition to the federal government's national urban park initiative. They're here to support my private member's Bill 204 and support the tabling of their petition later today. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sophia Hoogland and her parents, SherryAnn and Kurtis Hoogland. I'm pleased to say that Sophia is the recipient of the 2023 4-H Alberta Premier's award for her outstanding achievements as an ambassador and her passion for growing 4-H, which she tells me she's done over nine years. Congratulations, Sophia. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead has a statement to make.

Hinton Pulp Mill Investment

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. West Yellowhead has a long history of survival and economic diversification. We have our oil and gas sector, agriculture, farming, aggregate, mining, and an abundance of tourism, thanks to the beauty of the Rocky Mountains and our proximity to Jasper and Grande Cache. But, quietly, one of our biggest drivers is forestry. This industry has attracted \$7 billion of investment in the last decade and accounts for roughly 19,000 jobs for Albertans.

This past week I was in Hinton with the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade to welcome the latest global investor. Mondi announced that they had completed the purchase of the Hinton pulp mill. This mill was reaching the end of its life cycle. The key word there is “was.” Mondi is investing to bring the mill back to modern standards. They are also going to expand the mill to produce 200,000 metric tonnes of kraft paper for sustainable packaging solutions, fully integrating Mondi’s paper-bag operations in the Americas.

This will be one of the largest investments in the history of forestry in our province. It is a generational investment in Hinton that will benefit the town beyond just jobs. This project will also help the community upgrade their waste-water system and impact many businesses and families throughout the region for decades to come.

Mondi’s investment is a clear statement that businesses can feel confident about investing their money in Alberta. We have the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada, we are leading the country in cutting red tape, and we have a highly educated and skilled workforce with a world-class education system. This is all part of the Alberta advantage, making our province the best place to live, work, invest, start or grow a business, and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hospital Discharge Policies

Ms Sigurdson: On this side of the House we would like to acknowledge those who were subjected to the UCP’s motel medicine: a man recovering from a stroke, partially paralyzed, who was taken to a motel where he couldn’t use his wheelchair, had difficulty accessing the bathroom, and was fed fast food; another individual who was taken to a motel without being informed it was a motel and then taken to a different hotel without his family being notified. This is unacceptable and a total failure of this government to support these Albertans.

1:40

Despite the efforts of this government to find a scapegoat, this failure lies entirely on the ministers of motel medicine serving in this UCP government, a Health minister who claimed that proper procedure was followed and claimed that patients chose these motels, a social services minister who tried to blame this side of the House and then his own cabinet colleagues all while Albertans were left waiting in motel rooms.

Mr. Speaker, this tragedy was inevitable. It comes from a government that doesn’t believe in public health care. It is what happens with a government led by a Premier who thinks that motel rooms are the best place for long-term care patients. It’s what happens with a Health minister who breaks her promise to build the south Edmonton hospital and tells Edmontonians to hit the road to Red Deer to get hospital care.

Motel medicine isn’t an accident; it is the direct consequence of the UCP’s policy agenda over the past five years. The victims of motel medicine deserve better than half-apologies and endless

rounds of the UCP blame game. They deserve a government focused on them and building public health care in Alberta. They need and deserve an Alberta NDP government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Health Care Workers

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m honoured to announce that I have been appointed as the new parliamentary secretary for health workforce engagement. I rise today to address a critical issue that affects each and every one of us, health care. Having spent 13 years as a nurse, I understand first-hand the challenges and rewards of working in our health care system. Our United Conservative government not only cares deeply about health care for Albertans but also stands fiercely behind our hard-working health care workers, who dedicate their lives to keeping us healthy and safe.

Despite the relentless misinformation from the NDP, continually perpetuated by biased outlets like CBC, we on this side of the aisle remain unyielding in our commitment to supporting our front-line workers. We understand that it is the nurses, doctors, and health care professionals who truly make a difference in our health care systems, not the bloated bureaucracy at the top. The socialist NDP may attempt to spin a different narrative, but let me be clear: our government is a firm advocate for health care. We remain resolute in our determination to ensure that our health care system is efficient, effective, and focused on delivering the highest standard of care to all Albertans. We refuse to be swayed by the NDP’s baseless accusations and the deliberately divisive rhetoric they continue to push, as ordered by their party bosses in Ottawa.

Instead, we are laser focused on championing policies that empower our front-line workers, reduce bureaucratic tape, and improve access to timely care for all. We believe in a health care system that prioritizes patients over politics, one that values the tireless dedication and unwavering commitment of our front-line heroes and delivers world-class care while remaining accountable to taxpayers.

To the front-line health care workers who tirelessly serve our communities: I say thank you. Thank you for your resilience, your sacrifice, and your unwavering dedication to our well-being. I want you to know that our government and myself will continue to fight tooth and nail for you, the front-line workers, our health care system, and for the people of Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has a statement.

Health Promotion in Calgary-Falconridge

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP’s proposed restructuring of AHS is nothing short of an attempt to undercut the importance of preventative care in order to replace these services with private contracts down the road. Mosaic PCN, which serves many of my constituents in Calgary-Falconridge, has no choice but to cut the PCN active adults and active toddlers program that has been a staple in our community for 11 years at the Genesis Centre.

These programs provide essential services and support to members of our community, promoting physical activity, social interaction, and overall well-being. Cutting these programs would have a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of our community members, particularly our older adults and young children. The active adults program helps seniors stay active and engaged, reducing their risk of developing chronic conditions and improving their overall quality of life. Similarly, the active

toddlers program is crucial for the development of our youngest community members, providing them with structured activities and opportunities for socialization. Moreover, these programs have played a vital role in fostering a sense of community and belonging among our members. By participating in these programs, individuals and seniors are able to form meaningful connections with their peers, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Instead of cutting these valuable programs, we should be investing in their expansion and enhancement. By ensuring that all members of our community have access to these programs, we can work towards creating a healthier, more inclusive, and more vibrant community for all. I urge this government to reconsider the proposed cuts and prioritize the well-being of our community members.

Thank you.

Council of State Governments

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, the Council of State Governments was formed in 1933, allowing states to address policy and regional interests in a nonpartisan manner. It's also come to my attention that it's been pretty handy with dealing with federal overreach back in the day. CSG includes 50 U.S. states, six territories, and six Canadian provinces. CSG Midwest includes 11 states, one province as full members: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Saskatchewan with Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario as affiliate members. Alberta actively participates in the following committees: Canada-U.S. relations, Energy and Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and the MLC Executive.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you first-hand that the CSG organization provides a conduit to rapidly facilitate change and collaboration. I attribute the conference I attended in Wichita as the mechanism that allowed for the economic corridors MOU with Saskatchewan and Manitoba to be expanded and to be signed. Most recently I had the opportunity to visit Germany with CSG energy delegates to witness first-hand Germany's transition, both the good and the bad in their energy file.

I'd like to welcome the CSG Midwest delegation visiting this week. They're here to see what Alberta has to offer, including hydrogen production, agrifood, manufacturing, research and development in universities, agriculture, aviation, and energy. Senator Roger Victory from Michigan is the immediate past chair of CSG Midwest and a fellow whip, as it goes; Representative Amos O'Neal from Michigan; MLA Kelvin Goertzen from Manitoba; Representative David Monson from North Dakota; MPP Ernie Hardeman from Ontario; and Mr. Mitch Arvidson, senior program manager for CSG Midwest. He's the cat herder on this trip, Mr. Speaker.

The mutual significance of the Midwest and Alberta cannot be understated, and here are a few reasons why. Alberta-U.S. bilateral trade is \$182.3 billion. Alberta's exports totalled \$156.4 billion, which is 89 per cent of our total exports. The U.S. Midwest is our most important trade region. Last year alone: \$102.8 billion in bilateral trade.

Mr. Speaker, welcome everyone here to the Midwest. Hopefully, they can see what Alberta has to offer. Welcome to the province of the strong and free.

Victoria Torrie

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak today to recognize the life and legacy of an incredible woman, Victoria Torrie. Vicki was a well-known and loved member of the Edmonton-Manning

community, best known for her service with the Royal Canadian Legion. She passed away on March 17 following a battle with cancer.

Vicki was a hugger, and I am not. She would often give me a hard time for not hugging, eventually pulling me in for one. Every time we met, she would remind me that hugs should be given heart to heart. With each interaction and every heart-to-heart hug she showed me her warmth, vulnerability, and genuine character.

Victoria was a valued member of the Kingsway Legion and the ladies auxiliary for 19 years and was a life member of both organizations. She held many titles throughout the years and has played a key role in various fundraising efforts. Victoria's annual gala dinner and silent auction fundraiser had helped pay down the majority of the Legion's mortgage.

Born and raised in the Fraser valley, she met Robert Torrie, known as Mac, in her early 20s, and after two years they were wed and moved to Edmonton. The next 35 years were filled with adventures of being a devoted military wife. Since retirement she enjoyed gardening, crafting alongside her work with the Royal Canadian Legion, and, of course, the ladies auxiliary. So many lifelong friends were made at the Kingsway branch 175 and through the Alberta-NWT Command.

Vicki loved to learn, help others, and was always willing to lend an ear. Her sage wisdom and advice helped many people through difficult times. Vicki was a genuine friend to all and will be missed for her selflessness. She will be lovingly remembered by her husband of 54 years, Mac; sister Annie Wiebe; and many family members and friends.

Thank you, Vicki, for your open arms, your heart to so many, and opening your heart for mine.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Hospital Discharge Policies

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, since even before we knew the depth and the breadth of the UCP's motel medicine scheme, Albertans have been waiting for an apology. Instead, the Health minister exchanged finger pointing with the community services minister and eventually sputtered out that she's sorry the, quote, individual feels that the service that he was going to get was misrepresented to him. End quote. To the Premier: will she acknowledge that that is not an apology, and will she now apologize to all the victims on behalf of this UCP government for their motel medicine scheme?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're pleased that the individual in question came forward with their family to identify the problems with this service provider so that we could step in and help, which we did over the course of the weekend. I want to congratulate the staff at the Health department as well as the staff at Seniors, Community and Social Services who went in, did an assessment of all of the clients' needs, identified where they would be moving back to for their permanent home, as well as made sure that they got the health care that they need. We're going to make sure that if anyone else finds themselves in this situation, we will step in, we will identify the problem, and we will fix it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that still wasn't an apology.

Now, last week the Premier's Minister of Health said there was nothing to see here. She said protocol had been followed and that

Mr. Canniff chose to be dumped in a motel where he received such abysmal treatment that he was readmitted to the ER. To the Premier: was her minister unable or unwilling to provide this Legislature and the people of Alberta with up-to-date and accurate information? How could her minister have gotten it so wrong, and why will no one over there simply say, "I am sorry"?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it was an evolving situation over the course of the week. As we know, Alberta Health Services, across their 106 facilities, discharge a thousand people every day, and most of the time it works out just fine because they have family who will take care of them. They go home to their own home. On occasion there are clients with complex needs, and we identified a gap. In that gap is where Seniors, Community and Social Services and, if needed, Mental Health and Addiction are going to step in in order to provide an appropriate care facility for someone who faces those complex needs. That's what's going to happen in the future.

Ms Notley: Still no apology. Wow.

Now, on Friday the Premier said, and I quote, "I shudder to think what would have happened to those poor, poor folks," end quote, if they hadn't come in with their credit card. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm shuddering at what did happen to those poor folks; it turns out at least 27 of them and counting. To the Premier. Her folks caused the crisis. How many more victims are there out there of the UCP's motel medicine with other contractors?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this agency in question does not have a contract with Seniors, Community and Social Services or Mental Health and Addiction or Health. They are an independent service provider. They are not providing service up to a standard of care that we find acceptable. We are launching several investigations. SCSS is going to launch an investigation to determine income supports have not been used inappropriately. The office of the public guardian is going to do an investigation to ensure none of these vulnerable people were treated poorly or abused, and Service Alberta is going to conduct a consumer protection review to make sure that money wasn't spent inappropriately.

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

Ms Notley: Here's what's missing, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the apology. These Albertans were in the hospital and needed significant care. Some were wheelchair bound; all were vulnerable. Along came AHS staff to tell them it was time to go and handed them a list. Little did they know they would be dumped in a roadside motel without an accessible washroom or bed and given fast food. Last week the Health minister claimed that this scenario was proper protocol and everything that was supposed to happen did. To the Premier: how could her minister have gotten it so wrong on day one?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to be reviewing AHS discharge policy and process and the organizations and service providers that are provided as options during discharge. Clearly, this was an organization that was receiving patients and not able to provide the full range of care needed for their complex needs. They are a housing entity, a housing agency, but if they're going to be taking on patients that have high medical needs, we have to ensure that they're going to be supported with appropriate medical support, so we'll be looking into that as well.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this motel medicine is the direct consequence of the Premier's decision. She even thought it was a good idea at one point. She's also increased chaos in hospitals and invited more private-sector contractors into health care delivery, and then: cross your fingers. When media asked the AHS CEO last week who vetted the companies being recommended to these vulnerable Albertans, she said that she didn't know what that meant. To the Premier: how in heaven's name do these companies get on a list that are presented to vulnerable patients, and how many more contracts like this are out there?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly the question that we are asking and we're going to get to the bottom of. There are a number of different service providers who provide a range of care for people all the way from housing to room and board to including medical support for home care to including additional support for complex needs, whether it's mental health and addiction. We have to make sure that every service provider is able to deliver the care that they're promising. If they don't, then we are going to launch investigations, as we are in this case. We want to make sure that no fraud has been committed and that no dollars have been have been misappropriated.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, today the Health minister did finally admit that the discharge policy is a mess, it needs to be reviewed, and, as we've said, will be reviewed by up to four internal processes. Meanwhile at least 27 people have been dumped in roadside motels, and the government is hiding how many more are out there. To the Premier: while these internal processes drag on behind closed doors, in the interests of patient safety will she at the very least disclose the current discharge policy that these patients are relying on?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to hear if there is anyone who finds a loved one with a service provider that is not providing appropriate care. That's why last week I gave the number out for 310.1818 to make sure that anybody makes us aware in the event that we have to do another investigation. What has become clear is that when a patient with complex needs is being discharged from hospital, there needs to be more connection with the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction as well as the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services so that we can ensure that they are vetted and they are providing appropriate care.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Dr. Metz: For two years now the Boyle health care centre has had 100 per cent of its acute beds closed due to staffing issues, and its emergency room is operating on reduced hours. Today six of 21 beds are closed in Hinton, the emergency room in Consort has been closed for two years, and 50 per cent of the acute-care beds at the Coronation hospital have been closed for nearly a year. The UCP is failing rural Alberta. Will the minister confirm what dates these important health care sites will be reopened to full capacity?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, obviously, we want every centre open all the time. What we continue to see are staffing shortages, and we are looking to address those staffing shortages. We continue to have workforce strategies right across the province

to ensure that we have the proper supports and the proper people in place to make sure that those facilities can stay open. We're continuing all of this work. AHS is working very diligently to make sure that these facilities stay open so that they can provide Albertans the services that they need.

Dr. Metz: There have been no obstetric services at the Rimbey hospital for nearly three years, there have been no obstetric services at the Sundre hospital for nearly four years, and 16 per cent of the acute-care beds at the Rocky Mountain House hospital have been closed for three years. Albertans deserve quality health care in their communities, but the UCP is seemingly set on letting them down. What advice does the minister have for expectant mothers in Rimbey and Sundre? How far does she expect them to drive for health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the very reason we are doing the refocusing. In fact, it's why we need a refocus of the whole system. Acute-care service across this province needs to be focused. We need to have a strategy in place. This strategy has been lacking for quite a while. In fact, that's what we're working on, making sure that we have the services provided right across the whole province. In fact, we're seeing more surgeries completed in the last year than have been completed. We are now at almost 310,000 surgeries being completed in Alberta. That's an increase from last year.

2:00

Dr. Metz: As of Friday there are 30 communities in Alberta experiencing disruptions to their health care: Barrhead, Boyle, Consort, Coronation, Drumheller, Edson, Fairview, Fort Saskatchewan, and 22 more. Some of these disruptions have been going on for four years. Most of these communities have a largely silent UCP MLA. What messages does the Minister of Health have for the residents of these communities? Will she end these disruptions, or should they expect to plan to check into their local motels to get health care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question. We have gone across this province. We have over 60 engagements right across the province. The members opposite, who forgot rural Alberta, did everything to demean and demise rural Alberta. We are in fact going across this province listening to the health workforce. They are asking for services. We are actually working with them to ensure that we provide the services that are necessary for Albertans. They forgot rural Alberta; we remember them each and every day. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Elections Alberta Investigation of Take Back Alberta

Mr. Sabir: Elections Alberta plays a critical role in our democracy. They are tasked with administering elections, enforcing election laws, and regulating financial disclosures. Despite this, the Premier's BFF, David Parker, is refusing to comply with election laws and is refusing to report donations given to Take Back Alberta, something all third-party groups are legally required to do. Does the Premier agree that by refusing to comply with election laws, David Parker is threatening the very institution of democracy in this province? Yes or no? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hey. Hey. Relax.

The hon. member will know that question period is an opportunity to ask questions about government business, not third-

party organizations. If the member wants to make a question about government business, he's welcome to do so. There are many creative ways to make that happen. If he doesn't want to, then we will continue to move on to other questions.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I think that you eloquently put it to the hon. member here. This is an independent office. The hon. member makes a great deal about independence of offices. We respect the right of Elections Alberta to conduct their own investigations and do their own work, and we're going to keep it that way.

Mr. Sabir: Thousands of dollars have been spent by TBA to run ads in Alberta. They have been involved in every election, including the Premier's leadership election, and Albertans have every right to know where they get money from, where they spend it, what they spend it on. It is required by the law made by this Legislature. Instead of providing that information, Parker calls Elections Alberta corrupt and described these investigations as witch hunts, which is dangerous. Does the Premier agree with the comments made by David Parker, or will she join us in condemning these comments?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member had a wonderful and rare opportunity to ask a question that was relevant to this House. The member struck out once again.

Unfortunately, what other external third-party organizations do is their business, Mr. Speaker. We're busy running this province.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, aside from the Premier's friendship with David Parker, many members of Take Back Alberta sit on the UCP board, the governing party's board, and they have influence over this Premier and this government. It is essential that the rules apply to TBA and they comply with the rules or face consequences. No one is above the law. To the Premier: what steps will you take to uphold the rule of law so that David Parker and TBA and third-party groups comply with election laws in this province?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:04.

As I mentioned two questions ago, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is a learned member of this Assembly. He knows how to ask questions about government business. It's almost like he's refusing to do so by asking questions not about government business. There are many creative ways to get it done. I encourage him in the future to do so. If not, we'll move on to other questioners.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I can appreciate the desperate attempt to make a case for the candidates running in the NDP's race to the bottom, but I'll compare our record to theirs any day. Their members advocated for defunding the police. Their members advocated for cutting criminal justice budgets, but who can blame them for deflection . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, they're not just coming up against this government's common-sense policies, but their greatest barrier and their greatest opposition still remains their own rancid policies and managing their federal commanders. We won't submit to them in any way at all. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hospital Discharge Policies

(continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Albertans are rightly horrified by the UCP's policy of motel medicine. Jenalee Green's father was sent to the Leduc Travelodge without being informed that he was going to a motel. He was then, days later, moved to a second hotel with his family not being informed. The Minister of Health insisted that proper procedures were followed, even went so far as to blame the patients, insisting multiple times that they chose where they were sent. This is unacceptable. The buck should stop with this minister and this government who allowed this to happen as part of their race to the bottom in health care delivery. Will this minister stop hunting for someone to blame and finally just take responsibility?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this was a housing provider not associated with the Department of Health or the Department of Seniors, Community and Social Services. The vast majority of people involved were not receiving health care services; they were living in the community. Unfortunately, this provider chose to move those people to two hotels, to not pay their bills, and to not care for those people. The government has stepped in, returned those people to safe homes today, given them services, and has launched four investigations into the behaviour of this organization to make sure organizations like that cannot do things like that in the future.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the UCP has utterly failed dozens of patients who were promised real care and ended up in motel rooms and given that motel staff are not prepared to care for patients needing specific levels of care and given that one patient found himself in a room that was not built for a wheelchair and had difficulty accessing his washroom and his bed and given that the minister trying to dodge responsibility insisted that the proper procedures were followed in this case, this government's procedures, Mr. Speaker, will this minister agree that the proper procedures failed these Albertans and commit that they will be changed today?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, not only will I agree they will be changed today; I will let you know that they have already been changed today. Unlike the opposition, who wants to make up things inside the House, this government, when we find problems, takes action and defends Albertans. I want to be clear. Dozens of individuals were not receiving health care services in a hotel. A very bad provider took people into a hotel while taking their money, promising them that they would provide different services. That's unacceptable. That's why this government has taken action and got everybody to safety, to make sure it won't happen again.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the Premier campaigned on motel medicine, saying that it would be more comfortable for patients, and given that these ministers have tried blaming everyone from their fellow ministers to the individual patients for these failures, for which they are solely responsible, and given that doctors have called for increased checks and balances and protections to ensure that this never happens again and given that Albertans are worried that these ministers are more concerned about protecting their jobs than patients, will they commit that the findings, and indeed those standards, of every single investigation into the UCP's motel medicine will be released transparently in full?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is probably having trouble hearing, but I want to stress this again. There were no patients in these hotels. This was a housing provider. The vast majority of those individuals were in safe apartments when they

made a very bizarre decision to start to move them from hotel to hotel to hotel. They were not health care patients. We took action to get those individuals to safety and are investigating the organization involved. And, yes, we will make those results public when it's completed.

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

Water Conservation Investments

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province is potentially facing a drought season unlike many seen before. With several years of reduced precipitation and an El Niño winter the snowpack is low and things are dry. This could present a threat to our farmers, to our other industries, and to food costs. It can cause havoc in our provincial economy and be a threat to the well-being of Albertans. Can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas tell the House what she is doing to combat the upcoming drought season?

2:10

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank my colleague for the important question. We're negotiating water-sharing agreements. We're increasing conservation programs, strengthening drought and flood protections, and investing in our precious watersheds and wetlands. We're also investing in Alberta innovation. We're continuing to fund critical research to help our province recycle more water and use water more effectively and efficiently. This unmatched Alberta innovation, like the technologies being developed at the University of Alberta, will help industries recycle more waste water, freeing up more fresh water for businesses and communities downstream.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that our province has many innovators and researchers and they are developing solutions to many problems and given that with many parts of the world facing drought and with water becoming an increasingly scarce resource, can the Minister of Technology and Innovation tell the House whether our government is funding any technology to fight drought and increase our supply of usable water?

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I say it all the time, but it bears repeating. Technology is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry. Given the current drought conditions there is no better time than the present to highlight the work we have been doing to prepare. Over the last nine years we've invested \$75 million into over 150 different projects, each of which are focused on water conservation and water treatment, because we know that in a time of drought every drop of water counts.

There is no problem too big that technology can't help us solve. That's why we are proud financial partners with our brilliant researchers all across the province as they work to advance our interests in this regard.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our province has many innovators and researchers and they are developing solutions to many problems and given that Alberta Innovates is a key player in our province's tech space and they receive hundreds of millions of dollars from our government every year to provide funding for research and innovation, can the same minister tell the House whether Alberta Innovates is doing anything to help with the drought situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is yes. In fact, I was proud to join the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas this morning in collaboration with the University of Alberta and Alberta Innovates to highlight a recent pilot project with the city of Calgary. It is a pilot project that is commercializing a granular sludge reactor technology that will increase the performance of municipal water treatment facilities. It will increase the amount of processed water that can be reused and recycled.

Mr. Speaker, as we said before, in a time of drought every drop of water counts, and that is why we've been investing for over nine years in developing new technologies to address this kind of crisis.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, this government might have a listening problem. Albertans keep telling them that they don't want the Alberta pension plan, yet they're still trying to force it on Albertans. In a recent poll by Viewpoint Alberta 57 per cent of those surveyed said that they're opposed to the pension plan. That's more than half. It's quite evident that this pension plan is just another one of their unpopular ideas. Will this government start listening to Albertans and put down this unwanted Alberta pension plan for good?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again just in case there's a listening problem across the aisle. What we have done is ask the federal government to step in and involve the Chief Actuary. The Chief Actuary is now seeking legislative advice from three other actuarial firms. We think that we'll get that back in April, and then we expect a number in the fall. We have paused the engagement within the province, and we're waiting to see what comes back from the Chief Actuary so that we can re-energize this conversation with Albertans and hear from them how they'd like us to proceed.

Member Kayande: Given that the only people who seem to agree with the pension scheme are the ones the Premier keeps on her payroll and given that Albertans have been incredibly vocal on their lack of support for a provincial pension scheme, how much louder do Albertans need to be to get the message across that we don't want your pension scheme?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we always listen to Albertans. You know, we had a general election not that long ago, which is what sent – Albertans sent us into this House. We'll continue to engage and listen to Albertans. What we heard was they wanted more clarification on the information. We've involved the Chief Actuary. We're going through that process, and when it comes back, we'll rebegin the conversation with Albertans, and we can all look at it with fresh eyes from both sides of the aisle.

Member Kayande: Given that many experts have said that this estimated \$330 billion Albertans would be owed in pension contributions is a bogus, unrealistic, made-up number and given

that even the UCP's own supporters aren't buying it and don't want this government to risk their hard-earned pensions, will the minister do the right thing and stop this government from gambling away Albertans' retirement security?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why anyone would giggle about that number. That belongs to Albertans. That represents Albertans' contribution to CPP since the beginning. No good government would even throw an idea out there if we didn't think it had a substantial benefit for the province. We're talking about the potential for \$5 billion annually to be left in Alberta businesses and for Alberta working people. That's a huge number, folks, especially when we're sitting in this House talking about affordability. Why wouldn't we consider it and talk about it openly?

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

Social Studies Curriculum

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More experts are weighing in on the new social studies curriculum. This curriculum is increasingly bogged down with complaints that it lacks diversity and age-appropriate content. Experts have called it, quote, profoundly disappointing. The UCP is living in the past with a curriculum more focused on memorization than critical thinking. When will this government wake up to what is needed in a modern curriculum and a modern classroom? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that we're developing a new, modern, and robust curriculum to help ensure we set our students up for success. We will do that, unlike the NDP. When they were in office, they made clear and overt attempts to make the curriculum a reflection of their ideological viewpoint. We reject that premise. We fundamentally believe in giving students a balanced curriculum that gives them the skills, the knowledge, and the competencies that they need to succeed without ideology, and we will do that.

Ms Chapman: Given that another critic of the new curriculum describes it as, quote, a really interesting trajectory of another failed attempt . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Chapman: . . . and given that this critic is an Indigenous scholar and is another voice drawing attention to the fact that this curriculum fails to provide meaningful action on truth and reconciliation, will this government commit to going back to the drawing board on Indigenous content in the K to 6 social studies curriculum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to continue working with Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, francophone partners and stakeholders and others to refine the curriculum. Indigenous content is covered in, I believe, every grade in the draft K to 6 social studies curriculum. I'm sure there are always ways that we can make further improvements. That's precisely why we've put the curriculum to all Albertans, to receive their feedback so that we can further strengthen it. To date almost 8,000 submissions have been received, and we're very excited to receive robust feedback to strengthen the curriculum.

Ms Chapman: Given that the people working on this curriculum have disavowed it while the minister is celebrating the praise of an opinion columnist and given that Albertans deserve a curriculum that is written by experts and designed to ensure the best possible education outcomes for Alberta students and given that the experts have spoken out on this latest draft and say that more needs to be done to improve it, will the minister commit to going back, hearing the feedback of teachers, Indigenous communities, and experts to ensure we actually get it right before it's imposed on Alberta schools?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote some other experts in the education world, specifically the Alberta Teachers' Association, that has noted that the government is receptive to receiving and acting on teacher advice on curriculum matters. We will continue to engage with all experts, the Alberta Teachers' Association, other partners to build a robust curriculum for our students. Of course, I understand and I recognize that with social studies in particular, many people have different viewpoints when it comes to history and historical events, but we will do our best to balance all perspectives.

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Addiction is a devastating reality that too many Canadians face. Families are hurting, and their loved ones fall into the trap that only leads down a path of pain and destruction. I am a proud supporter of the Alberta recovery model, which is building access to world-class treatment centres, including the one that's coming to Grande Prairie, for which we are grateful. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what impact will recovery community treatment centres like the one coming to my area have in bringing people out of addiction into recovery?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't surprise me that the member is a supporter of the Alberta recovery model. We know that addiction, run its course, ends in only one of two ways: it ends in pain, misery, and death, or it ends in treatment, recovery, and a hopeful second lease on life, which is why we're building 11 new recovery communities, one of which, as the member correctly said, is coming into his constituency in Grande Prairie. We know that if we don't move forward with this, there is no path out of addiction into recovery. Facilitated addiction is no way to treat our most vulnerable. We have a moral responsibility to follow the evidence and help those who are suffering.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister. Given that we see a stark contrast in what the NDP and the federal government are doing in their response to addictions with federally funded so-called safe supply programs and given that this backward approach is nothing more than the facilitation of ongoing addiction, that is lining the pockets of drug dealers and flooding communities with highly addictive opioids, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to stand up against these dangerous policies like so-called safe supply?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, safe supply and any program like it is illegal here in the province of Alberta, and I challenge members opposite, instead of chirping, to support us in condemning safe

supply in Alberta, and I would like to see a position from the NDP opposing dollars for drugs in our province, which create nothing but harm, destruction, and chaos on our streets. It does not matter whether it's a drug cartel or Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh that provide the dangerous opioids; it will have the same effect when you increase the supply in our streets. Alberta is doing everything it can to oppose safe supply coming from British Columbia on to our campuses and our high schools. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta families have been left to watch their loved ones suffer from addiction with no ability to intervene and given that drugs and addiction have left communities less safe and crime and violence are more prevalent and given that this government has made a commitment to bring forward compassionate intervention, which will give mandated addiction treatment to those who have become a danger to themselves and others, to the minister: why is this so important, this piece of legislation, for the Alberta recovery model?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, our system is built around recovery. At any path along the way we want people to leave addiction into recovery, and for those tragic circumstances – perhaps someone is homeless from maybe my constituency or the member's, found their way to one of our major centres, and they are living in these drug cartel encampments. They have cerebral hypoxia multiple times a week from overdoses. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction is the only one with the call.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They are suffering from cerebral hypoxia, which is overdoses where your respiration stops because of the opioid. They're speedballing methamphetamine and fentanyl on a regular basis. We will not, as a compassionate community, let that person out in the cold on their own. We will intervene. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Funding for Health Promotion

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, under the UCP's leadership preventative care is crumbling before our eyes. The people of entire northeast Calgary are concerned about the termination of the Mosaic PCN active adults program. These programs provide an essential service, promoting healthy lifestyles and positively impacting well-being for community members. In the short term there doesn't appear to be a solution from the government, so can the Health minister explain to my constituents why she is okay with these essential programs simply shutting down?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we have many preventative programs. As a former rehabilitative practitioner working with the developmentally disabled, I know myself how important it is to have early intervention, to have programs in place that people can attend and can also help. But, again, we have to look at all of the situations that are happening across the province. We want to make sure that we're providing services and supports where they're needed. I will look into that particular program that the member opposite is speaking about, but we are committed to Albertans.

Member Boparai: Given that the UCP's proposed restructuring of AHS's cost is going to cost Albertans many of the programs and services that they rely on and given that this restructuring is also going to cost Albertans an estimated \$85 million, meaning they are paying millions just to lose services, to the minister: what is the UCP's real plan? Is it to cut essential preventative care and replace it with private contractors down the road while making Albertans pay for it every step of the way?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is not accurate. What the refocusing is all about is making sure that Albertans get the services and the programs they need in a timely fashion in the locations that are accessible to them. I have gone across the province. We've had over 60 engagements, over 2,000 people now, over 18,000 people; 2,000 in person, and 18,000 that have provided information online. Albertans want to be heard. They are saying the health care isn't working, and we're going to make sure we improve it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Boparai: Given that the active adults program gives seniors an opportunity to improve their health and maintain a higher quality of life and given that this program not only improves the life of Albertans but also saves us health care costs down the road, it seems that everyone wins both now and in the future when programs like active adults are accessible to the community. We should be supporting these programs, not cutting them. Why can't this government see this? What are they missing?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we're adding over a billion dollars to continuing care to make sure that we have programs and supports in place for seniors right across the province. It's the reason why new legislation was brought in in April of last year. It will actually take effect and be proclaimed as of April 1. We brought in new regulations. We're adding funding. We're adding additional supports right across the province because we know with an aging population – right now we have 1 in 7 Albertans over the age of 65; within 20 years that'll be 1 in 5 – we have to make sure that we are providing these investments.

Alberta Advantage Immigration Program Tourism and Hospitality Stream

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to fostering economic growth and addressing labour shortages, ensuring Alberta remains a premier destination for jobs and investment in Canada. As such, the launch of the new tourism and hospitality immigration stream signifies a strategic move to attract experienced workers to fill essential roles within Alberta's vibrant tourism and hospitality sectors. Through you, can the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism provide insights into the newly launched stream and how it will contribute to addressing labour gaps in our tourism and hospitality sectors?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta's tourism industry generates \$10.7 billion in GDP every year and supports 80,000 full-time job equivalents. Alberta tourism-related business represents 3.3 per cent of total business in Alberta and 11 per cent of Canada's tourism-related business. In developing the new tourism hospitality

stream, the government engaged with stakeholders to address acute shortages in this very important industry in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the pivotal role of the Alberta advantage immigration program is nominating individuals for permanent residence based on their contributions to the economy and further given that it is essential to understand how the newly launched tourism, hospitality immigration stream fits within this framework, can the same minister elaborate on how this new stream aligns with the Alberta advantage immigration program, specifically highlighting its criteria and role in attracting skilled workers to Alberta's workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

2:30

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's tourism and hospitality sector is important to Alberta's economy and is struggling with a chronic labour shortage that is impacting future growth. The 11 eligible occupations in this stream reflect the input from most of the sector's key stakeholders and reflect current high needs in this sector. Workers in these jobs have unique skill sets, including needed soft skills. This stream will help attract and retain the needed experienced workers, providing stability to business to focus on growing the visitor economy throughout our beautiful province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the shared jurisdiction on matters of immigration between the federal and provincial governments and given the complex nature of immigration management, characterized by shared responsibilities between federal and provincial authorities, can the minister explain how Alberta's immigration initiatives, including the newly launched stream, align with and support the broader objectives of Canada's immigration system to ensure the effective implementation of immigration policies that benefit both Alberta and Canada as a whole?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is currently far more interest in immigrating to Alberta than we can accommodate with the limited allocations we receive from the federal government. We must ensure that we meet many labour priorities across multiple sectors within our limited nominations. Our immigration strategy is designed to attract skilled workers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and people with trade skills to meet the labour shortage across this province. We will continue to lobby the federal government for a nomination increase as Alberta remains the land of opportunity for many in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Wildland Firefighters

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfire season started a month ago. We know there are already 57 wildfires burning in our province, many of which have been burning underground since last season. Despite this, the UCP laid off last season's wildland firefighters and waited until the beginning of the 2024 wildfire

season to start hiring, with no training time. It looks like the UCP is just hoping that things will work out, but as my colleague from Edmonton-Manning has said, hope is not a strategy. Does the minister realize how dangerous the current wildfire situation really is?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the question. The member has it all wrong when it comes to how we handle our wildfire in this province. At the end of the wildfire season many of our wildfire fighters go back to school to further their education in universities and colleges across the province. We support them during the summer, and they support us during the summer by providing us good wildfire fighting. We have begun the process of rehiring back. Through this winter we did have fires going all winter long, and we had over 200 firefighters on the landscape all through the winter fighting wildfire in our province, protecting Albertans.

Ms Wright: Given that wildland firefighters are exposed to all kinds of short- and long-term dangers, from falling trees to cancers, and given that the AUPE has said that pay and working conditions for Alberta Wildfire workers has gotten to a point where we have a retention and recruitment crisis and given that the UCP didn't seem eager to address any of these issues despite signs that the 2024 wildfire season could in fact be a record setter, what is the minister doing to ensure that our wildland firefighter force is protected, trained, and fully staffed? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we did realize what was going to be happening for this year and expecting the worst but hoping for the best. We still have an opportunity to have some more snow, some more rain that could make a big difference. But we have been hiring. We've had a record number of applications in our recruitment process. People do want to help us fight fire in Alberta. That's been good to see.

When it comes to the dangers, we know that it's a dangerous job fighting wildfire, and we respect our firefighters. We want to make sure that they're safe as they go into this fire season. Again, we have more firefighters than we've had in previous years, and we look forward to being prepared as we go into this fire season.

Ms Wright: Given that presumptive coverage was extended to firefighters who heroically fought the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire, something that our side of the House was proud to call for back in 2022, and given that presumptive coverage for 20 different cancers is now standard for firefighters in Alberta unless, of course, those firefighters are fighting forest fires, will the minister stop with this ridiculous distinction between wildfires and other fires and give wildland firefighters the coverage they deserve?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very serious question that is brought forward, and, yes, we are looking at the opportunities for presumptive coverage for firefighters. We know they provide a valuable service to Albertans, and we cannot diminish that. We want to thank them for their service, for the great work that they do, for putting themselves and their safety on the line each and every day to protect us during wildfire season. I'm going

to be looking at this very closely, and I will be happy to bring forward further information as we gather it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Highway Maintenance and Rehabilitation

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, over 40 per cent of Alberta's highways are chronically in fair, poor, or very poor condition. Alberta drivers and commercial carriers alike deserve transportation corridors that are in top shape. Albertans used to boast that they had the best highways in the country. Now they frequently contact my office to report that their local highways are virtually undriveable. Why is this government satisfied with roadways that are below Alberta's historical standards?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is not going to take any lessons from the NDP when it comes to investing in our roadways. Just the 10-year average in our estimates shows a 42 per cent increase in the rehabilitation of our roads and our bridges. While the NDP maybe is trying to pay some lip service that they would actually be investing in our roads, we're actually putting our money where our mouth is. We're investing billions of dollars, \$3.3 billion just in this year's budget, to rebuild the 64,000 lane kilometres that we have and the over 5,000 bridges that are in our provincial networks, and we're going to continue to do that with the capital plan. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Dach: Given that the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association has stated that this government needs to double its provincial highway investment to properly maintain Alberta roads and given that the preservation cost for an average kilometre of highway is five times less than the cost of reconstruction and given that Alberta highways have reached this poor state of repair because of the government's historical practice of deferring mandatory maintenance, when can Albertans expect their government to devote the required funds and foresight to ensure Alberta highways are all in good condition?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I had a time machine, if I could go back and erase the \$80 billion of failed legacy debt that the NDP saddled every single Albertan with, we would have \$3.3 billion of debt savings that we wouldn't have to have in our budget. But I don't have a time machine. We have to service that debt, that \$3.3 billion. The member asked to double it. That's, coincidentally, the exact same number that our actual budget is this year for everything within Transportation and Economic Corridors – roads, bridges, everything – \$3.3 billion. We could have doubled it had the NDP never existed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that highways in rural municipalities like Cold Lake are woefully underfunded, with Mayor Craig Copeland referring to highway 28 as a "goat path" and given that we hear the same story from municipalities right across Alberta, that the government is ignoring their pleas to properly maintain their highways, and given that these municipalities feel the highway investment they are asking for is but a small fraction of the

revenue they generate for Alberta's economy, when will the minister start listening to rural Alberta, invest equitably to maintain our highways, and return our proud highways to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the MLA in that region has been a fierce advocate in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. The twinning from Bonnyville to Cold Lake, the design work of that, is actually currently under way. Prior to this last budget, it actually had \$5 million to start that work. As well, from Bonnyville to Smoky Lake we are actually designing passing lanes. Obviously, there's a tremendous amount of oil and gas activity in northeastern Alberta, which the NDP doesn't support, and we want to make sure that we have the road network and our economic corridors that can accommodate not just the heavy truck traffic but also keep residents safe in that area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has the call.

Road Construction in Chestermere-Strathmore

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore is one of the best places in Alberta to buy a home, start a business, and raise a family. With its strong rural roots, close proximity to Calgary, and incredible investments in the area such as De Havilland, CGC, Phyto Organix, and Northstar, this place is a growing economic hub. With all this growth there are significantly greater needs for roadways and transportation infrastructure. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: how is Budget 2024 addressing this priority for the residents of Chestermere-Strathmore?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for her advocacy for so many projects in her constituency. Alberta has 64,000 lane kilometres and nearly 5,000 bridges in our provincial highway network, and Budget '24 actually saw a 42 per cent increase in our 10-year average for our highway and bridge investments. This year's construction program in Chestermere-Strathmore has three interchange projects for Chestermere, design work for the Inverlake overpass, and repaving for sections of highway 1 near Strathmore.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given Chestermere-Strathmore's close location to Calgary and given the importance of the Glenmore Trail as a key corridor for my neighbours and others in the Calgary region to commute to and from work, connect with family, and for other important activities, could the same minister please inform this House: what are the government's plans for the improvements of Glenmore Trail?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Glenmore Trail is apparently very popular with the NDP, but it's also an important road for the city of Calgary. Calgary actually initiated a functional planning study in 2018 and is currently conducting a traffic impact assessment for Glenmore Trail. We look forward to the results of that study and working with Calgary to advance this priority

project. This is just another example of how Transportation and Economic Corridors is working with Calgary and so many municipalities to make sure that we can get priority projects built here in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. I appreciate all the good work he's been doing. Given that so many businesses are choosing to invest here and call this amazing province home and given that Alberta has seen significant population growth under this government, particularly in Chestermere-Strathmore, could the same minister please explain how Budget 2024 will address the growing needs of a growing population, including transportation and, particularly, water infrastructure?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right. Budget '24 actually invests \$3.3 billion for the planning, engineering, and road improvements and our capital plan just this year. That actually includes \$900 million that goes directly out in grants to municipalities, and in the member's riding \$250,000 directly is going to the upgrades of the water treatment plant in Strathmore. But with all this good work, Albertans, unfortunately, are still saddled with the \$80 billion of failed NDP legacy debt. We still have to pay off that debt, but we're still going to be building important projects across this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

This concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a petition to present.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to table a citizen-led petition against the national urban park initiative in Alberta – this is very impressive; I mentioned citizen led – approved by Parliamentary Counsel, with nearly 1,000 signatures. These are all people who are very concerned about the federal government and their potential overreach into our river valleys.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Member Irwin: I'd like to table five copies of an article from *Alberta Politics* about Calgary-born-and-raised amazing humans Tegan and Sara – Tegan and Sara: we love them – calling out the UCP for their antitrans policies. This Premier should read it and watch their speech as well because trans rights are human rights.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of an article from the St. Albert *Gazette* on behalf of the Member for St. Albert: St. Albert to Pay 5.7 Per Cent More in Education Property Tax. This was from a 2024 budget analysis meeting.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this brings us to points of order. At 2:04 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questions outside Government Responsibility

Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I most certainly did. I don't rise on a specific point of order so much as on convention. There have been a number of instances since we reconvened the Legislature after Christmas where the members opposite continually ask questions about issues that are not related to government business. I think today you made a very clear point to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall that questions should be directed to the government on government policy, but he did persist in that.

The second part of this unconstitution would be directing comments at an opposite member as opposed to through the chair. The purpose of this procedure, or this convention, is to reduce the perception of personal attacks and ensure that we maintain a high level of decorum in the people's Chamber. I don't feel that that was being respected at the time, so I called the point of order to recognize that, one, we are not having questions on government business and, two, we are addressing members directly and not through the chair, Mr. Speaker. So I did call a point of order, but I leave the ruling, of course, in your capable hands.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I listened with interest to the Government House Leader because he's talking about how we ask questions in this place, and there's actually been quite a deal written about it in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I'm looking at chapter 11, pages 508 through to 510. I would argue that this is not a point of order. I listened carefully to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall but also to the caution that you issued in the first question. Now, on chapter 11, page 508, there are some requirements for questions that are being asked. A member should

- ask a question;
- be brief;
- seek information; and
- ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual Minister addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Elections Alberta, as an independent agency, is subject to the Election Act and implementing the EFCDA, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. The work that they do is of paramount importance not just to our democracy but to this Chamber. Asking questions about business, particularly things that are in the media, particularly things that are pertinent to the operations of the legislation that this House is responsible for, that this government has the ability to change, to me, seems to be eminently in our area of responsibility. We ask questions, as an example, about the Alberta Energy Regulator and what is happening with that independent office, again, because it is the government's responsibility.

Now, page 509 goes on to list the precedents of all the types of questions that should not be asked. For brevity, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to read this all in. I will say that most commonly on points of order to deal with the relevance of questions, the very final bullet point, "concern internal party matters, party or election expenses," is the one most frequently cited. Today's questions could not possibly be considered that unless you consider TBA an internal party matter for the UCP. That is not how the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall framed this. I realize that TBA is a language that the other side immediately perks up on, but making sure that elections legislation and third-party advertising is followed is

incredibly important to this House and this Assembly. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall's, at the very end, final question was: what steps will you take to make sure the rule of law is upheld so that David Parker and all third-party groups comply with election laws? This is absolutely a matter of government business.

Now, I did pay attention, Mr. Speaker, when you cautioned the member earlier, and in the short amount of time that I've had to review *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, I have found a relevant passage that I would like to bring into this debate. In chapter 13, now, it is speaking to repetition and relevance in debate, Mr. Speaker. But, essentially, the argument I would like to make to you is that I know that you are very aware that you have a delicate job and responsibility to make sure that the House is governed correctly and that we are functioning efficiently. However, in making your rulings and defining and enforcing what people can and cannot say, the balance between freedom of speech and allowing our members in the Official Opposition to ask questions of relevance – and again I say that Elections Alberta is governed by the Election Act, EFCDA.

In balancing that, on chapter 13, I quote from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*: "The Speaker must exercise his or her discretion: if the rules are applied too strictly, they have the potential for severely curtailing debate." I worry that we are approaching that line here. I think that asking the government what they think about the application of third-party legislation is relevant. Again, this was not an internal party matter; it is a question for the government about what they will do to make sure that third-party advertisers are dealt with in a fair manner. It is in the public interest. I do not believe this is a point of order.

2:50

At the very end of his comments the Government House Leader also mentioned a concern around personalization. He did not provide a quote. Perhaps with the help of the Blues, you will have that. But it's my understanding that the member and others referred to the Premier and questions to the Premier. I believe that is in order. If that is not, it would be a surprise to me, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you might inform us how we should adjust.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I have a number of comments to make with respect to the questions that were asked by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Make no mistake, Official Opposition House Leader. The Speaker has no feelings about whether or not members of the opposition can ask questions about any third-party organization, including TBA, and to imply anything other than that borders on disingenuousness and perhaps moves in the direction of offence.

What I will say is that even in my admonishing the hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall about asking questions, at no point did I suggest he should not ask a question about a third-party organization, only that he frame it in such a manner that it relates to government business. I have a very difficult time making the connection between this statement, in which he used, "Does the Premier agree with the comments made by David Parker, or will she join [me] in condemning these comments?" – clearly, this is not a position of government business. It's a question for the Premier to provide her personal opinion on the comments which an individual of the public made. I at that time provided the opportunity to the hon. member with respect to phrasing his questions about government business. Let me reiterate: members have the widest ability to ask questions in this Assembly provided that they do so under the conventions and the rules of the Assembly.

I might go on to say that you did a fine job of quoting chapter 11, page 509, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. You chose not to proceed to all of the indications in which the hon. member did not meet the requirements with respect to

- be a statement, representation, argument, or an expression of opinion;
- be hypothetical;
- seek an opinion,

all of which the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall did in the first two instances of his questioning. In the first question he said: “Does the Premier agree that by refusing to comply with election laws, David Parker is threatening the very institution of democracy in this province? Yes or no?” – seeking an opinion of the Premier on a third-party organization, not a question related to government business, and identifies on a number of occasions in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* where the question was not that of government business.

Now, I will relent and accept that in the third question in which the hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall made statements, it is possible that his final question to the Premier, “What steps will you take to uphold the rule of law so that David Parker and . . . third-party groups comply with election laws in this province?” – the challenge is that immediately following two admonishments, the member elected to ask a question that perhaps, if it was his first question, would not have received such a significant admonishment.

So while, on balance, I won’t find a point of order, I think that members of the Assembly can appreciate that the Speaker is at a high level of frustration, particularly with the argument of the point of order and what the Speaker may or may not feel about third-party organizers and my desire to curtail questions about those organizations. Let me be clear one final time. The Speaker takes no position on any third-party organization, be it the one mentioned today or others, but I do expect that when members are questioning during question period, those questions will be about government business. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall would like some tips on how to do that, he’s more than welcome to join me in my office at any point in time. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Is this a request for unanimous consent? The hon. the Member for Grande Prairie?

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 9(1) in order to allow the Assembly to proceed immediately to consideration of third reading of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent that will change the order in which debate will take place this afternoon.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 203

Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 203 here today, and I’m very honoured to rise again to speak once again in support of my Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

This bill represents a very pivotal step for me and, I believe, for our newcomer community as well as fellow Canadians, permanent residents. It really does create a freer and more prosperous Alberta by addressing a very pressing issue that affects not only newcomers to our province but also the future of our entire economy and workforce. This bill is, to me, a great step forward. We’ve done great work, but there is more to do, and this is what this bill is about, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

There are two issues that this bill seeks to remedy. Firstly, we are underutilizing our skilled immigrants’ talents and their newcomer talents. They have credentialing. They have the opportunity to work. They’ve worked in other countries. They’re talented. They’re skilled. We need to be able to utilize that here in Alberta with a pathway forward. Secondly, with the looming labour shortages for various projects we will soon face in very key economic sectors, we need to be able to speed up this process, be able to have key metrics for them to be able to hit and see as they’re going to be able to join the Alberta advantage here in Alberta.

Currently many newcomers to our province face significant barriers when attempting to have their foreign credentials recognized. This is a problem, and we want to be able to solve this by removing the barriers to enter our workforce completely. This completely prevents many newcomers from getting the jobs that are impactful for them, impactful for their families, and impactful to the Alberta economy. Often, you know, to be frank, Mr. Speaker, it’s a waste of their talent and a stifling of our economic growth and their personal wallets as well. We need them participating, and we want to be able to grow this.

Fostering this environment where skilled newcomers can fully utilize their talents benefits our province as a whole. Mr. Speaker, we are a melting pot of different cultures. We need and welcome people here. We talk about the Alberta advantage. People are coming and want to participate. They have a skill set. They’re innovative. They desire to be participating in, well, the backbone and the very foundation of, in many ways, the economic driver of Canada. This is so key. They want to join this. They want to be a leader. They want to join the leadership here in Alberta. They want to be able to showcase and help lead this country forward. We have many opportunities to do so, but the credentialing does matter in order for them to land those jobs, land the opportunity for them to bring their families and become, well, not just hopeful Canadian citizens in the future but participate here in Alberta and live here.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, I do believe this is about giving them an opportunity to succeed and contribute to our workforce. We want them to be able to succeed. This is about removing the red tape. It’s about removing the red tape in the credentialing recognition process, and we can uphold these values, the values of opportunity, the value of fairness, that are just extremely important to our government and the province at large.

With the labour shortages over the next five years we’re looking at a couple of main industries: health care, construction, and manufacturing. These three areas are areas that we all look at as being key to whether we have a high-quality way of life, high-quality opportunities here, and this is about welcoming those people. Alberta already has many skilled workers. We’ve seen this in the nurse bridging program already, but we have more people

waiting on their credentials. We have more people ready to go to work today in a field that they're qualified for, so this is about being ready to fill those existing vacancies in our labour market.

Just yesterday I spoke to a doctor who has worked across the world, has 13 years of education from some very esteemed educational universities right across in first-world countries, Mr. Speaker, and he's working at the lowest level of energy, emergency response. Not only is he not utilizing these skills, but he's also working at what I believe is a two-week course in order to get a job. So not only is he overqualified, but while he is working in an industry of safety and health, we're not utilizing his skill set to be able to move forward and also present the opportunities to him and his family who have moved here from across the world in order to participate in the Alberta advantage.

Again, I just received another e-mail from a young man who has his master's in pharmacy, and he's working as an assistant. He volunteered over the last several years a couple of thousand hours trying to get his hours up. Mr. Speaker, this young man has spent and put in the time in order to become. He's written tests and he's passed these tests, but the credentialing way forward hasn't been an easy one for him.

To me, Mr. Speaker, this bill is about laying the groundwork out for us to be able to welcome people here, get them high-quality jobs, and be able to have them join what I consider a fantastic society and an opportunity for him to lead his family well. This is about streamlining an effective system for recognizing foreign credentials, really, such that no talent of a new Albertan is left behind. This is going to function as a voice for skilled newcomers, advocating for changes that facilitate their integration into the Alberta workforce.

As I just said, we have seen many stories of newcomers working low-skilled jobs to support themselves despite holding credentials and expertise in higher paid, higher demand fields. As I said prior, Mr. Speaker, we have engineers that are working as janitors. That is inappropriate for us to ask of anyone who has a high level of skill. We need engineers to be engineers; we need them to work in the jobs that are appropriate for them. As I said prior, this not only represents a huge loss just for the individual but for the entire province. A single person can make such a large difference to our province, and I want to acknowledge that. That's what this is about, about bringing that forward and making sure that we can quickly and effectively welcome people and get them the jobs that they so well deserve.

Just speaking about growth in general, Mr. Speaker, the growth under this government is just undeniable. My constituents in Grande Prairie do serve in many ways as a microcosm of the expansion of Alberta. We have many industries that are booming, and we are looking to continue to see our population surge, and we need more skilled professionals in my constituency. It's becoming more critical the further along that we expand the Alberta advantage. The challenge is that northern municipalities like Grande Prairie face a unique set of challenges, particularly one in health care but in various other industries, too. In order to keep pace with the demands of our expanding health care needs, it is imperative that we tap into the talented pool of skilled immigrants and newcomers. This is just such a key opportunity, such a key piece of legislation that I do see that this is very, very important.

Along with that, our government's mandate to grow Alberta's economy and create jobs does tie into the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, Bill 203. It's about attracting and retaining skilled individuals from across the world to fill labour gaps. We've seen announcement after announcement after announcement, and people want to come to Alberta. They want to participate in Alberta. But we also need the workforce in order to

do it. This is about fostering innovation. It's about fostering and driving productivity and continuing to position Alberta as a global leader across industries. We've seen this over and over. We've put in the work, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta is driving the way.

This is about removing those barriers to credential recognition so we can get those opportunities here, continue to expand those opportunities, and open the doors for skilled newcomers to just be able to contribute to our economy. This includes nurses. It includes engineers. It includes tradespeople, professionals from various fields. They bring their wealth of knowledge and experience to our workforce, and it propels our industries forward. Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to see that we are welcoming many people here, and it is an amazing thing to be participating in.

You know, to wrap up here, Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about meeting short-term labour demands. This is about growing and laying the very foundation for long-term economic growth and prosperity. This is about welcoming people to Alberta, to say that this is a great place to be, that this is the place where you want to spend your time and stay here. We welcome anyone with those credentials and opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Any others wishing to speak to Bill 203? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This country has given so much to many of the newcomers to this country, to this place. This country has opened its doors, its arms and welcomed people from all across the globe and given them hope, given them the resources that they need to succeed. That is why Canada is called the land of opportunities.

But one thing that this country has not done well is recognizing the foreign credentials, the skills, the abilities of all the foreign-trained individuals, and that has severely impacted the economy of this country. This failure has impacted the mental health of those amazing, well-trained, hard-working people who came to this country to build a life, a life where they have self-respect, rights, and they could utilize their skills at full potential.

I meet these people on a daily basis as I am honoured to represent the riding of Calgary-North East, which has a more than 70 per cent ethnic population. I meet many people who bring their certificates to my office to show me how qualified they are. They show me their experience certificates. They tell me their stories, and most of the time they get tears in their eyes while they are telling me their stories. They come to me with the hope that I could be of some help to them. I personally know many doctors who are driving taxis and working as security guards, always working hard with the hope that one day their skills will be recognized and their hard work will bear fruit.

I met one doctor from Africa who brought all of his certificates to me and told me that he was a senior medical officer back home. He came to this country with the hope of a successful life. Canada accepted his credentials during the immigration process but refused to recognize his skills in the actual market where he could actually practise. He cleared all the exams but didn't get the residency here in Canada. He even tried in the United States, and he even went to the U.K., but nothing changed. He came back and is now working as a security guard. He had big dreams when he came here. He gave his best. He tried his best. When he and his wife were about to leave my office, he said to me: I'm not asking for help for myself. He said: even if I get my education recognized right now, I will be retired in the next few years. He said that it was about the many new young people coming to this country and to our province. He was

almost convinced that there was no help coming his way. This does not have to be this way, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

We must start respecting the foreign-trained individuals and their skills. We must help them to contribute to our economy. We must provide a clear pathway for the foreign-trained skilled workers. This Bill 203 does not go far enough to support the foreign-trained skilled workers.

If I'm not mistaken, this government voted down Bill 202 by saying that they don't believe in creating more committees. Now they are putting forward Bill 203, which will create a new bureaucratic body despite the existence of the fairness for newcomers office. This raises serious questions about the government's ability to address this issue. Foreign-trained workers are looking for action from this government. They have not asked for another committee. I know this for a fact because this government has not consulted with them. On this side of the House we regularly talk to those skilled workers, and they demand action.

Not only is this government failing at improving the recognition of foreign credentials; it is now making it more expensive to come here. In Budget 2024 the UCP has proposed an increase in educational assessment fees and AINP application fees. This will increase the burden of new immigrants by \$400. This government has no additional resources for the fairness for newcomers office.

There are some serious questions that people have regarding the operation and functioning of this committee, that will be created under this bill. How does this government justify the committee's primarily government-appointed composition? Is there a plan with this government to include nongovernmental stakeholders for a broader perspective? This government does not have a very trustworthy record when it comes to transparency, public scrutiny, or accountability. How will it be ensured that the decision-making will be transparent and will be subject to public scrutiny?

Alberta is a diverse province. We have people from all across the globe with different ethnic backgrounds. Diversity is our strength, and it must be reflected in this committee. If the people who are impacted are not involved, consulted, or included, it will mean that this government is not serious about helping those people.

This is the government who has a poor record when it comes to interference in independent offices, favouring their insiders and friends. The Premier interfered in the independent process to protect Artur Pawlowski. They have also appointed their insider friend Lyle Oberg to the board of Alberta Health Services. This government must make it clear: how will this committee prevent any potential bias? The minister is directly involved in appointing the members.

It is important for elected officials to listen to the concerns and consult with the stakeholders involved and impacted with the laws being made in this Assembly. I know this because I did my job well when I presented Bill 201 on protecting public health care in our province. I consulted with doctors, I consulted with health care workers, and I consulted with community members who were directly impacted by that bill. It would be nice to know which stakeholders have been consulted by this government before introducing this bill, as I have spoken to various stakeholders who advocated to help newcomers, and they have told me that they have not been consulted on this bill.

How will the committee co-ordinate with the existing recognition process by professional regulatory organizations? What measures are in place to avoid duplication? This bill does not address these questions. What resources will be allocated to support the committee? All committees need resources so that they can function well, they can put forward the results that will impact the lives of

many newcomers, and this committee is no different. This committee does deserve the resources, and this government must provide them and must make it clear in the bill. What are the plans for ongoing training to keep the committee updated on evolving trends in foreign credential recognition?

This bill also mandates the committee to submit a report within a year. How does this government ensure this timeline is realistic, especially considering the complexity of the issues the committee addresses?

Mr. Speaker, these are some serious concerns that I've heard from stakeholders. There are people in my community who get frustrated when I always talk about foreign credential recognition with them because they have been trying since they came to Canada. They have to raise their families, they have to work the jobs to keep the food on the table, and with the rising cost of living in this province of Alberta, they are even struggling more. They would have been in better shape, their lives would have been way different if their skills would have been recognized way earlier, in the time when they came here, and they would have been living a way better life. Unfortunately, that is not the case with the people in my riding. They are still struggling to put food on the table, to pay for their education for their next generations. The doctor that I just explained, that I gave the example of from Africa: he explained his entire story and the struggle to me.

This bill isn't the right step, and I request all the members to please listen to their consciences before voting on the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I will recognize the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to speak to the third reading of the private member's bill, Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, moved by my hon. colleague and friend the MLA for Grande Prairie. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the hon. member for introducing this bill, which addresses the pressing issue of foreign credential recognition in our province.

In an era characterized by increased global mobility, Alberta emerges as a beacon of opportunity for individuals from diverse backgrounds, yet the integration of foreign credentials into our province's workforce has posed some significant challenges. Recognizing this issue, our government has taken proactive steps to address it. In 2019 the Fair Registration Practices Act was passed to streamline the registration process to ensure equitable, efficient, and transparent registration processes for qualified individuals seeking licences from Alberta's regulatory body. This legislation also led the establishment of the fairness for newcomers office, helping to ensure that internationally trained newcomers seeking to work in regulated professions and trades can leverage their education and experience to reach their full potential and help grow our province's economy.

Mr. Speaker, within my ministry the international qualifications assessment service serves as a cornerstone in recognizing education and training obtained abroad. Through IQAS we not only provide essential assessments but also offer a wealth of country-specific resources on international education systems through our website. Additionally, our ministry conducts stakeholder training, provides resources, and hosts information webinars all aimed at supporting individuals navigating the complexities of credential recognition.

In the fiscal year of 2022-23 IQAS completed approximately 18,000 assessments, affirming individuals' qualifications and facilitating their integration into the workforce. Despite these efforts, Mr. Speaker, much work still remains to be done. Bill 203 marks a significant step towards fostering a future where expertise

and skills, irrespective of their origin, are duly recognized and valued within Alberta's workforce.

3:20

At its core the goal of Bill 203 is to establish the foreign credential advisory committee, a proactive advocate ready to enhance the integration experience of internationally trained individuals in Alberta. By championing a more streamlined and efficient credential advisory system, the committee envisions a future where newcomers' talents and qualifications are not hindered by bureaucratic hurdles.

This bill is designed to address the long-standing challenges encountered by internationally trained individuals seeking to establish themselves in Alberta. Many skilled immigrants looking to enter the workforce in Alberta often face undervalued or unrecognized qualifications, impeding their ability to contribute fully to their professions. This not only affects individuals but also represents a loss for our province as valuable skills remain untapped.

This legislation serves as a bridge connecting newcomers' valuable skills with the needs of Alberta's workforce. The advisory committee will act as an expert guide, understanding the challenges of internationally qualified people and collaborating with regulatory bodies and employers to create clearer pathways for newcomers, ensuring their skills are seamlessly integrated into our workforce.

This committee will be tasked with simplifying the acknowledgement of foreign credentials through an examination or review of current laws and regulations, including those established by professional organizations. By reviewing processes adopted in the other provinces across Canada, the committee aims to pinpoint effective strategies for improving the recognition of international qualifications.

With carefully structured supports the committee will bring together representatives from various ministries, including Immigration and Multiculturalism; Advanced Education; Health; Jobs, Economy and Trade; as well as Technology and Innovation. Each member will contribute their respective expertise to address labour market shortage, support autocredentialing for workers with diverse backgrounds, and ensure Alberta remains a hub for innovation. Through Bill 203 we affirm our commitment to fairness, equity, and recognition of immense talent that newcomers bring to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it's good news for Albertans. Bill 203 directly impacts the province's ability to harness the full potential of its diverse population. Recognizing and valuing qualifications of internationally trained individuals is crucial for Alberta's economy and workforce development. By aiding the recognition of foreign credentials, Bill 203 ensures that skilled newcomers can contribute their expertise to Alberta's industries, thus enhancing productivity and innovation across various sectors.

Bill 203 reflects Alberta's commitment to fairness and inclusivity. By establishing a committee dedicated to advising on foreign credential recognition, the province demonstrates its dedication to creating a more equitable and transparent system for newcomers. This not only aligns with Alberta's values, our diversity and opportunity, but also fosters a sense of belonging among immigrants, ultimately strengthening the social fabric of our province.

Furthermore, Bill 203 has significant implications for Alberta's economy's competitiveness on a global scale. As the province competes for top talent in an increasingly interconnected world, ensuring that internationally trained individuals can seamlessly integrate into the workforce is paramount. By removing barriers to

credential recognition, Alberta can attract and retain skilled professionals, positioning itself as a destination of choice for international talent and bolstering its competitive edge in the global market.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is not just about recognizing qualifications; it's about unlocking untapped potential. Many newcomers to Alberta possess valuable skills and experiences that remain unutilized due to barriers in the credential recognition processes. By addressing these barriers, Bill 203 paves the way for individuals to fully leverage their talents and contribute to their communities and achieve their aspirations in their new home province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation emphasizes our devoted dedication to inclusivity and, acknowledging the vast talent of newcomers, harnesses the untapped potential within our diverse population. The importance of this bill is vital as it attempts to address persistent challenges encountered by the internationally trained individuals who select Alberta as their new home. Bill 203 stands as a testament to our pledge to forge a more robust, dynamic Alberta where everyone, irrespective of their background, can play a role in our collective advancement.

I fully urge all members of the House to lend support to this bill. This is a very important bill, Mr. Speaker. I can share this with you that in 2019 the Conference Board of Canada indicated that if everybody was recognized for their education in this country, they would be contributing almost \$17 billion to the GDP. It's very important that we support this kind of bill and particularly Bill 203.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, members.

We'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to speak.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak for a few minutes – I would say moments, but it'll be minutes – about my support of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Certainly, while I am supportive of the bill, I do nonetheless have a few concerns.

I absolutely appreciate that the bill speaks about advocating for a more efficient system to assess and recognize foreign credentials. However, my chief concern is: why now? We know that we're in the midst of an affordability crisis and a housing crisis, and we also know that many folks who are newcomers suffer from both of these crises disproportionately, particularly those who are women. Without doubt, newcomers face great barriers, and it is indeed the job of government to smooth not only that individual's path but also to create the conditions – long-lasting conditions – that truly will change things and will not simply be, as one of my colleagues put it, though I'm paraphrasing at the moment, a plan to plan for a plan.

I might say that I have some memories of working for APEGA in my younger years, so I do have some experience with newcomer engineers that came over from different countries and the difficulties that they indeed faced achieving appropriate credentials so that they could indeed contribute to Alberta's economy. Also, in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Beverly-Clareview is host to many, many newcomers from many different places who bring with them many different experiences. In fact, according to a 2021 Stats Canada data table – a very big table – we've had about 6,000 folks who have immigrated and made their homes here just in the last 15 years alone, and in the last 20 years that number rises by another 2,500. So, certainly, the northeast of Edmonton is a real drawing point for newcomers.

I know that folks in Beverly-Clareview welcome newcomers, value them, know the work that they do, and know the important

contributions that they make not only locally but, as I said earlier, to the entire province. Again, folks are absolutely supportive of this sort of activity. Folks are supportive of newcomers, and that's why, of course, we also have lots of nonprofits whose job it is to lend other sorts of supports, including job support and pathways to credentialing. But those folks who work in that nonprofit sector, again, are also very mindful of what people who do come to Canada need right now. They not only need to be credentialed, but they also need to feed themselves and their families, and they need a really terrific, long-term place to live. This is not an either/or equation; it's an equation with the word "and" in it.

Although the underlying goals in this bill, I know, are things that we all understand are necessary – we want folks to see Alberta as a leader. We understand that given labour shortages, both current labour shortages and those that are looming, it is indeed incumbent upon us as the leaders in this province to attract skilled workers. We also know that we don't want to be seen as taking skilled workers from other jurisdictions in Canada, and we also want to make sure that those who decide to make Alberta their home have an opportunity to enjoy a prosperous future here, have a job that provides for their now as well as their future.

3:30

I'm also conscious of the fact that we already have a couple of initiatives that are taking place. We have the Alberta advantage immigration program. We have, as the minister talked about, the Fair Registration Practices Act. We've got the fairness for newcomers office, and that, of course, is the office which identifies fair and transparent governance practices. We also have a couple of summits that have occurred, the fairness for newcomers summit. There is lots of information that's provided on government websites to newcomers in terms of requirements, whether or not a labour market impact assessment is required.

It does seem to me that already, in fact, there are plenty of vehicles and initiatives that are available to make sure the work is done in a timely manner. If there are gaps that folks across the aisle are seeing, I'm wondering if there might be different vehicles to fill those gaps rather than to simply establish another committee.

Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act: certainly its mandate is fairly straightforward, to review legislation and other rules, to evaluate the process in place that exists currently in other jurisdictions, and then, finally, to make recommendations to the minister. I also do want to echo the words of my colleague when they talked about perhaps how quickly all of that is expected to be done. Having been a part of many committees, it's very tough to get the committee to establish rules, much less to actually do the work of that committee. I do wonder about that one-year timeline.

Again, certainly, as I mentioned earlier, I absolutely understand the barriers faced by newcomers in Alberta. In fact, I just wanted to point out that there was an *Edmonton Journal* article from about six months ago, and it had to do with the city of Edmonton's second annual state of immigration and settlement review. They noted, much like I know we all know, that many newcomers disproportionately face barriers like poverty, language, racism, discrimination, PTSD, unemployment, nonrecognition of credentials, and the lack of affordable housing. Of course, that means that they're often excluded from things that are meant to be accessible for all, again noting that newcomers struggle daily with housing, employment, and food security.

All of this, as my colleagues both on the other side and this side have rightly pointed out, points to an increasingly complex issue, but to understand the complexity of the issue involved, particularly since a number of regulatory bodies are involved, I'm just

wondering if we're truly interested in getting the work done and if a committee, again, is the best vehicle for that, again noting that there are laudable goals but making the point that these are goals that the government has been chasing for a while.

We know that there's crossministry work that's going on. We know that the mandate letter of the minister is very clear in terms of what the job of the ministry and therefore the department is. We note that the governmental office is supposed to be working already with regulatory bodies, helping those regulatory bodies and government departments to review registration and assessment practices and to indeed make recommendations to those regulatory bodies.

Again, it does seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that much of what's happening in this bill mirrors work that is already being done by other bodies. I'm wondering as well if the first job of the office, the fairness for newcomers office, might also fit in with the portion of the proposed committee's mandate that talks about working with regulatory bodies to streamline, simplify, and accelerate the assessment of qualifications. It would make sense to me that in an effort to work with those regulatory bodies, again, and to find some other understanding of what jurisdictions in Canada are doing to smooth the process for newcomers to Canada – if that might not be better served simply in the office that already exists, in the department areas that already exist, and finding that, really, just there's a simple extension of the work the office is already doing. Again, as I've noted before, I'm not sure that a committee is the right place to put all of this.

In terms of the committee's makeup we know that there'll be 13 members, each appointed by different ministers. It's certainly important to have that crossministerial work going on, but I do note that there doesn't appear to be a plan for nongovernmental stakeholders. Where are the voices of the newcomers themselves, and how will those voices be centred in the committee's work? Given that the ministers have purview over who it is that they will in fact be appointing, I'm wondering: are there any expectations in terms of who the ministers might look at appointing, particularly in terms of the diversity of such a committee?

I'll begin to wrap up, I suppose, but I'm not entirely certain why we require the oomph of a bill, an act, when we already expect that ministries work together to collaborate on initiatives that are already serving a multifaceted purpose. Why not, then, simply have the work that this bill is talking about in terms of a committee be an expectation in terms of the work that both the department and the fairness for newcomers office are simply expecting to be?

I also wonder about some of the work that might have been done prior to this bill actually being introduced in terms of what stakeholders were involved before the introduction of it. I note that when British Columbia was going through something very similar, they really had, like, a three-pronged approach: talk to folks before, talk to folks during, and talk to folks after the legislation has already been introduced.

I also note the recent Premier's Summit on Fairness for Newcomers. We've had a couple of those, and one would presume that there'd be reports that then can be actioned on, and I'm wondering where those reports might be and what the actions might be that might work themselves into being actual initiatives of this government.

Again, I do indeed support the bill but with many questions.

The Acting Speaker: Good. Thank you. The member referred to an article from the *Edmonton Journal*. Maybe table that for the benefit of all members.

I recognize the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to speak.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity during the last sitting of this legislative session to speak in favour of Bill 203. I mentioned how my parliamentary secretary role had me speaking and listening to Ukrainian evacuees and other newcomers across Alberta. I've shared how so many of those I spoke to have been thanking our government for the excellent supports Alberta offers. I haven't stopped talking, speaking to Ukrainian evacuees since then, and they've continued to praise Alberta for how we have welcomed them with open arms.

And that isn't all these newcomers are telling me, Mr. Speaker. They don't just appreciate the supports available; they want to contribute to Alberta's economic growth, give back to the province that has taken them in. However, an outdated and frustratingly complex process for credential recognition has prevented so many evacuees from pursuing careers in their areas of expertise. These are people who simply want to work hard and contribute to our society. Instead of finding gainful employment in their field of expertise, where they could support themselves and their families by contributing to the economy and filling a need, they find themselves working at lower paying jobs that do not match their skill sets, relying on the goodwill of organizations and food banks to survive. That's not beneficial to anyone, and that's just not right.

The situation I described becomes even more alarming when projections anticipate 3,000 unfilled vacancies in key sectors like health care, manufacturing, construction, and technology by 2030. There are so many obvious needs in our labour market, and new Albertans could help fill them. Thanks to our government's pro-growth policies, we're seeing record investments and thousands of jobs created for Albertans, but these companies still need more workers. They need workers with specialized skills and training. They need workers with certain types of experience, yet the Ukrainian newcomers, who have all had these things and more, are too often unable to fill these needs due to an outdated and clunky regulatory process. That's why I have no doubt many are filling out the survey on betterfornewcomers.ca to make getting to work in Alberta easier not only for themselves but for all newcomers.

The issue is not limited to the Ukrainian evacuees either. New Albertans have faced difficulties in getting their credentials recognized for years. I remember once I was in an Uber with a driver who was a new Albertan. We struck up a conversation on that ride, and he told me about how he moved to our beautiful province from another country, hoping to find a better life for himself and his family. He and his family were not free in the country they had come from, and he wanted his children to live in a free, democratic society where the potential you hold is yours to use and develop for the betterment of all rather than a tool for an authoritarian government to use to oppress its people. I asked him what he did before he came to Canada, and he told me he was a scientist with a PhD. I should have been shocked at this – what was a well-educated, intelligent scientist doing driving an Uber? – but I wasn't shocked or even that surprised because, Mr. Speaker, we've heard of so many stories just like this one.

3:40

It's no secret that the credential recognition process is failing new Albertans and long-time Albertans alike. If you're looking for a reason to support Bill 203, every "We're hiring" sign in a business's window or brilliant scientist driving an Uber should give you one. We know that there are hundreds and thousands of qualified and competent individuals in our province who are unable to work in their area of expertise, and we know how essential it is that we find a way to streamline the credential recognition process.

This has been a priority for our government since we were first elected in 2019, and with the recent influx of evacuees from

Ukraine the pressing necessities of this bill have become more and more apparent. When our newcomers can succeed, work hard, support their families, and contribute to our powerful Albertan economy, we all benefit.

When we think of groundbreaking bills like this one, we often don't associate that with words like "common sense," "reasonable," and "obvious," yet I think these are the best adjectives to describe Bill 203. It isn't groundbreaking because it shatters the status quo or because it will revolutionize life as we know it but because it makes sense. It is breaking ground on an issue both my constituents and I are very interested in. It will make our credentialing system in Alberta more logical and put newcomers in Alberta in the best position to help themselves and our whole province thrive.

For many of the Ukrainian evacuees who want to work hard, support their loved ones, and give back to society that has generously taken them in at their time of need; for the new Albertan who came here seeking a better opportunity for their kids but is denied their sense of worth through his trade; and for you and I, Mr. Speaker, who benefit from the economical and societal contributions and the incredible potential of these new Albertans, I call upon all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this common-sense proposal. Support Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen to speak.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again. *Groundhog Day*: another day, another committee to talk and talk and talk some more about foreign credentialing. This has been an issue in our economy for – oh, my – at least 40 years, since I have been practising for not quite that long. Foreign credentialing lies in the hands of the self-regulating professions, and I'm just curious about how this committee will help with foreign credentialing without representation from those professional associations that are ultimately going to be responsible for ensuring that people from all over the world are credentialed.

Make no mistake, this is a dire economic imperative for us as Canadians to allow people to practise in their professions and help address some of the critical labour shortages that we have all throughout our economy. At the same time it's a societal obligation that we have people who moved here in good faith in order to practise their profession and were allowed to, you know, have their credentials accepted by the immigration authorities in Canada and suddenly are not permitted to practise, with horrific consequences, as some of some of my colleagues here have talked about. So, yes, I will be voting for Bill 203.

I can't help but think that it is just one more excuse to avoid doing something. We have a fairness for newcomers office, that has a budget of about half a million dollars a year, that is tasked with helping foreign credential recognition. If the government wanted to, they could make it a higher priority. They could make it a higher government priority, maybe, you know, pick a profession and work with them and figure out how to get a scalable mechanism for recognizing foreign credentials and have rules in place and have a rules-based pathway where people coming from various different countries can actually follow the path and then get their credentials recognized. In fact, nothing like that exists.

The tragedy is that this committee won't create something like that because this committee doesn't have representation from the accrediting bodies that will make that happen. For the last, oh, my goodness, how many decades have I been speaking to cab drivers who tell me, "Yes, I'm a surgeon"? When I meet wait staff in a

restaurant and they tell me, “Oh, yeah, I’m an engineer”: just the sheer and tragic waste of human potential that that represents. Over many, many decades and over every single one of those years there has been a government in place that has said: oh, yeah, we’re doing something about foreign credentialing; you just wait. Now we have another committee. Fantastic.

What I think is important, what I would like to see is a recognition that we have self-regulated professions that are responsible for credentialing. It’s those self-regulated professions that need to start creating pathways for credentialing and for recognition of foreign credentials. Make no mistake; I’m fully cognizant of the challenges. As a professional myself I’m fully cognizant of the challenges of understanding curricula, of validating experience, of language requirements, of even adaptation in the engineering profession, adaptation to cold weather here in Canada and engineering design standards that have to take that into account. These are hard problems.

I by no means blame the regulatory bodies for the situation that we find ourselves in, yet we are in much more of a delicate situation than we have been in at periods in the past, because we have very real labour shortages combined with a very real incapacity to build large infrastructure in this country and with a very real shortage of labour, especially in our health professions. We need to start recognizing people and getting them practising in their professions, because that’s good for everyone. We need to have the government actually treat it as a priority.

I fear that striking another committee and waiting around for a year, a year where nothing is going to get done, is not sending the right message. I fear that it’s not the right path. I fear that it’s actually going to slow down the recognition of foreign credentialing.

Here we are. It’s *Groundhog Day* yet again. It is just more lip service. It is just more talk. It is more talk about talking so that we can talk some more. What I think that we need is a little bit of courage. I think that we need a little bit of effectiveness. I think that we need a government that actually treats this as a priority and actually starts to get to work.

I’ll be supporting the bill. It’s got my vote. But, you know, I just can’t help but think that it would be better to have some real action rather than another committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, with about three minutes left for debate.

3:50

Mr. Wright: Three minutes. Okay. I’ll speed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express support for Bill 203, introduced by the Member for Grande Prairie. This legislation aims to establish a more efficient and streamlined credential advisory system, a crucial step in fostering growth and opportunities for both newcomers and established residents in Alberta.

The reputation of the Alberta advantage has attracted people from across the globe, Mr. Speaker. They’re seeking new opportunities in our thriving province. Our industries flourish, and it’s evident that a cohesive and effective credentialing advisory system will be essential to us moving forward.

Many families in my charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, like numerous throughout the whole province, have encountered challenges when their prior education and talent are not duly acknowledged upon arrival. A great example are the many

stories of individuals who are doctors, lawyers, or nurses in their home countries who move to Alberta, only to find themselves struggling to secure employment.

A few recent examples from my constituency were people that I met with over the last few weeks. One woman was a nurse in her home country, but after moving to Canada with her family, she could only find work in fast food. Another is a doctor, both with civilian and combat experience. He’s now working as a mid-level manager in retail. Their experiences are a stark reminder that our system can be improved and that our current system needs help to recognize and utilize the skills of talented individuals.

The essence of Bill 203 lies in the creation of the Alberta foreign credential advisory committee. This pioneering committee, the first of its kind in Canada, would advocate for and propose recommendations to establish a more efficient credential system. By doing so, Alberta would gain a competitive edge in attracting and recognizing the ability of skilled workers. Alberta has had a long recognized history as the ideal place to move to start a business, and Alberta is also the ideal place to start a family.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member’s public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Grande Prairie to close debate on Bill 203.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate everyone speaking to the bill and also really appreciate today the unanimous consent from this entire House to be able to move this forward. Thank you, everyone, for that. It means the world.

Just in closing, one, thank you for the opportunity. Thank you as well for the opportunity to speak to this, to present this bill. I think it’s going to be a great opportunity for our newcomers in Alberta to be able to get their credentials recognized faster, more efficiently, and be able to start taking advantage of the Alberta advantage here in Alberta as we are the backbone of Canada. I am so excited to be able to hopefully welcome further newcomers here.

Just to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I do have a few thank yous. I would just be remiss to not thank and express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has played an incredible role in Bill 203: designing it and working on it, refining it. You know, first of all, I would like to thank Elina Pachon. She’s been dedicated, her expertise. She’s done a tireless job, incredible efforts in crafting this legislation into what it is today. Thank you, Elina. Your commitment to this, to continually advance foreign credential recognition, is commendable. Thank you for that. I’m very thankful for your work on this. Thank you for the many late nights and early mornings as we do that.

I would also like to thank John Hurley and Neil Singh – your insights and expertise have been very invaluable in refining this bill and ensuring its success – as well as the LAO Parliamentary Counsel office for their support throughout the drafting process. Just really well done. Thank you, all, for helping along the way.

I would also like to thank Tim Gerwing and Marc-Andre Morin and just our entire communications team, who have done a bang-up job helping me share about what this bill really can mean for newcomers here in Alberta and spreading the good news of, really, what the impact can be. Thank you, both.

Thank you to all the ministers. I want to recognize the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism for their unwavering dedication and hard work on this initiative as well as the ministries of Advanced Education, Jobs, Economy and Trade, Health, and

Technology and Innovation for all their support. Just incredible. It showcases our government's willingness to collaborate, commitment to excellence, commitment to get these projects off the ground. I'm just really thankful for the willingness of our entire government to bring forward a really cool and really amazing opportunity as this bill. Thank you, all.

I also would like to thank my family – your support in this has been huge – who are here as well today. My wife and my young baby, Creed, are here. Thank you for coming.

And thank you to my constituents, too, for sending me your stories. It really mattered as we've crafted this. I just want to say that you've been heard, and we deeply care that you're here and willing to participate in the Alberta advantage, so thank you.

I know that that is just a short list, that there are many more to thank, and there's been a huge list of individuals who have played both big and small parts in shaping this bill. I just want to thank you with all my heart. Your contributions matter. I do believe that Alberta's future is bright because of all the dedication on this bill as well and all the hard work on foreign credentials. We couldn't have done it without a big team, and I really thank everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity as well.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Amery | Hunter | Sawhney |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Jean | Schow |
| Batten | Johnson | Schulz |
| Boitchenko | Jones | Sigurdson, L. |
| Bouchard | Kayande | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Brar | LaGrange | Sinclair |
| Ceci | Loewen | Singh |
| Cyr | Long | Stephan |
| de Jonge | Lovely | Sweet |
| Dyck | Lunty | Tejada |
| Ellingson | McIver | Turton |
| Elmeligi | Nally | van Dijken |
| Fir | Neudorf | Wiebe |
| Getson | Nicolaides | Williams |
| Glubish | Nixon | Wilson |
| Guthrie | Petrovic | Wright, J. |
| Haji | Phillips | Wright, P. |
| Hayter | Pitt | Yao |
| Hoyle | Rowswell | Yaseen |
| Totals: | For – 57 | Against – 0 |

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 203 read a third time]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 204

Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis has risen.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 204. There are a few things about this bill that concern me greatly. This bill has been written to be mostly about the idea of an urban national park in the Edmonton river valley.

I want to just provide a few key facts that I think inform the reason why I am opposed to this bill but also why we should reject this bill in Committee of the Whole. There is recognition that the Edmonton river valley is incredibly important culturally, environmentally; it has great importance to the city, to the people of Edmonton, and to Indigenous groups. The UCP as a party supported the heritage river designation, which is a federal designation, so there is interest in recognizing officially the importance of this river valley.

The other thing is that, basically, a group of people have come together to try to seek increased protection for the river valley. They have approached Parks Canada to investigate the possibility of an urban national park. The province has been invited and has participated in this process so far, but the province chose to remove themselves from that conversation. This bill is saying that a municipality cannot work directly with the federal agency to create an urban national park without the explicit permission of the province, but the province was there, and the province chose to leave. So that kind of doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

I think we need to ask ourselves: why this piece of legislation, and why now? This urban national park is still just in the proposal phase; it is not ready to be designated. The current framework would allow for the land to remain in municipal hands and does not involve a land transfer, so we have to ask ourselves: why are we here? Why are we having this conversation around this legislation when what is currently in place already protects the rights of the municipality to manage the land that is within their land base? And where is the UCP commitment to protect the North Saskatchewan River?

The UCP has designated Big Island provincial park, but they haven't yet done anything with that. It's not enough to draw a line on a map, Mr. Chair. We actually have to do something with protected lands; usually create a management plan, do some public consultation on what the public would like to see done with that land. None of those things have happened yet. This should be up to the citizens of Edmonton. It is their river valley; it is their place that they enjoy recreating in and using. I as an undergraduate at the University of Alberta did many biology labs in the river valley, too. There are a lot of really cool things happening in there, and urban national parks are very important.

Going back to the national urban parks policy, which is under the National Parks Act, I think it's important to consider what existing pieces of legislation are already there. The National Parks Act already requires provincial government consultation and approval before a national park is created, so in essence this bill becomes redundant and superfluous because a federal bill already requires approval of the province. But what this bill does is that it stops a municipality from negotiating with a federal agency except under prescribed conditions by the Governor General. But why? The National Parks Act already requires that conversation to happen.

4:20

There are three core objectives to an urban national park. One is to conserve nature; two, connecting people with nature; and, three, advancing reconciliation with Indigenous people. I think we need to ask ourselves why the members opposite are opposed to those three core objectives. What is going on that we can't have a conversation about how to do this?

The national urban parks policy also requires that local contacts and interests of partners and stakeholders are reflected in the management planning and in the designation of the urban national park. They must have a governing authority that is responsible and accountable, and these organizations must collaborate. Collaboration across levels of government, across stakeholders, and across people in the community is foundational to the national urban parks policy. It's already in there. Parks Canada and stakeholders must work with local authorities to align, enact, and enforce an urban national park management plan. One of the key differences, I think, here is that national parks require the preparation of a management plan within five years of designation, and that management plan needs to be reviewed every 10 years. All of these steps are informed through thorough consultation with the public and stakeholders and governing agencies.

Just for reference, we have provincial park management plans that are over 20 years old and have never been reviewed. We have provincial parks and provincial protected areas that have been created more than five years ago and do not have management plans to guide activities on those land bases. Parks Canada is required by law to create these things, which strengthens the designation and, then, why it's important.

To maintain an urban national park's designation, any governing partner in the national urban park can request an assessment of the designation. Should an urban national park be created in the Edmonton river valley, there is plenty of opportunity for any governing agency, including the province, to require an assessment and a review of that designation if it is not serving the people of the town, the province, or outside of the province.

But let's take a moment here also to look at the big picture because this bill does not specifically talk about the Edmonton river valley, so it would apply to any and all future potential development of urban national parks in the province. What about other municipalities that may be interested in pursuing this designation? And why would they be interested in that designation? Well, in order to understand that, we need to understand that there are an array of legislative tools and opportunities to protect parks and areas for protection. Those range from a provincial recreation area through provincial parks, provincial wildland parks, ecological reserves, and heritage rangelands. We have many designations provincially, and national parks are one of those options as well. So when stakeholders sit down to consider protection, they are able to look at the suite of designated options and legal designations for land and choose the one that best suits the objectives that they're interested in pursuing. The reality is that the people of Edmonton have chosen national urban parks because they think it meets the objectives that they want to see for this landscape.

But I will also say that consultation, again, is a key part of this. Parks Canada has more capacity and funding to conduct more thorough public consultation and report back to people. They also have more capacity for management planning and even infrastructure. We would be denying the potential to tap into those federal dollars for management of the Edmonton river valley. Alberta Parks as a division also has incredible talent, dedication, expertise. They have incredible people working in the public service on the management of provincial parks and protected areas, but they lack the funding

and the capacity. That is why we have provincial parks that don't have a management plan right now. That is why we have provincial parks whose management plan is over 20 years old. Even though Alberta Parks may be interested in provincial designation for this land, they may not have the same capacity as Parks Canada to manage it effectively.

We also know that recent new provincial parks were acquired and designated through private land deals, but not all new parks and protected areas in the province should come from private land. We need to look at other options as well. We know that Albertans want more parks and protected areas. Poll after poll and survey after survey show that Albertans are interested in more parks, and we could have a made-in-Alberta solution to the Edmonton river valley if this government would step up and protect the Edmonton river valley, but they don't want to do that, so it's leaving the people of Edmonton with this option of investigating the possibility of an urban national park, emphasis on investigating and possibility because now the work has not been done to conduct a thorough public consultation that is required, so this bill stops the work before it can even start.

Just as a closing thought, Mr. Chair, I'll just share that outdoor recreation is what we do. I think in this House we all agree: Alberta's outdoors are amazing. We love them, and they generate a lot of opportunity for people to connect to nature, but they also generate a tremendous amount of economic revenue. The existing national parks of Banff and Jasper generate \$2.3 billion in annual revenue or more for the province, so why would we want to hinder that economic opportunity?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise again today to address Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. I'm proud to speak in support of this important legislation. Now, I was moved by the spirit of Bill 203. I was hoping maybe we would have the same spirit across the aisle. I guess their love of Justin Trudeau is just too strong. That's a bridge too far. It's also interesting that, you know, they choose to use Edmonton as a proxy. Of course, this is a provincial legislation for the entire province, and it's important to let those Edmontonians know that the NDP is not the sole voice for them. Conservatives support people in Edmonton. That's one of the main reasons we're bringing this piece of legislation forward.

Let me first begin by talking about how this process has been shaped by citizens, not only from Leduc-Beaumont. In Leduc-Beaumont we're really passionate about our green spaces. We have the beautiful Telford Lake. I often get a chance to enjoy that with my family. I've had people come into my office and talk about this legislation, and they really enjoy that opportunity in our riding.

I've also heard from people across the entire province and, most importantly, though, people in the greater Edmonton area. When I was approached by a group of concerned citizens, I never could have imagined that they would collect 1,000 signatures against the federal government's national urban park initiative. That just shows you how important this legislation is, and it shows you how important it is to have engaged citizens, citizens who did the research. They understood that this initiative is not in their best interest and have made their voices heard. That's super important. As we know, the primary intent of this bill is designed to prevent federal overreach while at the same time solidifying the relationships with our important Indigenous and municipal

partners, all while ensuring that Albertans will be in the driver's seat when it comes to decisions regarding their green spaces and river valleys.

Let's once again set the stage for our discussion. In recent years we have witnessed a troubling trend of federal intervention into provincial matters. This overreach has undermined Alberta's economy and threatens the fundamental rights of Albertans to govern themselves as described in the Constitution. We have seen this played out most egregiously in the setting of unobtainable and unrealistic net-zero energy regulations by 2035 and a proposed emissions reduction plan that acts as a de facto production cap. Look all around us. Albertans have been feeling the disastrous effects of the NDP-Liberal alliance for far too long. They skyrocketed the cost of living, rang up inflation-inducing deficits, and continue to jack up the carbon tax despite the opposition from most Albertans, Canadians, and the majority of provinces.

Of course, it's now less than a week until the carbon tax goes up again, making every trip to the grocery store more expensive, every trip into work. Basically, every aspect of Albertans' life is about to get more expensive solely because of the NDP-Liberal coalition. Our government has been standing up to this unconstitutional overreach, and we will continue to do so. It is within this context that our government will not allow for Justin Trudeau and Steven Guilbeault to dictate terms about what happens in Alberta's green spaces and river valleys, nor will we permit distant bureaucrats in Ottawa to make decisions on behalf of Albertans.

4:30

Bill 204 stands as a defence against this overreach, legislation that is designed to protect the role of the province in any interaction between municipal councils and the federal government regarding the establishment of national urban parks.

I would once again like to thank all members of this House for their consideration and contributions to the debate on this bill. Listening to everyone has allowed me to respond to some ongoing questions and concerns. Bill 204 is not about controlling the conservation process. Stewardship and environmental considerations will remain top of mind for green spaces and river valleys across the entire province.

I would also like to reiterate the importance of collaboration. We have committed to listening to, learning from, and respecting our Indigenous partners. Working closely with our Indigenous partners is, of course, a key priority for our government, including by providing support through the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation.

Additionally, this bill is not about exerting unilateral control or dictating terms to municipalities, as the members opposite have claimed. Rather, it is about fostering dialogue and partnership, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively and in the best interests of all stakeholders. To reiterate, we are not looking to control or be overbearing with municipalities. Bill 204 will help us partner with them. This is not about provincial control but, rather, about ensuring a provincial voice on behalf of all Albertans.

It's also important to highlight that this bill is not just about Edmonton although clearly Edmonton is a municipality that has had the most relevant conversations with the federal government on this potential initiative. I can't help but think about the numerous and varied urban areas across the province where federal intrusion would be unwelcome, from the meeting of the two rivers in Calgary, the Red Deer valley, the badlands in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, or Drumheller – I could go on – Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, or any of our other northern cities. Put simply, why would any of these amazing communities want Justin Trudeau to speak for them?

Mr. Chair, the opposition has also claimed that Bill 204 is not needed because there is other federal legislation in place that speaks to consultation with the provinces, but if we look at the Liberal-NDP policies on energy, their past ridiculous claims of building no new roads, and net zero in under a decade, can Albertans trust the federal government to do what's in the best interest for them? Can we even trust the federal government to follow their own legislation? Of course not. The opposition may take this disastrous federal government on their word, but we know better. Besides, the existing federal legislation is not clear how provincial input will be captured. If anything, Bill 204 would help the federal government ensure that provincial consultation is valid and respected. At the end of the day, Bill 204 is not legislating on the federal-provincial relationship. It is under the MGA because it relates to provincial-municipal matters.

There have also been some concerns about federal funding. Our message is simple. If the federal government is serious about providing funding for conservation, the province would be happy to receive it and administer it directly based on the best interests of Albertans, not on the ideological fancy of this federal government.

I would also like to address the accusations that this bill is overly confrontational with the federal government. It is true that when called for, our government is fierce in standing up to the Liberal-NDP alliance when doing so is in the best interest of Albertans. However, this is not done out of spite but, rather, out of necessity.

I also believe that this legislation would be prudent regardless of the political party in power in Ottawa. It's true that it is reasonable to predict that a federal Conservative government would not intrude into Alberta's affairs, certainly not to the devastating detriment that the current government is. Nevertheless, this legislation will protect our province's role moving forward. As the Premier has repeatedly said, our preference is to work in partnership with the federal government for the betterment of all Albertans. It is only when they take positions that would harm Alberta's economy, citizens, and freedoms that we have a duty to act.

Now, a private member's bill will never be confused with a sweeping piece of legislation or greatly impact entire sectors such as Alberta's electricity market or responsibility for resource development, but this private member's bill can address a clearly identified area where potential federal intrusion places the green spaces and river valleys across Alberta at risk. As this Liberal government grows more and more unpopular and desperate, who knows what kind of actions, big or small, they may take against their self-identified biggest enemy, Alberta. It is simply too risky for us to find out. We will not allow our province to be relegated to the role of a mere bystander in our own affairs. Our government will ensure that Albertans will always be the stewards of our provincial future. This is why I urge all members of this Assembly to join me in supporting Bill 204. Our river valleys and green spaces belong to Albertans, and this legislation will keep it that way for generations.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Lethbridge-West to speak.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise this afternoon on private members' business to speak to Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act. Now, what the legislation does is it amends the MGA such that it directly addresses the national urban parks plan in Alberta, makes it clear that the municipality would have to, quote, go through the province to pursue a national urban parks plan. Now, it gives the province the power to lay out conditions under which the plan would be negotiated, and it also gives the province the power to consider the

national urban park agreement invalid if it's not in accordance with the conditions laid out by the province.

Now, there's no question that this piece of legislation does set out a bit of a constitutional tension. Of course, under section 92 of the Constitution, what was originally the BNA Act, we have the province with jurisdiction over 92(13), which is property and civil rights, and 92(16), you know, kind of residual powers assigned to it in matters of a local or private nature. However, we also have a number of federal subject matters in section 91, which is essentially the door that the federal government walks through to establish national parks, and they can do so. Usually, if it's going to be on provincial land, if they're going to do a new national park, for example, somewhere or extend an existing one, as has been done, I believe, in Wood Buffalo national park, for example, they do that through negotiation with the provincial government because the provincial government, of course, if it's Crown land or if it's private land, has jurisdiction over how that land is treated in legislation under section 92. So that's how it's always been.

The federal government has always had an interest in establishing national parks, going back to 1887 with the Rocky Mountains Park Act, which was lobbied for by the CPR and established Banff. Subsequently there were others and in Alberta, being at the vanguard of some of that, with the establishment of Waterton national park after that and others. In general we find national parks in places where we already have federally owned property, where oftentimes we have the presence of significant fisheries, because the federal government does have jurisdiction over that, at navigable waters and/or sometimes with Indigenous protected areas.

Now, particularly in the north we find the establishment of new IPCs in places where we don't have the presence of a province. We have a territorial arrangement, but it's part of self-determination. Those Indigenous protected areas are for the Inuit and have been established in recent years in co-operation and in comanagement relationships with Inuit Tapirit Kanitamy, who are the spokespeople, one of the national Indigenous organizations for the Inuit people in this country.

4:40

It's very difficult to read this bill as anything less than a direct response to the events of the last few years within the city of Edmonton. Certainly, in July of 2023 we had media coverage of the city of Edmonton wanting to move forward with conversations with the federal government around a national urban park. The federal government some years back – a couple, maybe four, I want to say – did put out a framework for a national urban parks strategy to work with municipalities who wanted to work with them under the auspices of the National Parks Act. Important to underline the observations of my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis, who, not just because of her geography but also due to both her academic training and her significant contributions to conservation and the public interest in this province in her previous life, knows a heck of a lot about how parks are established, how they are managed, and how they contribute to conservation and biodiversity in our province and beyond.

Certainly, the establishment of a national park cannot be done without the express contributions of and consent of a province. We've seen some of these back-and-forths, not in an urban context but in various places in British Columbia where communities haven't necessarily wanted to move forward with a national park proposal. We've seen that provincial governments have to react to both citizens for and against in the interior of British Columbia over a period of some years. The good news is that with this overlapping jurisdiction and the requirement for provinces to consent to a new

national park, people get heard. That's also the good news for the North Saskatchewan River valley.

It is, of course, a place of tremendous historical importance. Certainly, it has been a meeting place since time immemorial, not only because of its great natural bounty, its great biodiversity bounty, its ability to sustain human life with hunting and fishing and trapping over the course of thousands of years, and as a key travel route as well given that the river valley having a river is a navigable water, and Indigenous people have navigated it from here to the Hudson Bay for thousands of years. It was a trade route during the fur trade, obviously. Certainly, along the river valley we have found those trading forts and evidence of not just trading with folks who came here in an era of colonialism but also many, many indications of human settlement going back thousands of years.

Now, this is not the first conversation that this city has had about the relative merits or development or no development and how to preserve its conservation values for generations to come. In 1965 there was a plan to run a freeway right through the place and pave paradise, I guess, and the idea was that it would connect the city, and people didn't like it. Certainly, as I understand it, a lot of women stood up in a citizens' initiative to put pressure on the powers that be, whether they were municipal, provincial, or federal. People didn't care who was responsible; they just wanted the place protected, and so it was. Citizens came together to express their desire for what they wanted for the future of their river valley. There were a number of different organizations: the Save Our Park Association; a shout-out to people like Anne Packer and Margaret Chappelle, who are well known to folks on this side of the House for their work some 50-odd years ago and continuing.

They also had to go into battle again to save Mill Creek ravine from another freeway expansion, and, you know, there have been various proposals over the years. I know. I grew up in this neck of the woods. Every once in a while some developer would pop up their head, or some initiative or other would be proposed. And, invariably, regardless of sort of ideological place on the spectrum at the time of the city administration, those proposals were jettisoned and have been, and as a result we have one of the largest if not the largest urban connected protected area in North America and a crown jewel of conservation and of outdoor recreation.

You know, certainly, as a no-longer-resident of Edmonton I'm allowed to say this, though, because I used to live here: it gives folks here at least something to be proud of. [interjections] No. It is most certainly – I live about a five minutes' walk from this river valley when I'm here in Edmonton, and it is unbelievable how I can be in nature within five minutes from my downtown condo. It makes up for the weather: put it that way, Mr. Chair. As someone from southern Alberta now, it makes up for the weather.

The national urban parks piece, you know, came as a result of some of the . . . [Ms Phillips' speaking time expired] Oh, okay.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Our government is dedicated to ensuring that Albertans retain autonomy over their landscape. We refuse to allow the vultures that are the Trudeau government to nationalize Alberta's landscape without the consent or knowledge of Albertans now or in the future. This is why I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023, brought forward by the esteemed colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont. This bill is a necessary step to safeguard the constitutional division of power between the provincial and federal governments and ensuring a cohesive, collaborative conversation between all three levels of government.

Let's be clear, Mr. Chair. Municipalities' jurisdiction within the province is set by the MGA. This bill is not a new power grab, as the opposition would have you believe. It is, in fact, a matter of protecting clear-cut jurisdictional protection enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. This bill is to address the continued and prolonged power grab the federal government has shown across Confederation, and without it we are only going to continue to experience the prolonged pressure the federal government's overreach has had on all provinces under the notion of what? Nationalization.

Permit me to share with you a story that will further illustrate why it is necessary for this bill. In this story imagine that there's a neighbourhood with 14 houses, representing Canada's 14 different jurisdictions; 10 houses for the provinces, three for territories, and one is housed by the federal government. In this neighbourhood the federal government is known as the notorious national Karen, also known as Justin Trudeau, who is often found to be self-imposing his final say on every household in the neighbourhood. You know, this neighbour is the bane of the neighbourhood, just like Trudeau is to all Canadians. Time and time again he likes to meddle with the very framework that makes the neighbourhood what it is. On regular occasions Trudeau, in proper Karen fashion, likes to try to move the neighbourhood fences or, in the case of this story, constitutional boundaries to claim more and more authority, power, and land for himself.

One night, Mr. Chair, the neighbourhood goes to sleep, and in the morning they find that all the fences have been changed and now Ottawa's property is significantly larger. When the other 13 neighbours look outside, they see that Ottawa has extended their fences through half their yards and in some cases even through the very hearts of their homes. Alberta and the rest of the jurisdictions go down to look at the fences, and they see a sign that reads: by declaration of Prime Minister Trudeau of Ottawa, our constitutional boundary fences have been moved in the name of the environment through Bill C-69, the plastic bans, no more roads, unrealistic clean energy regulations, the carbon tax, production caps; secondly, in the name of the greater good, enacting the unconstitutional Emergencies Act. And, lastly, due to the neighbourhood's apathy in questioning Ottawa's previous and continued overreach into your jurisdictional boundaries, at the bottom of the sign it reads: if you have any concerns with these changes, tough luck; we'll see you in court, and we will punish you for questioning our decisions and authoritarian approach.

4:50

Time and time again the province and the territorial neighbours have to push back against the unconstitutional changes through the courts. Time and time again, Mr. Chair, the boundaries are moved back where they should have stayed. After this back and forth and growing frustration our national Karen Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has decided, even though it's not what he was elected on or for, to change up his approach by going after, this time, the neighbourhood boroughs, also known in this story as our provincial municipalities.

Now, the Alberta household, unfortunately, has some terrible roommates as well. They're known provincially as the hon. NDP opposition. These roommates are the ones whose lifestyles have become spend and lecture, constantly wanting to remortgage the province by spending more than the provincial income yet wonder why their champagne socialist and caviar communist lifestyles can't be sustained while driving around in their Mercedes-Benz SUVs. And yes, the irony does, in fact, go right over the roommates' heads.

The roommates like to talk down to the rest of the neighbourhood as well as the household. They treat the rest of the household with such disdain, with even their leadership candidates referring to them as sewer rats and Canada's embarrassing cousins. They preach a message: you will own nothing, and you will be happy. But those messages don't apply to the roommates, Mr. Speaker, only to everyone else in the neighbourhood and anyone else who lives in the house.

Time and time again Canada's biggest Karen Justin Trudeau is trying to buy off the roommates with money and over-the-top promises, somehow convincing them to put pressures on the rest of the neighbourhood to give their municipalities additional promises that they can never deliver on. While the bots of the devil are whispering into the ears of Alberta's municipalities, the horrible roommates across the aisle create more trouble. Their hypocritical and terrible roommate is just happy to attempt to buy social licensing and attempt to garner favour with Trudeau in standing up for the individual authorities of the provinces.

We've seen that with the carbon tax, a policy which 70 per cent of all Canadians are not in favour of and has made everything more expensive from gasoline to food, from utilities to housing. Now, the terrible opposition roommate time and time again has voted in favour of making things more expensive for everyday Albertans and Canadians just like their emperors Trudeau and Singh, who took the authoritarian route this last week and forced parliament to disregard the wants of 70 per cent of Canada's population. It is this type of governance which is why Bill 204 is so vital in setting up safeguards to ensure the appropriate steps are taken in negotiations in all levels of government through the correct jurisdictional approach.

You might ask: "Why? Why would the roommates and Ottawa want this?" Well, because they know that it aligns to their ideology. Their ideology looks to centralize power away from provinces to the federalist and globalist masters. Mr. Chair, Bill 204 is a private member's bill brought forward to protect the proverbial household and boundaries laid out in the Constitution. Bill 204 would amend the Municipal Government Act under division 8, limits on municipal powers, section 70, disposal of land.

Mr. Chair, if your neighbour keeps overreaching and attempts to move your property line, you're going to do what you have to to defend it. Unlike the opposition, who are so willing to roll over and show their bellies in alignment with the power and jurisdictional grabs of the federal bullies and their globalist agenda, we are going to set up safeguards against overreach like Bill 204 and build a collaborative engagement with our municipalities while ensuring the federal government stays off our yard and in their own space. I call all members who support the constitutional protections of provincial jurisdiction to support this bill. Keep Alberta's lands for Albertans, not for the greedy Karens that occupy Ottawa's Parliament Hill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-Klein. One minute.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Bill 204. I will say that I think the only government overreach here is what is proposed in this bill. What this bill does is interfere with and sabotage the work that's being done by communities calling for national park urban designation. In the long history of this government making sticking it to Trudeau a personality, what this bill proposes is more performative heel-digging as grandstanding when it comes to the federal government. I'm concerned about the

implications for such endeavours across this province, including my city of Calgary.

My first question is: where was the consultation with Treaty 6 nations? Who did the Member for Leduc-Beaumont consult with from Treaty 6 and Métis Nation? And, no, referencing AIOC in defence of this bill is not sufficient. Did this member consult with the city of Edmonton? What happened to: Strong and Free? I see now that the slogan is only for use by this government in terms of strong-arming other levels of government and being free to stand in the way of communities when they are asking for conservation of their natural spaces. At the end of the day not only does this interfere with conservation efforts; it also duplicates processes in the National Parks Act already requiring . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(6)

If the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole on Monday afternoon at 4:55 p.m. and the Assembly has not yet considered motions other than Government motions that day, the Chair shall interrupt and the Committee shall immediately rise and report without question put.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 204.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That is carried and so ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Senior Wellness and Exercise

507. Hon. Ms Sigurdson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider introducing a bill to create incentives and supports aimed at reducing financial barriers to participation by seniors in senior wellness activities and exercise programs delivered by municipalities and private organizations.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak about Motion 507. I got the idea for this motion some time ago. It was when, of course, we were government and I was travelling the province meeting with many seniors across as the minister of seniors and housing. Seniors would often say to me: you know, I'd like to be able to take programs but oftentimes it's financially prohibitive for me. And oftentimes they would cite their grandchildren. The parents of their grandchildren would have an opportunity for a tax rebate or some kind of cut in programs for children's recreational activities, and they always thought: well, why don't seniors get that same kind of support? That kind of got me to thinking, and that's one of the reasons that stimulated this motion to come forward.

We know right now in Alberta we have approximately 750,000 seniors in our province. This population is growing at a faster rate than any other demographic in Alberta – I'll soon count myself among them; in just two years I'll be 65 – and by 2035 Alberta is

expected to have over a million seniors living in this province. By 2050 seniors will make up 20 per cent of Alberta's population, and Albertans over 80 years of age are projected to more than double as a share of the population. Creating policies that support seniors to age well makes sense considering this tremendous growth. Seniors' contributions are vital to the health of the communities in which they live. We know that Alberta seniors have some of the highest rates of volunteerism in the country. They're engaged politically and vote at a higher rate than other age groups. They donate and fund initiatives that make society better.

5:00

However, seniors do need support to age well, especially today, as we are in an affordability crisis. Many costs have gone up, including utilities, insurance, and groceries. I'm hearing from seniors that they are unable to afford any extras such as fees for exercise and other recreational programs, yet we know that seniors who are engaged in their communities live healthier, happier lives. This is why I'm proposing Motion 507, to support seniors to age well in their communities.

Extensive research concludes that seniors who are physically active have better health and mental health than those who do not. We know that physical inactivity is the second most common risk factor for cancer, and there is convincing medical evidence that physical activity decreases the risk of certain cancers such as colon and breast cancer. Other benefits of physical activity include reductions in cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, depression, stress, and anxiety.

Besides physical activity, other recreational programs also increase seniors' well-being. Programs such as art and music classes as well as various hobbies create connection with others, stimulate brain activity, and give seniors opportunities to have some fun. Unfortunately, for too many seniors the costs to attend these programs are prohibitive. Therefore, this motion proposes measures to reduce the financial barriers to seniors participating in recreational programs.

Clearly, seniors themselves will benefit from these measures, but our society in general will benefit as well. A study in Washington state found that health care costs were reduced by 20 per cent when participants attended an exercise program once a week. Another study, reported by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, said that a 10 per cent reduction in physical inactivity has the potential to reduce direct health care expenditures by \$150 million a year. When seniors are supported to be active and engaged in their communities, not only do they live healthier, happier lives, but we as a society save on expenditures to public programs. These savings are often referred to as deferred costs. High-cost programs such as emergency medical services, acute care, continuing care, and policing are needed at a significantly reduced rate when seniors are supported to age well in their community.

Sadly, we know that 30 per cent of Canadian seniors are at risk of becoming socially isolated, and actually reports are indicating now that it's getting even worse. The National Institute on Ageing recently released a report that said that 41 per cent of seniors are at risk of social isolation. That is why this motion is so important, Mr. Speaker. We can prevent seniors from becoming socially isolated by removing the barriers to their participation in recreational programs. Age-friendly Alberta is leading the charge to create communities accessible and inclusive for seniors. Their important work here in our province supports seniors to maintain their independence, participate in social and volunteer opportunities, and build stronger community connections.

Nonmedical factors, also known as the social determinants of health, determine 75 per cent of health outcomes for seniors.

Recreational programs are a good example of a nonmedical factor that supports seniors to have positive health outcomes. These preventative programs are essential to the well-being of seniors and to our society in general.

Mr. Speaker, that's why I have brought forward Motion 507, so that barriers of access to recreational programs are minimized for seniors. I just want to urge all members of this Assembly to vote in support of Motion 507.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 507. The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am requesting unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 41(5.2) so that I may move an amendment from the floor.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a request for unanimous consent is likely being asked because the appropriate notice was not given to move an amendment that a member intends to try and move here this evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite 95 copies and would like to move an amendment to Motion Other than Government Motion 507. Would you like the copies distributed first?

The Speaker: If you can read the amendment into the record, and then I'll have you pass them to me.

Ms Hayter: Perfect. That the motion is amended by striking out "introducing a Bill to create" and substituting "establishing."

I move this amendment because I believe that there is an agreement between the caucuses on the intent of a motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and that is to ensure that seniors all . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. Let me just interject there. I just needed the actual wording of the amendment, which you've done fabulously for me.

Ms Hayter: Sorry.

The Speaker: No. It's okay. If you can just pass them to the pages.

Ms Hayter: First time.

The Speaker: Yeah. It's okay. We'll get a copy to the table, we'll make sure the mover of the motion has a copy real quick, the hon. the Government House Leader, and I, and then once all of those folks have one, we'll start your clock again, and we'll get you rolling.

Ms Hayter: Awesome. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to the unanimous consent motion that was just previously passed, this amendment will be referred to as A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you. I move this amendment because I believe that there is an agreement between the caucuses on the intent of the motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and that is to ensure that seniors of all income levels have access to

wellness activities that keep them healthy. The initial motion required the introduction of a bill to make that happen. By removing that requirement, the members of this Assembly will simply be sending a message to the government that we believe that measures to increase access to wellness programs for seniors should be established.

I am so proud to stand in support of Motion 507 with the amendment, that the government will consider creating "incentives and supports aimed at reducing financial barriers to participation by seniors in senior wellness activities and exercise programs delivered by municipalities and private organizations." This is a conversation that comes up many times on the doors in my riding of Calgary-Edgemont, that probably has 9,775 seniors, which is 20.3 per cent of the riding. Also, the next-biggest demographic in my riding are the people that are thinking about retiring, between the ages of 45 to 64. In Calgary-Edgemont it's 29 per cent of the residents, with just over 14,000 people.

I'm excited for all of them as this motion will help increase the health and mental wellness for seniors while simultaneously reducing future health care costs. I also know that many of my constituents are struggling during this affordability crisis. They're already dealing with the rise of cost of living, whether it be their groceries, utilities, housing. Wellness activities and exercise programs shouldn't be considered a luxury item.

Due to the cost-of-living pressures, it is more important to have healthy, socially active seniors. It also means a higher quality of life for Albertans. Seniors have built our province, and this motion is an opportunity to financially support them and move our province in the right direction. There are so many benefits for all the seniors that we all represent in this House.

I love that when I go to an exercise type of program, I also get to visit and chat with the other participants. It used to be one of my favourite components of going to an outdoor boot camp. You know, group programs promote social inclusion, and it also gives seniors the opportunity to stave off isolation. Many seniors suffer from social isolation and exclusion, and this leads to many negative health effects, including depression.

5:10

According to the World Health Organization social isolation and loneliness are linked to anxiety, depression, suicide, dementia, and can increase cardiovascular disease and stroke. I received a letter from a constituent titled: keeping seniors healthy. It reads:

I'm writing as a concerned senior and a resident of the Edgemont constituency, about the financial difficulties seniors have in accessing resources that allow seniors to stay fit and healthy during our retirement years. Most of us are on a limited, fixed pensions, and as everyone is aware, food and housing prices continue to rise. Also rising are the fees of attending fitness-directed activities. Senior women, especially if they are single, are particularly vulnerable and are limited to the options to access fitness opportunities. According to StatsCan the average yearly (2021) income of men 65 years and older was \$51,600. Women over 65, however, have an average income of \$37,900. The comparison of the median income for men versus women is even more striking - \$41,000 versus \$28,000. There are more single female seniors than there are men. This is not to say senior men are not in need of assistance as well as senior women. (Compare with the income of a 50-65 year old male at \$74,000.) This is only to point out that this is particularly a women's issue.

. . . [The] Health minister's . . . new parliamentary secretary has said that people have heart attacks "come into the hospital and all of a sudden it's everyone else's problem but their own." In clarifying her statement, she said, "I believe we should be in a province that not only focuses on reactive health for those

in need but also one that teaches our kids to practice healthy living, which includes taking care of our physical health.”

Having something like a Seniors Fitness Account, where the government would provide X amount of dollars per senior for them to access fitness classes or programs would benefit everyone! As an older adult, regular physical activity can prevent or delay many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps our muscles grow stronger so we can keep doing our day-to-day activities without being dependent on others. Physical activity is crucial for recovery from physical issues. It has been suggested by various studies that those age 65 and over need 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity, two days a week of activities that strengthen muscles, plus activities to improve balance. In addition to the physical benefits, exercise helps to maintain and improve our mental acuity. Being in a fitness-focused activity would enable seniors to achieve these goals, and having a fitness account to draw on to attend these classes would benefit everyone.

Encouraging seniors to live a healthy lifestyle, helps to keep blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels normal and lowers the risk for heart disease and heart attacks. Surely our Minister of Health can see the benefits to seniors and to our health care system in providing a program such as this.

I am writing to you as I believe seniors need the Alberta government to recognize the importance of creating a program such as a Seniors Fitness Account to enable all seniors to access programs that would benefit them and in doing so, would benefit our health care system and our province.

I am hoping you can bring these concerns forward to the Legislature.

Thank you for your consideration,
Carol.

I hope that we all take Carol's letter into consideration. One thing that she talks about are the physical benefits to seniors. Seniors involved in exercise programs can work on strength and balance training, which helps with fall prevention. Also, activities stimulate and boost our brain health and increases our mental health. It can help us with our problem-solving. Studies have shown that this also reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, depression, stress, and anxiety and prolongs the independence of those who are older.

When I was earlier thinking about this, it made me think of my own grandfather, who aged in place until his late 90s. I attribute his being able to do this to his daily walks and him riding his bicycle everywhere he was going. When he was in his 50s, he had actually had a heart attack and afterwards decided to take up healthy and active living. He should, in my mind, be the poster senior for maintaining healthy behaviours and reducing other health-related risks. He definitely optimized his life and his health conditions with his daily exercise.

On another health note, you know, physical inactivity is the second-most common cancer risk factor, showing that we need to encourage all Albertans to participate in exercises and wellness programs. There's also convincing medical evidence that physical activity decreases the risk of certain cancers such as colon and breast cancer.

I really do urge everyone in this Chamber to vote in favour of this motion with the amendments so that senior Albertans can maintain their independence and participate in social opportunities and build stronger community connections. I call on all members of this Assembly to support this amendment, and I hope they will support the amended motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 507, amendment A1. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing the worst affordability crisis in a century. With the rising cost of rent and groceries, wellness activities and exercise programs should not be considered luxury items.

The Motion 507 amendment is an opportunity to financially support seniors and start moving in the right direction. Mr. Speaker, to foster greater participation among seniors in wellness activities and exercise programs, it's crucial to address financial barriers and provide incentives for their involvement. This is what the Motion 507 amendment is seeking. Healthy, socially active seniors means a higher quality of life for many Albertans. Healthy, socially active seniors will lead to future savings in health care costs.

As alluded to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, 75 per cent of health outcomes for seniors are determined by nonmedical factors or the social determinants of health. This includes wellness and recreational programs that improve physical and mental health. Seniors stand to gain immensely from engaging in recreational pursuits, Mr. Speaker. Not only do these activities promote physical well-being by managing chronic health conditions, but these wellness activities enhance mobility, flexibility, and balance, crucial for maintaining independence as one ages.

Similarly, I have quite a high proportion of seniors in Edmonton-Decore. Moreover, seniors' wellness activities for mental health benefits cannot be overstated. Recreational activities stimulate cognitive functions while the social aspect combats isolation, contributing to better mental well-being. Seniors' participation in wellness activities and exercise programs has been particularly challenging over the past few years given inflation and cost-of-living pressures. The government recently introduced a 25 per cent seniors' discount on registry services but failed to address the financial barriers associated with wellness activities and exercise programs that are so crucial for seniors.

Social interaction is a cornerstone of recreational activities, countering the loneliness that can plague older individuals. This is a trend that is being experienced across the globe, where senior isolation is a huge problem for many societies. By fostering connection and community, these activities become lifelines to address social isolation, enrich lives, and foster a positive outlook for many seniors.

The pandemic disturbed many programs for seniors as well as many seniors' social routines. Community centres and seniors living facilities serve as hubs for such activities, providing nurturing environments where seniors can explore new interests and bond with peers.

5:20

I have similar recreational facilities in Edmonton-Decore that provide programs and services that improve activities of wellness and recreational activities throughout the year. However, access to those facilities and programs is hindered by financial burdens. Studies have suggested that there is clear and urgent need for collaborative efforts among policy-makers, community organizations, researchers to find ways to design and implement effective, community-driven programs that promote wellness and well-being for seniors. Healthier seniors would lead to a higher quality of life for seniors as well as lower health care costs to our system.

Mr. Speaker, we need holistic approaches with equity lenses to meet the multifaceted needs of Alberta seniors, who built this great province, ensuring that wellness activities remain accessible for seniors.

With that, I encourage members of the Assembly to fully support Motion 507, which is intended to improve access to these important and crucial social determinants of health for our seniors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Peigan has risen.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues who have already risen and debated this topic. I always appreciate hearing numerous points of view on such an important topic. As the Member for Calgary-Edgemont was talking about a senior that she knows who is sure their life was extended by their daily exercise, it reminds me of a 91-year-old woman I knew who was convinced that she lived her long life because every day she climbed up three flights of stairs to her apartment carrying her groceries even though there was an elevator available.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is proud to support our senior citizen population, whether it be through the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services or my Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. Alberta's government is taking a wide and proactive approach to supporting our seniors. Through Budget 2024 we are maintaining numerous supports through my ministry which go to various nonprofits that help our seniors engage fully and meaningfully in our communities and economy.

Mr. Speaker, to help explain how we are supporting seniors, it's important for me to explain the two grant programs that Arts, Culture and Status of Women has. Community grants improve the lives of Albertans, create jobs, and generate local investment across Alberta. These grants are vital to supporting our communities, which is why Alberta's government will invest almost \$130 million in programs and grants that support our critical nonprofit community in Budget 2024 if passed.

My ministry has a number of grants that help build vibrant communities across Alberta in the areas of art, culture, recreation, community, heritage, diversity and inclusion, and supporting seniors. Budget 2024, if passed, maintains funding to the community facility enhancement program, or CFEP, of \$50 million in 2024-25. That's up from \$35 million in 2022-23. This increased funding for CFEP has allowed us and will continue allowing us to support projects that stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and support the gathering places across the province that bring Albertans together.

Since the last intake closed, my ministry provided \$42 million through the community facility enhancement program to hundreds of nonprofits across the province. We look forward to sharing the good news with the latest group of successful CFEP applicants, from the latest intake, later this week. For every CFEP grant dollar invested into a community, up to \$3 is raised by that community, proving that this program has an amazing return on investment.

In addition to the CFEP grants, my ministry also provided \$9.9 million to 260 nonprofits through the community initiatives program, or CIP, in the last intake. Each year over approximately 1,100 nonprofits are supported through CIP.

By investing in facilities that support art, culture, heritage, sport, recreation, and our seniors, we are also supporting the critical nonprofit organizations that offer valued programs in these buildings. We are continuing to make it easier for nonprofits in the voluntary sector to access services and supports, most recently by introducing the new nonprofit portal, where eligible nonprofits and

charitable organizations can find government supports and grant opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our CIP and CFEP grants, and we will continue to find new ways to work with the nonprofits who support Albertans. I would like to share some success stories from our CFEP and CIP grants with you, especially some stories about how Alberta's government has supported seniors through these grants.

The Commonwealth Lawn Bowling Club of Edmonton received \$12,702 to host the Canadian senior lawn bowling championships from September 12 to 16, 2023, in Edmonton. Lawn bowling is an inclusive game where everyone competes on equal footing regardless of age or ability. The event provided a great experience for the competitors, many of whom are seniors, and brought together volunteers from across Edmonton and across generations, building strong relationships within their community that lasted long after the athletes went home. The organization considered this event a trial run before they make a proposal to host the 2029 world championships.

Another example of my ministry supporting seniors is the funds we gave to the Calgary Seniors' Resource Society, which received \$75,000 in 2021-22. These funds went to support hiring two new staff, allowing the organization to continue supporting seniors by delivering meals, dropping off supplies, and providing transportation to cancer treatments. Approximately 1,000 seniors benefit from the program.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other success stories of Alberta's government for organizations serving seniors is the nonprofit and voluntary services sector in the operating stream of our community initiatives program. I would be pleased to share just some examples of the incredible projects that we have been able to fund through this grant stream thanks to taxpayer support. For example, in 2023-24 Alberta's government gave \$60,000 to the Brooks and District Seniors Outreach Society. This assisted the organization in providing meaningful programs to rural and isolated seniors such as wellness teas, field trips, and friendly visiting opportunities. These programs promote a healthy lifestyle, helping seniors to enjoy their lives and remain independent for as long as possible.

Mr. Speaker, we also funded the Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre. This organization received \$60,000 in 2023-24 for staffing to enhance programs and services that positively impact seniors' physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being and expand reach to rural Indigenous seniors. Programs supported include fitness programs, gardening projects, traditional arts and crafts, wellness and spiritual supports, traditional foods, berry picking, fishing, hunting, cultural teaching and ceremonies, intergenerational activities, translation services, and online learning and digital literacy courses.

Another example is the Drive Happiness Seniors Association, based here in Edmonton. They received \$61,628 in 2023-24 for volunteer training, staff wages, and staff salaries to increase services and capacity. This investment allowed them to expand their assisted transportation service area and enhance the quality of life for older Albertans by strengthening access to health care, food security, and social interactions. Through all these services the association is promoting aging in place.

As I mentioned before, the community facility enhancement program has such positive benefits for our seniors' organizations as well. For instance, Spruce Grove's only seniors' facility, the Spruce Grove Golden Age Club, recently needed an upgrade to their building to continue serving the community. The government of Alberta provided \$28,599 from our CFEP small stream to complete facility upgrades to the Pioneer Centre, a 32-year-old hub where

seniors gather, socialize, and participate in leisurely activities. With this funding the seniors' facility is now able to reduce its costs, replace old windows, and carry out lighting upgrades to continue to serve the over 20,000 community members that use the facility on a yearly basis.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has also supported larger capital projects at senior-serving organizations through the community facility enhancement program large stream. The Pincher Creek Curling Club is the only organization in the area that provides the curling experience to those engaged in the sport in Pincher Creek and surrounding communities. That is why Alberta's government invested \$1 million to construct and replace the curling rink and make curling programs more readily available for everyone in the area. This facility has a long and deep history in Pincher Creek, but the 65-year-old curling rink had become unsafe and was scheduled for demolition in 2024 until the province stepped in with funding. The funding will also increase accessibility to the sport through a new wheelchair curling league, giving even more community members a chance to enjoy this treasured sport.

If that wasn't enough, Mr. Speaker, I have a few more examples of major projects for organizations that provide sports and activities for seniors. The Punjab United Sports & Heritage Association embodies the spirit of community by providing services and activities for all ages. Alberta's government invested \$370,000 in capital funding to continue supporting this community. This funding will support a two-storey multipurpose community hub that allows the organization to host programming, including seniors' yoga, cultural activities, craft and wellness events, seniors' picnics, and community functions.

The Dunmore Equestrian Society works to improve the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of seniors by providing facilitated wellness visits designed to engage isolated seniors and those unable to participate in outdoor activities. The society is a champion of the southeast Alberta community, providing a range of public programming and healing and reconciliation through the *miywasin mistatim* – Cree for "horse" – club with the assistance of *mistatim* knowledge keepers and elders.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1 are there others? Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at Motion Other than Government Motion 507 as amended. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has the call.

Member Batten: Perfect. Hello. I rise today in support of the amended Motion 507, seniors' activities. Calgary-Acadia is home to thousands of seniors: active, young at heart, pillars of our community. I had the pleasure of visiting Francis Klein Centre in the beautiful community of Acadia. The gathering was one of, hopefully, many visits to the centre to engage with these awesome residents.

In addition to being very concerned about the UCP playing with their pensions, which happens to be their only source of income, some even joked about picking up a second job, you know, to supplement but then joked that they might die on the job. Anyhoo, going back to this, honestly, they could not understand why the

government would threaten their future, especially given the fact that we are facing the worst affordability crisis in Albertan history.

But a more lively conversation topic was that of socializing and activities. These seniors have a spectrum of physical requirements, energy, and interests, but one thing they all agreed on was how they dearly missed the senior activities that used to come to them at the centre before the pandemic. They shared that they missed the conversations and the fun. They truly felt that without more activities their lives would be less colourful and less joyful. They shared that the best part of any activity was the connection and engagement with their community. They really missed the time spent in community.

Further, the impact of isolation and poor mental health on our seniors cannot be ignored. The seniors at Francis Klein Centre were perfectly aware that some of their increased fatigue, anxiety, and loneliness could be addressed simply through reintroduction of social activities. In fact, when I asked what I could do to support them, their request was: bring back the programming, and let's invite our neighbours.

As a nursing instructor I was fortunate enough to have groups of students placed on units where the population averaged about 80 years of age. Now, nursing students learn the social determinants of health as part of their training. A quick reminder for anyone who needs it: the social determinants of health are a broad collection of factors that will impact your health. There are at least a dozen. Some are quite obvious like your income or, you know, your social status, education, physical environment. But there are some which are a little less obvious, a little harder to measure, and those are ones like social supports and coping skills. It was the less obvious determinants for which I asked the students to focus on as they completed their training with the seniors they were caring for.

One of my most favourite moments is when the student would notice that the seniors who got dressed, left the room, chatted with other patients, and engaged in their care recovered faster and seemed to be, well, happier whereas those who stayed in their room and did not engage with other people recovered slower. Of course, the senior situation we are in right now is much more complicated than what they're wearing or where they're sitting. Okay. So what the students observed will serve them well through their nursing career, where they're going to see, you know, much more complicated patients and have to realize and accept that all their patients as well as older adults are people, and people are social, complex beings, and they should be treated as such.

Another group of seniors I had the pleasure of visiting recently was at Unison at Kerby Centre. Now, technically the centre is not in Calgary-Acadia, though it does serve a lot of Calgary, and I suspect that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo will be okay if I discuss his constituents. Now, the Unison at Kerby Centre is a not-for-profit organization with the mission to support older adults to live well in their community. This centre has recently turned 50 years of age, having supported countless seniors in Alberta over the years.

Now, Unison is very focused on their mission and have learned over the years what it is that keeps seniors engaged, healthy, and happy. This centre offers a series of activities, from holiday celebrations to road trips to meet wolf-dogs at the sanctuary. They hold seniors' expos: a full day of fun, 50-plus with more than 60 trade shows. The folks at Unison understand the value of keeping seniors active. They provide a huge variety of activities, and the residents know there will always be something to occupy their time, someone to connect them with their neighbours and to keep them actively engaged. Unison at Kirby Centre has been around a long time, and I think it speaks very highly of the utility of senior

activities given the large investment this centre has made to support their shelter residents and older adults all over the city.

I recently was hosted at the Italian market by a thriving group of seniors. The Italian market is in the community of Willow Park in Calgary-Acadia, of course. This group of eager, engaged seniors were bubbling over with questions about the various political ongoings. At the time there might have been some exciting announcement happening on our side, so they were a little distracted, but of course they wanted to discuss that. But what they really wanted to spend time on was correcting misinformation. They wanted to know how the UCP government possibly believed that Albertans would be okay with them stealing the future of all other Canadians just so that Albertans can have a little bit more. They wanted to know how the UCP government was going to possibly affect housing and rental costs, and they wanted to discuss how they might better age in place, stay in their homes as they age, and were very worried about how this aging in place would happen given the state of our crumbling, now being dismantled, health care system. They wanted to know how they were going to stay connected as their mobility declines or their health needs change.

So, yes, I speak in favour of this amended Motion 507, seniors' activities. This is a fantastic start to rebuilding the social connections direly needed by seniors across the province. I know that seniors in Calgary-Acadia will appreciate this first step in creating or, rather, recreating the supportive, respectful Alberta that they helped build. Seniors in Calgary-Acadia will be excited to support this motion as it helps them have a higher quality of life and keeps them healthy longer, which is, of course, what we all want. I encourage all members to support the amended Motion 507.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah; thank you. I would like to close debate on Motion 507 as amended, and I'd just like to begin by thanking the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women for her comments and her support of this amended motion as well as all of my colleagues who also spoke and are supporting this motion that will really, I think, create a lot of positive outcomes for seniors in our province as we know that, you know, the activities that we've all talked about as we've spoken about this motion – recreational, physical activity, ways of connecting with our communities – make a huge difference to all of our lives, making us healthier and happier. Certainly, as a social worker for over 30 years it makes me very pleased to be able to sponsor this motion and know that it will have really positive outcomes for seniors in our province.

With that, I'd just like to encourage everyone to make sure they vote in support of this amended motion. Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 as amended carried]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and let me be the first to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Riverview on a Motion 507 well done, as amended.

I now move, given all the hard work that has been done in this Assembly today, that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:41 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