



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 9, 2024

Day 35

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
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(UC)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 9, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three grade 6 classes from École Beau Meadow school in Beaumont. I ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has a school to introduce.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 35 members from St. Jerome's Catholic school, where my kids went to school and graduated from. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. There you are. How are you doing?

Members' Statements

Vaisakhi

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, April 13 marks a significant day in the Sikh calendar, the beginning of Vaisakhi, a vibrant celebration of the birth of Khalsa, which means purity as a collective faith. It is also a date that marks the beginning of the spring harvest. Farmers have observed the occasion for generations. It's a time of joy and togetherness, where families, friends, and communities come together in spirited festivities filled with music, dance, and delicious food. Vaisakhi commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa Panth by Gobind Singh Ji, signifying the formal order dedicated to protecting humanity, to fight for social justice, and to fight against oppression. This festival holds deep meaning for Sikhs world-wide, including here in Alberta where we recognize and cherish the many contributions Sikhs have made to this community.

As we celebrate Vaisakhi, let us also remember the fundamental principles of Sikhism: fairness and equality, respect and unity within our communities, and the commitment to serving others and pursuing social justice for all. Whether you are Sikh or not, this is a wonderful opportunity to learn and embrace Sikh history and culture, to share a delicious meal and join in on the festivities, and further embrace the spirit of unity and generosity that defines Vaisakhi.

May all of you and your families enjoy a bountiful harvest of love, happiness, peace, joy, and prosperity. Happy Vaisakhi. [Remarks in Punjabi]

Happy Vaisakhi. Millions and millions of wishes. [As submitted]

Regional Airport Funding

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, it seems that every day our government members are able to share another way that our government is growing and diversifying Alberta's economy. I rise today to highlight an important investment made by this government into our regional airport network. As we all know, regional airports are critical to rural and remote communities and serve as vital connectors, linking people, businesses, and markets across our vast province. That is why Alberta's government recently announced \$1.13 billion through the regional airports development grant to help airports identify, explore, and prioritize investments and opportunities to increase their connectivity and economic competitiveness.

The grant funding allocated to 10 regional airports will enable them to conduct comprehensive business cases and feasibility studies aimed at enhancing their infrastructure and operational capabilities. From exploring airport certification for scheduled air services to analyzing commercial development opportunities, each funded project is tailored to meet the unique needs of its respective airport. Together these initiatives will help restore regional airports' positions as primary transportation hubs across the province and enable them to be used to meet local needs, including around agriculture services and medical transportation.

Take, for instance, the \$78,000 grant: it was a grant awarded to the Woodlands county regional airport in my constituency on the outskirts of Whitecourt. This funding will go towards a feasibility study on commercial development. This strategic investment will enable the airport to position itself as a hub for economic activity in the region. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade for this important initiative. This investment underscores Alberta's unwavering commitment to growing the aviation sector and diversifying the economy, with a priority on rural areas.

As we move forward, we will continue to work closely with our regional airports to make them engines for economic growth and prosperity across our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Black Entrepreneurship

Mr. Haji: Alberta has the third-largest Black population in the nation. Black Albertans exemplify a strong entrepreneurial spirit and contribute to the province's economic vitality. In 2021 a report commissioned by the African Canadian Senate Group revealed startling statistics: 76 per cent of Black entrepreneurs cited race as a barrier to success, and 75 per cent expressed difficulty in accessing crucial capital loans that would sustain and expand their businesses.

In 2022 the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce issued a landmark report titled Building Black Businesses in Canada focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities supporting Black entrepreneurs across the country. In 2023 a report commissioned by the Council for Advancement of African Canadians in Alberta highlighted hurdles facing Black entrepreneurs, particularly gaps in training, education, networks, and access to capital loans. Concerningly, Black-owned businesses report lower profitability and economic growth compared to the rest of the population. Addressing these disparities is critical for our economic growth and requires targeted policies and support to level the playing field.

Since May 2020 strides have been made by the federal government, financial institutions, and other stakeholders to bolster support for Black entrepreneurs in the province. Other provinces, notably Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, have demonstrated leadership and implemented programs and policies to address these challenges. Over the past months Black communities have made

tremendous efforts to engage with this government. They even met with the Premier and asked the Premier to step up and work collaboratively with Black Albertans and build a landscape that enables success for Black entrepreneurs.

However, Budget 2024 failed to allocate resources to Black-owned businesses. This is a huge missed opportunity to address the much-needed capacity-building funding to Black business supporting organizations. Leaving Black business communities out of the budget and ignoring their requests for support is inexcusable.

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

Drought Preparations

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we continue to experience below normal precipitation levels attributed to El Niño, the potential impact on our water resources and agricultural sector cannot be understated. Our government recognizes the urgency of the situation and has taken proactive measures to address the drought crisis. Earlier this year we established a drought command team, which is working to finalize the drought emergency plan. WaterSmart Solutions is helping our government conduct enhanced drought modelling that will explore ways to make the best use of Alberta's water. Water sharing negotiations have been initiated for the first time since 2001.

In agriculture water is a lifeline to farmers and ranchers in sustaining our food supply. That is why last year we rolled out various support programs, including the water pumping program, the Canada-Alberta drought livestock assistance program, and the temporary livestock water assistance program. Investments have been made to modernize and expand Alberta irrigation systems, ensuring the resilience of our agricultural sector. A Water Advisory Committee has been set up, comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, which will be a crucial resource in our efforts to conserve and manage water resources effectively.

Budget 2024 provides over \$35 million to help maximize water management and proposes an investment of \$125 million over the next five years for Alberta's new drought and flood protection program. Our government is committed to keeping Albertans informed when it comes to the issue of drought. Tomorrow, April 10, the ministers of Environment and Protected Areas, Agriculture and Irrigation, and Forestry and Parks will be hosting a telephone town hall to discuss the current situation and provide updates on how Budget 2024 will help prepare the province for the risk of severe drought.

Mr. Speaker, it's imperative that we take decisive action to safeguard our water resources, ensuring that every drop of water in our communities is used wisely and sustainably.

1:40

Electric Power System

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, on Friday 45,000 Albertans lost power in a series of rolling blackouts following two grid alerts. This government had the opportunity yesterday to take responsibility, show leadership, and commit to addressing their failures. Instead, as expected, the UCP chose to blame others. They blamed the sun for not rising earlier. They blamed the wind for not blowing harder. Then the utilities minister . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. member will know that the interruption of members' statements for whatever reason is not acceptable.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore can begin from the top.

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday 45,000 Albertans lost power in a series of rolling blackouts following two

grid alerts. This government had the opportunity yesterday to take responsibility, show leadership, and commit to addressing their failures. Instead, as expected, the UCP chose to blame others. They blamed the sun for not rising earlier. They blamed the wind for not blowing harder. Then the utilities minister blamed the coal phase-out, that has cleaned our air and left Albertans healthier, for the UCP's rolling blackouts that left tens of thousands of people in Alberta's two largest cities without power.

Strangely, though, at the Climate Summit this past fall in downtown Calgary I heard the Premier hail the coal phase-out as a successful emission reduction policy. She and the environment minister boasted about it at Dubai's COP conference as a great Alberta success story. Phasing out coal is a good policy. Even former Prime Minister Stephen Harper created Canada's first coal phase-out regulation in 2012, and the Alberta NDP government got it done.

The Premier and her ministers should be celebrating Alberta's success as a testament to our innovation and policy that expanded investment across the province, but sadly for the UCP it's another day, another excuse to blame someone, something, somehow – anyone else but themselves – for the UCP's failure to keep the lights on. It is April. It is plus-10. The government cannot keep the lights on.

The combined planned and unplanned outages caused a lack of supply, but we pumped hydro and dispatched batteries until thermal plants came up. The diversity on the grid helped with reliability, and we need more of it. The government needs to get to work to modernize and diversify the grid instead of playing the blame game.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has a statement to make.

Youth Treatment and Recovery Centres

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is nothing but talk when it comes to helping vulnerable young Albertans. Governments are supposed to be there for struggling families, open to trying different strategies, opening up more resources, and, my goodness, saving the lives of these young children. The Premier told us that there would be more youth treatment and recovery centres, but that's all talk and no action.

The UCP closed the youth centre in Lac La Biche in 2022 for a renovation that has no end in sight. Is this service still happening in Lac La Biche while it's being renovated? Of course not. Without warning it closed, and the children who needed support are now being shuttled hundreds of kilometres away to places like High Prairie. But guess what happened next? Well, last week the UCP permanently closed the High Prairie youth treatment centre. Oh, but the UCP is all about opening up more resources for youth, right? Instead of refurbishing the centre and keeping the program intact, it's shuttering it.

The children who need this community-based support close to their families and their communities shouldn't be torn. I mean, really, what do you expect these children to do? We had a centre in Lac La Biche; they shut it down indefinitely to renovate, with no alternative. Okay. Now we'll go to High Prairie; whoops, that one's closed, too. And the UCP just say: well, sorry, Alberta; you're going to have to figure it out for yourself. Not cool.

This government is saying that it'll do one thing, and it quite literally does the exact opposite. The consequences of these closures mean that children will be ripped from their communities, far from their families, and not receiving the local support that they need. When the UCP says that treatment is the only way forward, they have the audacity to close the youth treatment centres and abandon them in their time of need. It's all talk, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans are tired of it.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide oral notice of Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act, sponsored by the Premier.

I also rise to give oral notice pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) that at the appropriate time I will be raising a point of privilege regarding an altercation that occurred outside the Chamber where the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar intimidated and obstructed the Member for Camrose in the performance of her parliamentary duties.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Bill 17

Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence Act

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence Act, 2024.

This act is a step forward in continuing to build a world-class system of care for those facing mental health and addiction challenges. I look forward to robust debate and discussion around the establishment of CORE through this legislation, and in that spirit I move first reading of Bill 17.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of more e-mails from constituents all across Alberta urging the UCP to support my bill, Bill 205, the housing security act.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an open letter to the Premier and the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction and all people of Alberta about the life lease fiasco that is ongoing.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. members, this concludes the regular Routine, and we will call the time 1:50.

Oral Question Period

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

Surgical Wait Times

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Premier about her promise that by March 2024 no Albertan needing surgery would be forced to wait longer than what is clinically reasonable. Instead of accepting responsibility for her failure to meet that goal, she said that it wasn't a promise; it was just "aspirational." To the Premier: will she explain when and how Albertans are supposed to know the

difference between a promise she makes that is a commitment and a promise that she makes that is not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The target remains the same. We believe every single Albertan should be able to get the surgery that they need within a medically recommended period of time. We're making progress. As I mentioned yesterday, we started off with 39,000 patients who are outside that medically recommended time frame, and we're now down to 27,000, and we're going to keep on going until we reach that target. Obviously, there are issues that we need to address. We're expanding chartered surgical capacity. We're expanding the capacity of our hospitals to perform surgical care. I am confident that we're going to keep on working towards achieving that target.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, when a Premier commits to something, Albertans should be able to trust it. "I promise" doesn't mean "wouldn't it be cool if." During the campaign the Premier said, and I quote: we will have completely eliminated our surgical backlog by this time next year and be the first province in the country to do so. To the Premier. This clearly didn't happen. Alberta is, in fact, way behind other provinces. So will she apologize to Albertans today for breaking this critical election promise?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we began our reforms, we were reducing that surgical backlog by 3,000 surgeries a month. After the election we found that it had slowed. We came to the conclusion that we needed new management. So we've got new management, we've got a new board of directors, and we are refocusing the system. What we do know is that Alberta Health Services needs to be focused on delivering hospital care for emergencies, making sure patients are treated and released or treated and admitted in a timely way, and making sure that no patient waits beyond medically necessary, and we're starting those reforms.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, since the Premier is clearly refusing to apologize, it seems like any commitment she makes could go from a promise to a hope and then disappear in a puff of smoke. She's already broken her promise on her tax cut, on keeping her hands off Albertans' pensions, on surgery wait times now, and the list just goes on. To the Premier: since she clearly doesn't understand the meaning and the significance of the word "promise," how many more broken promises should Albertans prepare for?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

1:50

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What people can expect from me is that we will set aggressive targets. We will expect the people whom we hire to achieve those targets to achieve them, and if they don't achieve them, we will get new management who will. That is the way that we will operate. We were not satisfied with the performance that we saw, so we do have new management at Alberta Health Services. We've got a new Health minister refocusing the system, and we're going to continue to make progress. I and the minister remain aligned that the goal needs to be that every Albertan should be able to get the surgical care they need within a medically recommended period of time.

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

Ms Notley: Well, I would argue that when it comes to new management, perhaps it should start at the very top.

Affordable Housing

Ms Notley: Now, when this government fails, they force Albertans to pay the price. Since 2021 the vacancy rate in Calgary's rental market has dropped 80 per cent. As a result, average rents are up \$500 a month. That's \$6,000 a year. We are in a crisis situation. Unique and temporary measures are absolutely required. To the Premier: will she implement a temporary rent freeze until supply increases by supporting our housing security bill next Monday?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is no. It was so funny to hear the member opposite discipline, actually, one of her MLAs in the previous iteration of the government because she proposed exactly what is being proposed now, which is a rent cap, which is rent control. The reason why she got kicked out is because everybody knows – even left-wing economists know – that if you put a cap on the amount of money that rental owners can charge, it means there will be fewer rental properties built, which means you will continue to have a problem with rental housing. All you have to look at is Vancouver and Toronto, who have rental caps. They are the highest cost markets. We do not want to go that direction. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, during the last housing crisis the government of the day, Conservatives, debated between either rent controls or rent supplements, ultimately choosing the latter. The situation today is far worse, but this government has done virtually nothing, offering supplements to only 550 additional households. Good Lord. To the Premier: if she won't cap rent hikes and she won't okay a consequential increase in rent supplements, what will she do to address this crisis today, the crisis today, not in 10 years but today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that for the members opposite, their solution to housing is to chase people out of the province, which they did for 13 consecutive quarters, tell them to go get jobs in British Columbia. That is not our approach. We believe that we should continue to attract people to our beautiful province, and we have to keep up with growth, which is what we're doing. We're reducing red tape. Budget 2024 provides more than \$840 million over three years in capital funding to build more affordable housing, and we're going to continue reducing red tape and building more.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's people at the lower end who are hit the hardest, but nearly everyone is actually feeling the crunch. According to RBC Calgary is now less affordable than it's been in over a decade, and businesses are already seeing challenges recruiting and retaining workers. Speaking of chasing people out of the province, the Alberta advantage is becoming the Alberta wall. Listen to business leaders; they're the ones saying it. Families have been hurting all along, and now it's the economy that's going to be hit. To the Premier: what will it take for her to take seriously the fact that rents are skyrocketing and people can't afford a home in this province?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite well knows they did nothing to support affordable housing when they had the chance. When they were in government, they increased the housing wait-list by more than 76 per cent, and now they're lecturing us. You know what we've done? We've reduced regulatory requirements, in fact 6,400 . . . [interjection]

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

Ms Smith: . . . reducing red tape nearly 24 per cent. Stronger foundations supports affordable housing for 25,000 new households through rent assistance and new construction, and we've seen a year-over-year increase, and housing starts have doubled. What we are doing is working. Just ask the industry.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:54.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow has a question.

Personal Income Tax Rates

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, on day 1 of the last election the Premier promised Albertans a permanent, billion-dollar tax cut that would have started this January. But the government broke this promise as soon as they were elected, and now we know just how short lived this government's promises are. In July 2023, one month after being sworn in, the Finance minister received a single short briefing note that killed this nonexistent tax cut. Can the Minister of Finance confirm that it only took the government 44 days to break the campaign promise that his party made to Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, once again, I think the hot mess express over there needs to worry about their own commitments to Albertans, and we'll worry about ours. As the Premier said, we're going to be pragmatic. We're going to do two things at once. We're going to balance the budget while bringing in the promised personal income tax cut. As Budget 2024 clearly lays out, we're going to legislate in 2025. We're going to bring it in in two pieces, a 9 per cent, \$60,000 threshold in 2026 and an 8 per cent in 2027. We're committed to keeping the promises we make to Albertans.

Member Kayande: The Premier promised Albertans struggling with her affordability crisis that by January of this year they would be paying \$1.3 billion less in taxes. As recently as December the Finance minister was still claiming it would be introduced. Instead, this budget brought in new taxes, higher fees, and the much-touted tax cut is nowhere to be seen, as this FOIP shows. Will the Finance minister apologize for his government breaking its promise to Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's not a good day for NDP parties across this country. If anyone is paying attention to what's happening in B.C. under NDP leadership: two credit downgrades today. Maybe it's a good idea that your leadership is considering a name change and colours and the whole deal.

What I would say is that we're going to do both things at once. We're going to manage the fiscal finances, the fiscal position of this province while bringing in the tax cut. It's a \$1.4 billion difference to Albertans. We had a \$367 million surplus. Do the math.

Member Kayande: It took the UCP 44 days to break their central campaign promise, but then the UCP pretended for months that it was still coming. We all know the truth. Last July they met and ditched their number one campaign plan and then kept that decision a secret, Mr. Speaker. It was not costed in the 2024 budget, and I don't know a single Albertan who trusts this affordability-

worsening Minister of Finance. Will the minister admit that the UCP had their fingers crossed when they made this promise?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is costed. It's \$1.4 billion. It can't be in the budget documents until it goes through cabinet. That's why we laid out the process in Budget 2024: legislate in '25, move to 9 per cent in '26, and a full 8 per cent in '27. Once again, we have to manage the total finances of this province. We had a debt issuance today in euros; it worked out to 4.44 per cent. Just understand that our average debt right now is 3.9 per cent; \$3.4 billion in debt-servicing costs for Alberta now. Every other province is feeling this. We're managing it responsibly. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Family Physician Compensation

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, after years of attacking and undermining family doctors, then more spent dragging their feet, the UCP are finally starting to act, but their plan has a significant gap. Their short-term, one-time transitional funding leaves hundreds of front-line family doctors out: doctors providing complex care, rural doctors practising in community and hospital, doctors making house calls for palliative care. Their work is essential, but because they have fewer than 500 patients, the Minister of Health says that they don't count; they don't get funded. At a time when tens of thousands of Albertans have no access to a family doctor, why is the minister risking the loss of even more?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, in fact, that is not accurate. We have worked with the Alberta Medical Association to make sure that we are in fact providing relief to those doctors that are providing care to Albertans. We will continue to do that even though there was an agreement signed, a contract signed with physicians worth \$780 million over four years. I was able to go out and find an additional \$257 million to stabilize family medicine. It's making a difference.

2:00

Mr. Shepherd: Speaking of the AMA, their president said that many of the doctors excluded by the UCP have fewer patients because of the UCP's cuts, that meant they couldn't afford to practise full-time primary care – they had to drop patients to take on work in other parts of the health care system – and that despite this, it was the minister's decision, against the recommendation of the AMA, to exclude those doctors from getting this support. So why is the minister risking more Albertans' access to care by punishing much-needed family doctors for her government's bad decisions?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to why the AMA did not prioritize family medicine during the negotiations only 15 months ago, but I've been able to successfully add an additional \$257 million over the next two years to provide stabilization and relief for panel management as well as keeping clinics alive while we work with the Alberta Medical Association on a new funding model. That is the commitment I've made, that is the commitment we're keeping, and the dollars are flowing.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, you get what you incentivize, and this minister is rewarding high-volume clinics with quick turnover while excluding doctors who provide comprehensive care, much like the minister that came before her, who paid megacorporations more for virtual care, walk-in care than Albertans' actual family doctors received. Because hundreds of thousands of Albertans are lacking a family doctor, we can't afford to see a single doctor, even

those with less than 500 patients, close up shop. Or is it this minister's plan to go back to the UCP's original goal of finding savings by having fewer family doctors providing comprehensive care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite seems to not know reality. Reality is the fact that we are attracting more and more physicians to Alberta because they know it is a very good economic climate to practise in. We've attracted over 330 physicians into the province within the last eight months alone, and of those, 170 are family physicians. I constantly hear from family physicians that are excited to practise in Alberta. That stabilization funding will allow us the opportunity to work with the Alberta Medical Association on a new funding model. We're getting the job done.

Health Care for Uninsured Persons

Dr. Metz: The AHS website says, "You will not be denied emergency medical care in Alberta even if you do not have medical insurance." However, just two weeks ago Perla Estrada, about to give birth, was denied an emergency C-section at the Royal Alexandra hospital because she could not pay the \$5,000 she was told she had to pay up front. This is a human rights violation and is completely unacceptable. To the minister: will this government apologize to Perla Estrada for this mistreatment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just recently learned of this particular case. I've actually asked AHS to investigate because this is not our policy or procedure. It is unacceptable that anyone requiring emergency surgery or emergency medical attention is denied that. So we are looking into it. Alberta Health Services is in fact launching an investigation into this, and I'll have more to say in the coming days. [interjections]

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

Dr. Metz: Human rights experts have already responded to this story, saying that blocking access to reproductive health care violates international law. Emergency C-sections are stressful enough without having a hospital deny a patient this critical surgery. What Perla went through cannot happen again in this province and never should have happened in the first place. What specific steps is the government going to take to resolve this gross and dangerous medical mistreatment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is a very serious situation. I've asked AHS to investigate. Beyond that, I've also asked the office of the Alberta Health Advocate to investigate this issue. I wrote them a letter to explore this even further. I'm glad, in the end, that the patient was able to get care and that she delivered a healthy baby. But, again, we need to address this issue. This is not usual policy, and we will make sure that it is investigated fully. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Dr. Metz: Perla's story might have been very different if it weren't for the support of family, friends, and community, who brought her safely to another hospital, where she did get care. Immigration status is not and should not be a prerequisite for getting emergency

medical care in Alberta. This incident raises serious alarm bells about the ways that vulnerable people are treated in Alberta hospitals. Will you make the results public and ensure that no other person giving birth ever experiences this again? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: Well, if the member opposite would actually listen to the answers, I have already said that we are going to launch an investigation through Alberta Health Services. I've also asked the office of the Alberta Health Advocate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member LaGrange: . . . to look into this matter and do their own investigation. Mr. Speaker, any patient, whether they're from Alberta or not, should be able to receive the emergency care that they need when and where they need it. I'm focused on that. We'll get it done.

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

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has been focused on responding to addiction by building a modern focus on recovery. We know that addiction is a deadly disease and mental health challenges have grown more and more prominent among Canadians. Alberta recently hosted the largest ever Recovery Capital Conference to showcase the model our province is doing to build the Alberta recovery model. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is the Alberta recovery model making a difference in the lives of those suffering from addiction or mental health challenges?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The truth is that every single Albertan who is suffering from a mental health challenge or the deadly disease of addiction deserves the right to recovery. Now, some of the steps we've taken to move forward are expanding our virtual opioid dependency program to a world-class delivery of OAT, one that is seen nowhere else in any jurisdiction, over 8,000 Albertans a day getting access to the service. We have partnered with five Indigenous communities to build 11 recovery communities, and that's going to give us 2,000 new spaces. We're incredibly proud of our partnership with our Indigenous partners across Alberta to make sure that those who need the care get it in a culturally appropriate and safe way.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that we also heard from the minister last week about the creation of a new health agency known as recovery Alberta, which will be the lead provider of mental health and addiction services in Alberta, and given that this is putting more focus on improving services for Albertans in need, giving them more consistent access to recovery and wellness services across the province, to the same minister: what has our government done so far to improve mental health and addiction services, and how will recovery Alberta continue this work?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. Recovery Alberta is going to play an absolutely intrinsic part of our

path forward. Five years ago the Alberta government didn't have an associate minister of Mental Health and Addiction, and then a year and a half ago, after we created one in 2019, the Premier elevated that to a full ministry. We now have a budget line of \$1.5 million. This means it's the first step towards a very serious policy focus and delivery for Albertans on mental health and addiction. Our first step here, with the creation of this new organization, recovery Alberta, is providing hope for all those who suffer. Recovery Alberta is our obligation for Albertans to be hopeful in their path forward to a full recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta recovery model is an evidence-based compassionate approach in bringing people out of the deadly disease of addiction and into recovery and given that we also heard about the creation of the Canadian centre of recovery excellence, which will continue supporting the improvement of mental health and addiction services and support the creation of evidence-based policies, to the minister: what further impacts will the Canadian centre of recovery excellence have on the Alberta recovery model and other jurisdictions building a recovery-oriented system of care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. The truth is that the Canadian centre of recovery excellence, or CORE, is going to give us the possibility to do a number of things. First of all, to evaluate our current system and our programming, we need to be an evidence-based health care system providing the best possible outcomes for Albertans. This allows us to do that in parallel to what HQCA does for the health care system in the Minister of Health's office. Also, it's going to be able to partner with organizations to make sure we're providing research and be able to do systematic reviews of the research available so we're always evidence based, putting our best foot forward on making sure we serve Albertans for the best possible outcomes on mental health and addiction.

2:10 Postsecondary Education Costs

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, this government knows students cannot afford life under the UCP. They know this because they have doubled the amount allocated to student loans in the last five years. But what I find really concerning is that the UCP knew students were struggling to access postsecondary education, and instead of taking actions to lower costs, the only action they took was to increase student debt. Will the minister explain to Alberta students who are thousands of dollars in debt why the UCP did this to them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that student loans have gone up because enrolment has gone up. I've mentioned this in the House before, that we've had record levels of increased migration into the province, so of course we have more students who are accessing postsecondary education. That is why our student aid package is \$1.4 billion. Of course, I'll have more to say on some of the other scholarships that are available as well.

Member Hoyle: Given that when students cross the stage in Alberta, they get debt as well as a degree and given that this is the sad reality of pursuing postsecondary in this province under a UCP government and given that couch surfing, food bank use, and

skipping meals are not normal parts of a university experience but are the result of this government not addressing student affordability, why is the minister forcing Alberta students into these terrible and stressful situations?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we know that affordability is an issue not only for students but for Albertans and Canadians everywhere. We have addressed affordability concerns. I had mentioned the \$1.4 billion in student aid. We have capped tuition at no more than 2 per cent, and there are so many scholarships that are available for students, including low-income students. I would encourage Albertans who are interested in postsecondary education to please visit our website to take a look at all of the scholarship offerings that are available because they will find something that will suit their situation.

Member Hoyle: Given that tuition is up 33 per cent and rents are increasing by 20, 30, even 50 per cent in Alberta and given that students need safe places to live, food to eat, and the mental capacity to pursue their studies without the stress of trying to afford the basics and given that postsecondary education is a significant economic driver, can the minister explain why this government is forcing students into an affordability crisis? Shouldn't the government care about the future of our economy?

Mrs. Sawhney: The member opposite is right. Postsecondary education is an economic driver. That's why we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the postsecondary system. If I just recap some of the investments we've made, we've invested \$55 million at the University of Calgary, which will open up 2,000 seats in the STEM programs; we've invested more than \$80 million with the MacEwan School of Business, which is going to open up more than 7,500 seats in the School of Business. Again, Mr. Speaker, we do have student aid and scholarships available for students, and we are at the national average for tuition.

Hospital Construction in Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton is going to be short 1,500 hospital beds in the coming year, but the UCP solution is to try to pit north Edmonton against south Edmonton. My constituents in Edmonton-Manning are facing long wait times for doctors, hour-long wait times in emergency rooms, and because of the UCP game of cancelling hospitals, this is only going to get worse. Will the minister stop trying to divide Edmontonians and distract from her utter failure with the south Edmonton hospital and just build the 1,500 hospital beds?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite actually, when they announced the south Edmonton hospital, did it without a functional plan, without a business plan. It was totally politically motivated. In fact, all the documentation that I'm seeing is that a hospital is required in the north end. We are actually going to take our time and do a strategic plan for all of Alberta, something that is in short supply currently. We're going to take that time, and we're going to make sure we build facilities where they're needed.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's tone has clearly changed because I've heard nothing but about the north side and given that my constituents struggling with the UCP health crisis deserve better than the excuses and the nonanswers by

the UCP and given that decades of Conservative failure have left Edmonton short thousands of beds and this legacy of the minister is clearly embracing that idea and given that despite campaigns on building the south Edmonton hospital the now minister claims that we need one on the north side, will the minister apologize to the constituents of the south side and admit that you've been playing games with both the north side and the south side of Edmonton?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is not accurate at all. In fact, right now we have planning under way for a stand-alone Stollery children's hospital as well as the redevelopment of the Royal Alexandra hospital, the WestView health centre, the Strathcona community centre. We are looking to make sure that we provide investments and do what we need to do to address the concerns within Edmonton, just like we're doing right across the whole province. While the members opposite were always focused on themselves, we're focused on the whole problem. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. But let's be clear. Given that the minister has repeatedly said in this House that the south side of Edmonton does not require a hospital but the north side does and given that I am asking the minister to commit today to a north side hospital and given that it's clear that the health care needs of Edmontonians are being ignored by the UCP and this minister, will the minister just say what everyone is thinking, that they will need to wait for the next NDP government to build the hospital? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite will have to wait a long time for that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, again, large hospitals take a lot of planning, planning that the members opposite didn't do. In fact, we're going to make sure we have an infrastructure strategic plan for the whole province. We're going to make use of the ability to build smaller facilities that can be going up faster. We're also looking at how we can utilize the spaces we have and add to the current hospitals that we have. We're going to do what we need to do for Edmontonians. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question to ask.

Natural Gas Industry Development

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the largest oil and gas producer in Canada, making up over half of this country's total natural gas production. That number is in large part due to the Montney and Duvernay natural gas basins. Output from Montney has doubled since 2012, and there are projections stating that the Montney basin itself could make up more than half of the entire country's output of natural gas by 2040. Could the Minister of Energy and Minerals expand on what our government is doing to defend our number one export from federal interference?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's true. The Montney and the Duvernay: they are amazing world-class resources, some of the lowest emitting natural sources on the planet and cheaper than anywhere else on the planet. What a find. In fact, right up there in Grande Prairie, one of the greatest cities in Canada and the world, you would find the opportunity to heat all of Canada for 100 years. That's right. We have world-class resources, and this government

is supporting the hard-working men and women to get those resources to market.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the massive growth in natural gas production from the Montney and the Duvernay basin natural gas place and further given that my constituency of Grande Prairie acts as an important crossroads for the Montney's resource-rich natural gas production, can the same minister please outline the Alberta government's plan for the future growth of the Montney basin, which will continue to position us as the cornerstone on the world stage?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we have an incredible opportunity to end energy poverty using the natural resources we have here in Canada. Whether it's the regulatory environment to encourage drilling and production, whether it's to make sure that this world-class resource gets to market through transportation or encouraging carbon capture, utilization, and storage and working with our Indigenous partners, we are doing all we can to make the world a better place. With the help of this Conservative government and with the focus of this Premier we will do exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the critical importance of environmental stewardship as we move forward with these resource extraction initiatives and further given the mandate of this government to conserve woodland caribou habitats and support woodland caribou recovery across Alberta, could the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas please outline how this government plans to continue the expansion of our natural gas and forestry plays while still protecting caribou habitats?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question. We have invested \$38 million this year alone in caribou recovery planning and habitat restoration. We're also developing subregional land-use plans in all caribou habitat areas with Indigenous community and industry consultation. The plans for Bistcho Lake and Cold Lake are being implemented as we speak, and two additional plans will also go to public engagement later this year. These plans will provide clear paths to protect caribou habitats while ensuring responsible development to continue to create jobs and continue for generations to come.

Federal-municipal Agreements

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, every day the UCP government finds new ways to hobble Albertans with red tape additions. This time they added red tape for Alberta municipalities by demanding they produce lists of each and every agreement with the federal government, including agreements for community mailboxes with Canada Post and mutual aid agreements with First Nations. Instead of providing municipalities with the resources needed to deliver public services, this government adds red tape by ordering them to build lists. To the minister: will the government admit that its red tape addition has more to do with petty bickering over jurisdiction than providing Albertans with the services they need and pay for?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities know those lists are to enable us to deal with the federal government to get

Albertans' fair share. The hon. member, if he was paying attention, would know that the federal government came through Alberta about three weeks ago, left \$175 million here, went next door the next day to B.C. with the same population, left \$2 billion. A \$1.8 billion shortfall is not petty, as the member would describe it; it's pretty important. I think Albertans would agree with this, and I think municipalities would also agree.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans are facing a dire housing crisis and an urgent need for affordable housing, including supportive housing for patients who are discharged from hospitals instead of the UCP's motel medicine, and given that the UCP prefer to fight with the feds rather than access and recoup tax dollars Albertans are rightfully owed even if it means underfunding health care and housing when federal dollars are on the table, can the minister explain why this government doesn't actually want to fix things like housing and health care and would rather let them fail in a schoolyard scrap with the feds?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP want to continue to shore up the NDP-Liberal Trudeau coalition that you see in Ottawa, but this government is fixing the housing crisis. Underneath the leadership of the NDP government you saw affordable housing wait-lists go up by 70 per cent. Under this government you see affordable housing access increase by 40 per cent. Again, our construction industry continues to bring forward record levels of residential construction. Unfortunately, the NDP continue to want to see us get ripped off by Ottawa because that's what their boss Mr. Singh is telling them. We reject that, and we're going to defend the people of this province.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that people love to say that there's only one taxpayer but Conservatives don't actually believe that and given that the UCP has a history of leaving federal dollars on the table while they themselves severely underfund provincial and municipal services and given that municipalities like Calgary are calling this latest scrap with the feds a red tape addition at a time when we need to be building affordable and attainable housing, will the government commit to working with the federal government to fund the public services Albertans deserve and pay for with their taxes, or will it admit that it would rather pick phony fights based on party partisanship?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the folks across are willing to leave \$1.8 billion on the table and in the next breath say: why don't you have more money? Well, it can't be both ways. Somebody has got to stand up and fight for Alberta, and what Albertans have learned is that the folks over there didn't do it when they had a chance, won't do it today. Fortunately for them, they chose our Premier and our government to be over here to fight for their interests. That's just what we'll do. We will not stop fighting. The federal government is hostile to Alberta, but that will not hold us back. The other side just did whatever the feds wanted. Not us; we're fighting for Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Support for the Energy Industry

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, the federal NDP, which, of course, we all know is the same as the provincial NDP, recently had one of their radical MPs table a bill that would criminalize the promotion of Canada's clean and responsible oil and gas industry with penalties, including jail time. Can the Minister of Energy and Minerals please share what this bill passing would mean for my constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, which is home to thousands of

oil and gas workers who depend on this ethical industry to put food on their family's table?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's true that the oil and gas sector here in Alberta pays for schools, pays for hospitals, for new roads, for our incredible opportunity in the future. If I was in that party, I'd be ashamed of my leadership. I mean the leader that sits in Ottawa. That's right; the leader of the mother ship. That ship has landed in the ocean, and it cannot float. It cannot float anymore because the people of Canada and the people of Alberta have rejected them. They should think about that before they elect their next leader. Not only do they need to change the name of their party and their colour, but they need to change their policies. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the Alberta NDP MLAs have been largely silent since the legislation was introduced and given that some of those members and the former NDP cabinet ministers have actively opposed our energy sector in the past, will the same minister please share with this Chamber how our government has undone the damage of the former NDP government and restored investor confidence in Alberta's energy sector?

Mr. Jean: That's correct, Mr. Speaker. We stand up for the people of Alberta against the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa. They do not speak for the people of Canada and do not speak, certainly, for the people of Alberta. Now, what have we done? Not once but twice we've actually stood up against Ottawa in our court and received the Supreme Court of Canada's greatest authority to continue on down our jurisdictional path. What did the Supreme Court of Canada say? They said that the NDP-Liberal coalition, the mother ship in Ottawa, is overreaching their jurisdictional opportunities and they should stop. We are right, and we will continue to be right standing up for the people of Alberta.

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that this proposed federal legislation is just one of many examples of the NDP showing that they aren't serious policy-makers and they don't represent the views of the vast majority of Albertans or Canadians and given that some of the members opposite seem intent on dismantling Alberta's world-class energy sector, can the same minister please elaborate on measures that the government of Alberta is moving forward with to stand up for our oil and gas industry and the many Albertans it employs?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is just responsible for a tiny, tiny bit of the world's emissions, but what we are responsible for is standing up for the world in a world-class way that reduces emissions across the planet. More Alberta energy means less energy emissions for the world. We can do better. We can end energy poverty. We can stand up for the people and give them a better quality of life. How do we do that? Well, we stand up for Albertans, make sure we protect the jobs, the quality of life, and the families right here in Alberta, and we will get a better quality of life for all. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

School Construction in Calgary-North East

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, families in northeast Calgary deserve schools for kids, but this government once again continues to ignore our needs. They have offered no help with the skyrocketing costs of living and high costs of rent, and now they are doing nothing to support the students and families of northeast Calgary by not building the schools our communities need. Under this government northeast Calgary has always been ignored and seen just one school open. How does the minister justify this when our area of the city has a booming population?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, we take the concerns of the residents of northeast Calgary extremely seriously. I went out there personally to meet with residents and speak with them and understand their concerns. Our government is very happy to open additional schools in northeast Calgary. In fact, this coming Friday I will be at Prairie Sky school for the official grand opening of a brand new school for the residents of northeast Calgary. I hope the member opposite will join me in celebrating the work that's been done to add additional schools to that incredible growing community.

2:30

Member Brar: Given that students are being bused hours a day to schools across Calgary because of this government's failure to support our families and given that hours a day on the bus will impact the long-term learning of kids and given that there is little action from the UCP to support our growing region of the city, why does the UCP insist on letting down northeast Calgarians year after year?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the projects that have opened and are opening, there are many additional projects being planned, specifically three in the member's riding itself. We are planning a new high school in Cornerstone, two new elementary schools in Redstone. We're also planning a junior high school in Saddle Ridge and additional schools in the community. As I mentioned, our government is firmly committed to building schools in our growing communities, and northeast Calgary is one of those. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Brar: Given that the northeast stands out as one of Calgary's fastest growing regions and given that this problem has been known for years and given that it is this government's job to plan for the schools in Calgary-North East, what message does the minister have for my young constituents who will spend a longer time travelling to schools or be stuck in already overcrowded classrooms because he wasn't willing to build the schools we need?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, my message is that schools are coming and that schools are on their way. Again, I'd like to reiterate: a new high school in Cornerstone is coming. Two new elementary schools in Redstone . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaidis: . . . are also being planned. A junior high school in Saddle Ridge is also on its way. We're also planning to modernize the Annie Gale school in the community as well. Again, we are committed to building schools in our growing communities, including northeast Calgary. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Support for Black Entrepreneurs

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has not come through with supporting Alberta's diverse organizations and businesses, because her talk and her action are different stories altogether. Take the Alberta Black Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Alliance, for example: the Premier, when asked directly by the alliance if they had received funding, went silent. Why does this government refuse to step up and support an organization dedicated to lifting up and growing Alberta's Black-owned businesses?

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. Our Immigration and Multiculturalism ministry has been working very closely with the Black community here in Alberta, and we have been very closely in touch with the business community. I have gone to a number of seminars and events that they have been organizing, and we have recently also established a Black Advisory Committee in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ip: Given that Alberta's Black communities have seen significant growth, particularly with 64 per cent being first-generation newcomers as of 2021, and given that building collateral and business networks are essential for start-ups and given that the UCP are shrugging off investing in these kinds of targeted programs for Black businesses, will this government step up, put their money where their mouth is, and truly support Alberta's Black entrepreneurs, or will it continue to be all talk and no action?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to participate in the round-table with the Black entrepreneurs. Our government offers a broad range of supports for small-business owners and entrepreneurs through our Biz Connect, our Futurepreneur program. What I'd like to see is that organization meet with my parliamentary secretary for small business, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and really tell us what they would like to see in terms of supports from our government. We love tailoring programming to the needs of the different business communities around the province.

Thank you.

Mr. Ip: Given that the federal government's Black entrepreneur program was meant to drive economic empowerment and given that Alberta has an opportunity to support rather than reject the amazing Black Albertan entrepreneurs and organizations who eagerly want to contribute to our province's success, will the government rise to the occasion, invest in its diverse communities, and embrace economic growth for all, or will it continue to lag behind, missing out on the opportunity to lead an inclusive, diverse, and prosperous economy?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, our government offers a wide range of supports to all entrepreneurs and business owners. Again, pleased to hear submissions from the Black entrepreneurs on how we can better support them with our current or future programming. Again I would encourage them to reach out to our parliamentary secretary for small business, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I've tasked him with going around the province, meeting with entrepreneurs and small-business owners to answer exactly that

question: how can we support them better? How can we remove barriers to their success? And that's exactly what we're going to do.

Thank you.

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, once again the NDP-Liberal coalition is making life harder for the people of Alberta and my constituency with their latest carbon tax increase. Despite Trudeau's recent drive-by campaign-style stops in the province to support his choice for leader of the NDP, this group of tax-happy elites continues to ignore and fails to understand the needs of the vast majority of Canadians. This tax increase will hurt the industries that are the wealth and job creators of our province and our country. Can the Minister of Finance explain what Trudeau's massive tax hike means for Alberta's economy?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta's economy and the affordability of Alberta families are all affected by the carbon tax. While the Liberal-NDP alliance is committed to increasing it every year – I'd remind everyone that they want to double it by 2030, from \$80 to \$170 a tonne – it is hurting investment, it's hurting families that are trying to put food on the table. Even the eco terrorist federal environment minister has said: we know it doesn't work; maybe it'll work by 2060. They have no idea what they're doing. It's punitive. It's a wealth redistribution scam. It's shameful.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this tax is making life more expensive and difficult for families, for farmers, and for all Albertans and given that this carbon tax has been called a tax on everything and is now more than double the price of natural gas and is scheduled to still increase to more than double its current amount in the next six years, can the minister please explain how the latest devastating tax increase from the out-of-touch NDP-Liberal coalition of chaos will impact the day-to-day lives of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. The federal government increased the tax by 23 per cent on April 1. That means higher costs on fuel, on groceries, on heating our homes. All in all, the carbon tax will cost Albertans more than \$900 per household this year. The carbon tax increase on natural gas is now \$4.09 a gigajoule, which is more than double the base price of natural gas. Once again, it's punitive. They've had many chances to back up or change, and they refuse to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 70 per cent of Canadians are opposed to the federal carbon tax increase and seven Premiers have spoken out against this out-of-touch and punitive tax and, surprisingly, even some members from across the aisle who were the architects of the carbon tax scheme have had a magical awakening to the harm that this tax has on everyday families and businesses, can the Minister of Finance explain what it would mean for Albertans if Ottawa were to just finally wake up, do the right thing, and axe the damn tax?

The Speaker: I might just provide some caution to the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore that while she may have some strong feelings, unparliamentary language is still unparliamentary. The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for her advocacy. It's a slogan that's been heard around the country: Axe the Tax. At the very least the federal government should apply the tax equally. Quebec does not pay the carbon tax on fuel, and we would also like to see an exemption on all forms of home heating, not just ones used in Atlantic Canada. While more than half of Canadians are struggling and the affordability crisis is worse than ever, the federal government should do its best for Canadians and eliminate the carbon tax.

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

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 1:54 the hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks rose on a point of order.

2:40

Mr. Loewen: Withdraw.

The Speaker: It has been withdrawn. I consider that matter dealt with and concluded.

During Notices of Motions the hon. the Government House Leader gave indication of his intention to raise a point of privilege, and I call him now.

Privilege

Threatening a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I wish to confirm that appropriate notice pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) was given. I made brief remarks yesterday before the Assembly adjourned and provided notice to the Speaker's office today before 11:30 a.m. Points of privilege are and should be rare. As we know, privilege is a serious matter; as such, the threshold for finding a breach of privilege is very high.

Yesterday an incredibly serious breach of privilege occurred within the precinct of the Assembly involving the conduct of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 107, clearly states: "Members should be able to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. Assaulting, threatening, or insulting a Member during a proceeding of Parliament, or while the Member is circulating within the Parliamentary Precinct, is a violation of the rights of Parliament." It further adds, and I would strongly emphasize, "Any form of intimidation of a Member with respect to the Member's actions during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt."

"Contempt," Mr. Speaker: a word we do not take lightly. I cannot think of any behaviour that is more unbecoming of a member of this Assembly or more egregious than what occurred yesterday just outside of this Chamber. The Member for Camrose was in the south members' lounge following delivering a speech in the Assembly when she was verbally intimidated and physically prevented from freely circulating either to the washrooms or back to the Chamber by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. While the Member for Camrose was in the lounge, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar came up behind her and aggressively admonished her, and I quote: the people of Camrose have no business weighing in on what's happening in Edmonton. End quote. When she told the member, and I quote, you are scaring me, he outright mocked her in an aggressive and intimidating manner. He mocked her, Mr. Speaker.

As she tried to leave, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar followed her, sought her out, to continue this onslaught of harassment. In fact, a member from the Legislative Assembly security service had to intervene and tell the opposition member to, quote, take a walk.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I'm at a loss for words here; I truly am. While we all represent our constituents in this place, collectively we represent all Albertans. Of course, any member can speak to any provincial matter of importance, either to them personally or matters which their constituents feel strongly about. To insinuate that members can only speak to matters in their own constituencies is completely absurd.

There's nothing wrong with expressing your dislike for another member's opinion; in fact, I believe that's the whole point of this debate. But there are rules, Mr. Speaker, with a bit of latitude built in so as not to prevent one member or the other from being able to freely express their opinions. It makes for good and thorough debate.

However, the reason I chose to raise this point of privilege is because there is a difference between heated remarks made during the course of debate in the Chamber and to have a member intentionally seek out another member in order to verbally intimidate and prevent them from fulfilling their parliamentary duties, something they were duly elected to do.

Maingot's Parliamentary Privilege in Canada also provides clarity on this matter, stating that members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any member on the floor of the House or while he or she is coming or going to and from the House or on account of his or her behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any attempt to influence or obstruct a member from this parliamentary work may constitute contempt. There is that word again, Mr. Speaker, "contempt."

Erskine May Parliamentary Practice on page 146 states, "To attempt to intimidate a Member in his parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt, cognate to those mentioned above." Again, Mr. Speaker, contempt.

I think it is incumbent upon me to point out, Mr. Speaker, that this particular event is representative of a pattern of behaviour from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. On November 29, 2021, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made a menacing gesture and yelled in a threatening manner to a member of the government caucus in what only can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to intimidate. Upon having the opportunity to speak to the point of privilege raised at that time, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did rise and state, "I realized that my behaviour was not becoming of the Chamber, so I offer my unreserved apology to both the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the Member for Taber-Warner."

More recently, on November 20, 2023, during a point of order the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made – and I will quote the Speaker – "an absolutely unacceptable gesture directed to the Government House Leader." When asked to return to his seat and apologize, the member was reprimanded by the Speaker for his behaviour. There are many, many more examples of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar being called on his behaviour in this House, including a quick search that would reveal 20 points of order: on October 31, 2018, twice in one day; on November 26, 2019, four times in one day; and on March 18, 2021, again, two times in the same day.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the idea of proper behaviour and decorum becoming of a Member of the Legislative Assembly is a concept that completely escapes the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but yesterday's behaviour is the most egregious example to date. Specific criteria for finding a prima facie breach of privilege must

be met. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 109, clearly states:

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Camrose was so intimidated yesterday by the member's actions, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that she was not able or comfortable returning to the Chamber to participate in further debate. This is the most serious case of intimidation I have ever witnessed in this place. Moreover, the Member for Camrose was also so affected by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's behaviour that she attended a Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting this morning remotely for fear of encountering such behaviour from that member again, either in the precinct of this morning's meeting or during the meeting itself.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot even imagine what the Member for Camrose is feeling at such an encounter, but there can be no doubt that what happened yesterday is unbecoming behaviour by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and this has obviously created an unhealthy, hostile, and – I'm just going to come out and say it – an unsafe work environment.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, it truly grieves me to say this, but this behaviour is so egregious that I do not think an apology will come anywhere near to repairing the lasting impression the member has made on the Member for Camrose. This is clearly a point of privilege and, I am disappointed to say, certainly fits the criteria for contempt. I'm even more disappointed to point out that the gravity of this behaviour is exponentially amplified by the fact that the members opposite regularly accuse this side of the House of not caring about women and also of being misogynistic and things of that nature. Yet here we are having a male member of the opposition intimidating a female member of this side of the House in such an aggressive and an egregious fashion.

In closing, I would leave us with the words of Speaker Bosley, who in a 1986 ruling stated:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

I think there is ample evidence, Mr. Speaker, that this raises to the level of a prima facie breach of privilege, and I would urge that this matter needs to be further studied by a committee in order to adequately deal with the persistent pattern of behaviour from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is the case with points of privilege, hon. members who have had their conduct called into question or the Official Opposition House Leader are able to speak directly to the point of privilege immediately following the arguments made by the Government House Leader or others, or they can elect to defer such an argument to a later date. Typically speaking, that would be tomorrow. I can confirm with all of the members of the Assembly that all requirements pursuant to Standing Order 15 have been met in this case on this point of privilege.

I now turn to the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader or the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to make their remarks. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to respond to the Government House Leader's point of privilege. I would just like to start my response by offering up my own version of the events that happened yesterday in the lounge behind the Chamber.

I was, in fact, in the lounge behind the Chamber at the same time that the Member for Camrose was there. She instigated the incident by continuing the debate that was here on the floor, and I responded by escalating the argument. Where the Government House Leader suggests that I followed her in an attempt to intimidate her, I strongly take issue with that characterization. It's my understanding that the Member for Camrose was proceeding to the washroom, which is situated on the opposition side of the building here behind the Chamber, and I was on my way to the opposition lounge.

She did indicate to me that she felt threatened by my behaviour, at which point I clarified to her that it was not my intent to intimidate or make her feel threatened; that I was going to the opposition lounge. The Government House Leader indicates that I mocked her. At no time was my intent to mock her. I was simply explaining why I was walking in the same direction that she was and trying to tell her what my intent was.

I recognize and take seriously the fact that the Member for Camrose felt threatened and intimidated, and I regret my behaviour in making her feel that way. I know that many of my colleagues here have expressed on numerous occasions times that they have felt threatened and intimidated by members of this very Legislature, and I take that seriously. It was by no means my intent to make the Member for Camrose feel threatened or intimidated, nor was I attempting in any way to obstruct her ability to do her work here in this House.

That's my version of events, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to put that on the record. I'm also apologizing directly to the Member for Camrose for my own actions yesterday. Like I said, I acknowledge that she has felt threatened and intimidated, and I sincerely regret having made her feel that way. I will do anything that I can to restore a feeling of safety and wellness in this workplace, and I commit to the entire House that my behaviour will reflect that improvement and that consideration going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to comment with respect to the point of privilege, as it is the right of members of the Assembly to make comments with respect to a point of privilege?

Hon. members, the apology from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, typically speaking with respect to points of privilege, concludes the matter, and the matter is considered dealt with.

I think it is imperative to provide some additional remarks with respect to conduct of members, especially with respect to their interactions with one another. I have received information that confirms some of the behaviour of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I do believe that his conduct was inappropriate. I value his apology, but I also want to reiterate that I believe it's important that members feel safe and unimpeded to conduct their parliamentary business.

I also think it is very important to note that there is a significant difference between conduct inside this Assembly, in these four Chamber walls, in which there are a number of protections, whether we agree with the level of those protections at any particular given time with respect to the presence of presiding officers, members of the table, the Sergeant-at-Arms, or otherwise, that interactions that take place inside this Chamber provide some level of those protections – and it is

very, very concerning to the Speaker that members of the Assembly or, in this case, a member of the Assembly felt significantly threatened outside of this Chamber. While I appreciate that those two things can be similar, there is a significant and tangible difference between a member feeling threatened or being threatened by a member of this Assembly outside of the protections of the four walls of this Chamber, so I am gravely concerned about the actions of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm particularly concerned and have expressed my concern that this incident took place outside of the Chamber.

This, unfortunately, is not the first offence of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. While there have been other points of privilege raised in this Assembly about the conduct of members, on each of those occasions the conduct took place inside the Assembly, where, as I just mentioned, there are other protections in place. This is certainly the most concerning point of privilege that has been raised during my Speakership. I'm deeply concerned about the impacts that this interaction and this behaviour by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will have and could have on other members and their ability to conduct their business.

I am going to have a personal conversation in a meeting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I will accept his apology as it is presented. And I will communicate directly to the hon. the Government House Leader and the Leader of the Opposition on issues impacting members, in particular on how members interact outside this Chamber. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is rising.

Point of Clarification

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 13(2), asking for the Speaker to explain any decision at the request of a member.

The Speaker: I'm happy to continue to explain. My sense is, though, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud will accept that the Speaker took some length to describe the difference between an interaction that takes place here inside the Chamber and an interaction that takes place outside of the Chamber.

I can appreciate the value that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has on occasion raised points of privilege of which there has been no official record of those interactions. I'm sorry, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud; in this type of point of order you get to ask the question for me to explain my ruling, and then I explain it to you. We don't have a debate.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't asked a question yet. I just said that I was rising under Standing Order 13(2).

The Speaker: Right. The question under 13(2) is for the Speaker to explain his ruling, which I'm doing.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually not about this ruling that you've made just now.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, 13(2) applies only to the ruling which I have just delivered.

3:00

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, that's not what the standing orders say.

The Speaker: I will entertain your question. It is unlikely that I will answer it.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On February 28 of this year, in response to a point of privilege raised by the Opposition House Leader, the Speaker accepted the apology of the Government House Leader in response to a point of privilege that was raised on the last day of the fall sitting of the last Legislature and accepted it without any comment and made no explanation. I'm wondering why in this situation there was no further direction given to the Government House Leader as a response for making a very tepid apology with many limitations. That apology was simply accepted, and the matter of that point of privilege was resolved by just simply accepting that apology. No evidence that was provided that was available from statements from other members of this House who were present at the time of that point of privilege were allowed to be provided to the Speaker for consideration.

I would argue that there are fewer protections in this Chamber as there are compared to outside of the Chamber, so I'm asking . . .

The Speaker: I appreciate your remarks; I've heard enough of them. The very clear difference, as I made in my ruling – and for you to make the accusation that no other member was able to provide arguments is categorically untrue. The reason why it's untrue is that I stood in this very place and asked at that time prior to the ruling and provided members of the opposition the additional opportunity to provide further information, which you will know was not provided. So for you to make the accusation that members of the Official Opposition or otherwise were unable to provide additional information is categorically untrue and unbecoming of a member.

Additionally, significant information was provided between the time of that raised point of privilege and the apology. I provided that information both to the Official Opposition House Leader as well as the Government House Leader, which is acceptable to do.

I might continue to add that in my remarks this afternoon I provided a very clear reasoning and differentiating between activities that take place inside this Chamber – and you might disagree with those protections, and you're entitled to that – and activities that take place outside of this Chamber. I can assure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that if she would like to litigate this issue, the one on which I have just accepted the apology for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Speaker is very, very happy to do that.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to that opportunity.

The Speaker: I actually don't think that you do, because the information that is available at present is unbecoming to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I can say with some level of certainty that it will not be a positive process. It is in the best interest of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and, I believe, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as well as the members of the Official Opposition, members of the government or otherwise, for us to accept the apology. While I appreciate that you may be disappointed that the hon. member received some level of caution and admonishment for his actions, for the purposes of ensuring that members understand the significance of going outside of this Chamber, raising their voice in inappropriate manners, standing intimidatingly over members in close proximity: this conduct outside of the Assembly is entirely unacceptable.

Ms Pancholi: I agree, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have made a decision. That is to accept the apology. I've provided my ruling. I have also now expended close to 10 minutes of time explaining the difference between those two things.

This matter is dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 10
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned March 27: Mr. Eggen speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, should he choose to do so.

Are there others who wish to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. [interjection] The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, with all of that.

An Hon. Member: First day.

Ms Phillips: Yeah. It's my first day. It was actually my first day with what just happened.

Thank you, and I appreciate your indulgence, Mr. Speaker. It went a little quick for me.

I rise to speak to Bill 10, of course, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This is, of course, one of the pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, that brings the budget to life. There are always several bills that bring the budget to life, and this one brings in a couple of different tax expenditures or revenue elements: the tobacco taxes, there's an agriprocessing credit involved here, and a couple of other pieces that actually got a little bit more public attention when the budget was announced at the end of February. Of course, I'm speaking here of the film and TV tax credit, the Land Titles Act, and this invest in a diversified Alberta economy business, but also the changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act around the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Now, the Alberta Is Calling retention bonus is a \$5,000 refundable tax credit, and it's only for certain occupations that are in shortage. These will be spelled out in the regulations. The minister has said that these will likely include crane operators, electricians, heavy-duty mechanics, welders, and pipefitters, and to be eligible, a worker will need to be employed or self-employed for certain trades on a full-time basis in Alberta and file their 2024 taxes here.

This cost of the tax credit was the first thing that popped out to us in terms of this legislation. In estimates I found out from the Finance minister that \$10 million is the foregone revenue, that is to say the tax expenditure for this program. The other \$4 million is for administration and promotion. That seems like a lot: \$4 million for a \$10 million program that is going to benefit 5,000 people at maximum and even then not in all of the occupational categories that the government talked about during the election campaign. I'm sorry. I need to correct myself because it's actually 2,000 workers that this applies to, not the original 5,000.

A fairly expensive flagship promise, and it certainly does not go very far with respect to health care shortages in particular. We do see some shortages in other occupations as well, but the one that I hear the most about and certainly did during the election campaign is health care, health care, health care. During estimates debate around the same time I also asked the minister if Alberta's physicians could expect some of the reforms that they had been asking for and are continuing to ask for in the comprehensive care model that the AMA has put forward, and the answer was, in fact, a flat no.

Now, we know that we have attraction and retention issues throughout health care workers, various front-line workers, various professions, both physicians and allied health professionals of various kinds, which is why in the original iteration this Alberta Is Calling business was supposed to cover some health care workers and does not.

Now, physicians are, of course, a different piece. Number one, they actually are quite a large expenditure on behalf of the government. As I always say about health care: yes, it can be quite expensive in terms of the one budget line that it takes up in any provincial government's budget, but the only thing that's more expensive is not doing it.

3:10

Certainly, you know, public health care binds us together as Canadians. Medicare is the promise that we have made to one another that you will not be destitute if you fall ill, and it is increasingly under stress. Nowhere do we see that more than in family physicians. Now, this business of attracting and retaining family physicians one would think that one would find in this Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, at least some recognition of attraction and retention, given what is happening in other provinces.

Now, I heard the Health minister stand up a couple of days back and indicate in response to questions about family medicine and about some of the new programs that are coming out to help people with administrative costs and other non fee-for-service aspects of their remuneration. I think it was yesterday, in fact, that she said: oh, Alberta family physicians are some of the highest paid in Canada. If not, I'd have to check the Blues – or I guess it would be *Hansard* by now – whether or not she actually said: the highest paid in Canada. That statement is demonstrably false, laughably so. The estimated family medicine annual payments per FTE were just published in the president's letter from the AMA president, Paul Parks, just recently on March 8, 2024. Here we have that Alberta's estimated family medicine annual payments per FTE lag British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba considerably. I can table this data at the appropriate time.

You've got to remember, too, Mr. Speaker, that not only are their payments lower, but in British Columbia they've got some new stuff coming in. There are visit payment, hourly payments, rate increase, all this sort of stuff happening to attract doctors. They also enjoy a lot more respect as front-line health care workers than they do here in Alberta because we live in a province where we tore up the physician master agreement in 2019, heard all of the physicians saying that this is going to have tremendously deleterious consequences for the future of health care, in particular primary care, in this province. Those people were summarily dismissed, ignored, and belittled, and we did not then have another master agreement until last year.

I remember specifically meeting with a group, a large group. It was right before the pandemic, and you know at that time in February or late in January when we didn't quite know what to do, if we were supposed to not touch our faces or those kinds of things, I met with the hon. Leader of the Opposition in Lethbridge with a large group of physicians, many of whom were family physicians but also hospitalists and palliative care docs. They were saying: "Look, what is coming in terms of the replacement for the master agreement? It's going to cause physicians to leave their practice here in Alberta, look elsewhere, leave the profession entirely." And it did exactly that particularly in Lethbridge.

In 2021 we had 62 fewer family physicians than we did in 2019. In one year the south zone lost 31 more. In the Q1 of 2022 we lost 13 physicians alone. So it was quite rich to listen to the UCP stand up during the election campaign last year and declare that we had

added 43 physicians in Lethbridge. Last I checked, 62 is more than 43, so we were still at a considerable deficit, which is why to this day, Mr. Speaker, one cannot find a family physician.

People come to Alberta. There is no question that folks are moving here. Certainly, in Lethbridge one of the reasons they move to Alberta is because they enjoy the weather. That's why they're not coming to Edmonton. I support folks in that. This is an obvious reason to come to Lethbridge, but the other reason they come is, of course, affordable real estate. You know, you can cash out of your expensive GTA or Lower Mainland real estate and buy a beautiful home in sunny Lethbridge and finance a retirement or what have you. But when I talk to people who have just come, I say: "Great. Welcome. I'm glad that you're enjoying this community. You're outside in January; it's not miserable to do so." They say, "Yes; everything is wonderful; I just don't have access to health care," which is an extraordinary statement for any Canadian to make.

As I said before, medicare and public health care is the promise that we have made to one another, and when Confederation is in tatters, as sometimes it is, and when we have rancour and division among regions, we have medicare to pull us together. Even the UCP government found a way to be nice about the Canada Health transfer given how, as they know, citizens treasure their public health care system. No access to health care: that continues to be the case in Lethbridge.

What we see here through this Financial Statutes Amendment Act is an utter failure to reckon with that health care crisis both at the primary care level but, of course, at the specialist level as well. We know that surgical wait times are getting longer. We have seen the CIHI data that has just come out. We also have a situation in southern Alberta where anaesthesiologists are now writing to the minister indicating that AHS's recruitment efforts, given that this bill grapples with the question of recruitment from out of province and out of the country, through the recruitment office have been – and I quote, Mr. Speaker; I have tabled this letter – a complete disaster.

Now, it is quite unusual for a group of anaesthesiologists to pick up pen and put it to paper and describe a piece of public policy being administered by AHS to the minister as a complete disaster. This is a level of frankness that normally we do not see. What it reveals is the level of crisis and the fact that specialists and anaesthesiologists in Alberta and in southern Alberta do not feel that they are being heard by this government. The answer, when I asked the Health minister about this emerging crisis in anaesthesiologists – meaning that we will have surgical wait times back up – was that everything is fine. I know she received that letter because I was CCed on it, and it was written to her.

On the one hand, you have specialist people who care deeply about the future of public health care in this province saying that we have a recruitment and an attraction and retention problem, which is, by the way, a complete disaster and characterized as such, and on the other hand you have a government hand waving away the problem and instead throwing \$10 million plus \$4 million for administration and advertising at 2,000 people for a lot less than it would have been. That is the flagship piece, I guess, of this budget. It's interesting that the government has not really made a whole lot of effort to even advertise this thing. Even with its considerable budget they do not appear terrifically focused on this task of building the economy in the sense that it is building the capacity of people to build the economy.

Now, there is no question that attracting skilled trades is very, very important. I think that we can all support that. I think that the narrowing of the number of folks that it's targeting and also the number of occupations is problematic, and I think we do need to look at health care here. I also think we need to have a talk about

training our own professionals here and our own skilled trades here. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-South has been working on this matter, on apprenticeship training centres, and working with the labour movement on those.

3:20

That is an important way that this province can signal its desire to expand the workforce, to make sure that young people of all backgrounds have an opportunity to access those high-paid trades jobs that, when they come with the benefit of a union, come with a pension, better wages, and an advocate that looks out for their occupational health and safety, because everyone deserves to come home safe and, in many skilled trades that are dangerous, come home alive.

Again, we have a situation here of: when people come here to work, what do they find once they come here? Are they finding that good, solid, middle-class lifestyle where they also have access to health care and education? That's where this bill falls short.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I'll recognize the Member for Grande Prairie next.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, here. I do see that this bill encompasses a wide range of measures aimed at guarding our economic standing, attracting skilled workers to our province, supporting our local industries, and fostering technological innovation. This is about the Alberta advantage. It's about bringing people to our province. It's about making sure that Alberta continues to be the backbone of Canada.

As we navigate currently, we have some complex economic challenges, but, Mr. Speaker, we also have opportunities, great opportunities, here in this province, some of the best in the world. It's incredibly important that we equip Albertans with the necessary tools in order to not only overcome obstacles but also to thrive in this competitive global environment. This bill covers a lot of ground, so I will be taking a little bit of time to outline some of these key things that this bill, Bill 10, is covering.

Mr. Speaker, even though we have so many undeniable strengths, we are not immune to economic fluctuations and also workforce challenges. As we look ahead, we can recognize coming challenges and opportunities that demand proactive action by this government, by our workforce, and by legislation. Among these future hurdles is a potential shortage of skilled trade workers, which threatens to impede the progress of critical projects across our province.

In addition, we have an opportunity to support our film and television industry, which is beginning to truly blossom here in Alberta. It's becoming an economic driver for our province. This helps us remain competitive and attract even more lucrative productions here in Alberta.

Our commitment to emissions reduction and technological innovation is reflected in the proposed carbon capture incentive program. We are also committed to deterring smoking and tobacco use.

Last but not least, facilitating further investments in agriprocessing facilities is essential for job creation and economic diversification across our province. All the way from southern Alberta, northern Alberta there's great opportunity in agrifoods right now, and we need to seize this opportunity. Whether it's ensuring a steadfast workforce of skilled workers to help sustain our economic growth, supporting our film and television industry to showcase Alberta's beautiful landscapes and cultural richness, reducing emissions through innovative carbon

capture initiatives, and promoting public health by deterring tobacco consumption, the implications and benefits of Bill 10, if passed, are extensive, to say the least.

In addition, making it easier to apply for the already successful agriprocessing investment tax credit program would not only boost the creation of jobs and the opportunities but also support community development, thereby enriching the lives of all Albertans.

Now, just a quick plug for my own community. There's great opportunity in the agrifood sector up in Grande Prairie and northwestern Alberta, so I look forward to, well, right now publicly inviting the minister up to my riding. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to do that right now.

The passage of Bill 10 would also not merely represent a legislative decision but a commitment to our provincial well-being. This bill seeks to address these areas and more through many different avenues. For starters, the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus: this is a landmark initiative offering a one-time refundable tax credit of \$5,000 to skilled trade workers relocating to Alberta, becoming Albertans, supporting Albertans, and becoming part of our culture and the enrichment therein. This would foster growth across all parts of Alberta, addressing impending labour shortages while also showcasing that our great province is a prime destination for a skilled workforce to find a job that they can excel in and also improve our economic growth as a province.

I just want to say to everyone contemplating moving to Alberta: we have welcoming arms to the skilled workforce; we're the place you want to end up in in Canada to participate in the backbone of Canada, the backbone of economic growth and innovation across Canada.

By widening the film and television tax credit program, this also greatly expands the opportunities for films to be able to come to Alberta, for television to expand the window of what they're able to apply to, and also this greatly impacts rural Alberta, welcoming them into the conversation as well. We're also streamlining the administration, the processes associated with this tax credit, and providing earlier tax credit disbursements. These are all important steps for us to continue to grow our film industry. This also broadens clear rules and reduces the bureaucratic hurdles and reduces red tape, which this government is all about, reducing red tape, unlike our counterparts across the aisle, who only added red tape for many years. We'll continue to work on that. We welcome the film industry here to choose Alberta as its location and also just expanding Alberta's voice in film and television.

As well, by recognizing the potential of the Alberta carbon capture incentive program in lowering our carbon emissions and creating jobs, Bill 10 would exempt the program from in-year expense limitation rules, a strategic move which grants the program much greater flexibility in deploying resources and advancing our environmental objectives while diversifying Alberta's economy.

Now, Bill 10 would also implement a careful and necessary increase in tobacco tax rates, aligning with our government's commitment to public health and harm reduction strategies by discouraging tobacco consumption through taxation. We do seek to support the well-being of all Albertans and ease the strain on our health care system. I'm a big supporter of this as well.

We're also simplifying the process for registered partnerships to access the agrifood processing investment tax credit program, which will help incentivize investments in this growing sector. By offering a nonrefundable tax credit and attracting substantial investments from across Alberta and, actually, from across the world, we are promoting job creation and stimulating economic growth. As I said, we have the Alberta advantage. This leans into it heavily. I look forward to continuing to see the implementation and growth of our agrifood sector. This would cement Alberta's

position as an agrifood processing hub across all of Canada, which Alberta obviously is. We are the backbone of Canada. We are solidifying our place in agrifoods.

Now, this bill also does hit home for me personally. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203, my private member's bill, which recently went through, is on foreign credentialing, and I do think that is an important part as well. I'm very familiar with the challenges and also the opportunities facing our newcomers. They help with our skilled labour shortages. While Bill 203 will continue to help lay the groundwork for attracting more skilled tradespeople to Alberta and recognizing those credentials and allowing them to participate in the economic growth, Bill 10 will uphold that promise to a higher degree and also pave the way for a smoother transition and integration of newcomers into our communities through the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus as well.

Another proposal in Bill 10 that I see great promise in relates to the freedom afforded to the carbon capture incentive program. Grande Prairie, my home riding, is a hub for energy development in northern Alberta, northwestern Alberta. We have witnessed first-hand the potential of carbon capture measures in reducing emissions associated with energy production in my backyard. As Grande Prairie serves as a crossroads for numerous energy companies and operations, the potential found in initiatives like the Alberta carbon capture incentive program is important. With Bill 10 we have the opportunity to bolster these efforts, providing greater support for carbon capture initiatives across Alberta and in my riding of Grande Prairie.

This government is fully committed to reducing emissions. It is imperative to recognize that by providing greater flexibility and support for carbon capture initiatives, we can accelerate Alberta's progress towards a more diverse economy, creating jobs for Albertans while reducing emissions. Bill 10 is grounded in our government's core mandates and exemplifies our commitment to building a stronger, more prosperous Alberta. By driving economic growth, attracting global talent, promoting public health, and mitigating carbon emissions, we can chart a course towards a greater future for all Albertans.

I would encourage every single member in this Assembly to join me in voting in favour of Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the speaker from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. As my colleague noted, it certainly is one of those bills that brings a government's budget to life and, in doing so, does indeed set the stage for the UCP to bring its Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus to the public, as it were. We absolutely do need to attract and retain workers to Alberta, and that includes those folks in skilled trades. But regardless of that and regardless of the intention of the bonus itself, my reading of the act leaves me with many, many questions, concerns, and reservations. I find that there are a number of gaps, and I'm curious about why those gaps might appear. I find that there are unmet considerations and, I think, also some unexplored alternatives and some things that perhaps could have made it a more fulsome representation in terms of what it is we actually need, some unexplored alternatives which are indeed left out.

To begin with, this is a promise that wasn't kept by this government, in my view. This bill indeed, I think, represents a betrayal of sorts – and, certainly, I do not use that word lightly – because it's a betrayal of health care, child care, and other workers who were depending upon this government to keep its promise that they would soon see more colleagues working alongside them, most particularly and most

crucially and most acutely in the midst of a health care crisis. These workers waited for this, and sadly they continue to wait.

If I might, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to relate some information I found in a news article from the *Calgary Herald*, which did run about a year ago. It talked about the sort of beginnings of the Alberta Is Calling campaign. It talked about that original incentive, touted as a one-time attraction bonus, of at least \$1,200 for people who move to the province to work in high-demand jobs. It talked about the fact that it included child care employees, health care professionals, which, of course, included nurses and paramedics and doctors, apprentices and people and other folks employed in the certified trades. As the minister noted in that article:

"It will, in conjunction with other things, help move the needle." . . .

"What it says is that we're very serious about this campaign, about supporting those workers, long term, in Alberta. We want them here . . . We're willing to put our resources behind that."

I need to underscore part of that last paragraph.

"We're very serious about this campaign, about supporting those workers, long term, in Alberta. We want them here . . . We're willing to put our resources behind that."

Now, certainly, I do understand that things, circumstances, and contexts change, and so, too, can those things that a government might choose to focus its job upon. Certainly, the minister has indicated that upon reflection it was noted that \$1,200 was insufficient to move from another jurisdiction to Alberta; hence, the \$5,000 total. I appreciate that. I, in fact, do appreciate folks who reflect.

However, we also do need to remember that it's people who make the economy. Without workers there would be no economy. Mr. Speaker, by electing to focus this bill, Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, and its attraction bonus only on a very small number of skilled trades and those trades mentioned by the minister in the press conference that announced the bonus, those five trades in particular, whether or not they end up in the program in the end, by electing to focus only on those five skilled trades, health care workers and other health care professionals along with child care workers – and this includes all of those presently working in the province on our collective behalf. I would say that it appears that those folks are simply being forgotten, less than valued. That's not a good thing, and surely that's the direct opposite of what the minister intended when he said earlier, when referring to the original broader swath of professionals, "We're very serious about this campaign, about supporting those workers, long term, in Alberta."

Absolutely, we do need skilled trades professionals here in Alberta. The work of the skilled trades professionals that the minister has referenced in news conferences – those electricians, pipefitters, heavy-duty mechanics, welders, and crane operators – will indeed be needed. Certainly, they will be called upon to do that important work in the future as we, for instance, build the infrastructure necessary, including the \$30 billion infrastructure deficit that Alberta Municipalities just talked about. We need workers to support, to build, and then to maintain, to not only catch up on that infrastructure deficit but also, as our population increases, with projects this year and into the next decade.

But my fundamental question that I'm left with, Mr. Speaker, is: does Bill 10 actually deliver it with its one-time \$5,000 bonus? My first instinct, of course, is always to look into the details of something. If we look into the details of who will qualify, as my colleague from Lethbridge noted, generally speaking, to be eligible, a worker needs to be employed or self-employed within certain trades on a full-time basis in Alberta in 2024 and to have lived here for one year. But let's consider for a moment those workers beyond, of course, health care workers and child care workers, who are left

out of the legislation. Let's consider those who are likely to be included. Of those from those five approved trades, will it then include those workers who change jobs over the course of a year? Will their jobs not be considered stable, and therefore they will not be considered for the bonus?

I wonder about the timing. I note that in the act it says that you have to have completed a 2024 tax return, which tells me we're looking to folks arriving here this year, not for folks who might have arrived just last fall or perhaps in December, Mr. Speaker, not to mention the trades professionals who are already resident in Alberta. What happens to the worker, for instance, who ends up laid off for a period of time or who becomes injured? What about those folks who find themselves working on separate projects, perhaps with a subcontractor, a number of different projects through what looks to be a number of separate employers over the course of the year? As one stakeholder I talked to noted, when the work is gone, you're gone.

I'm also curious: what will the definition of full-time work mean? Who will be the person or people who, in fact, are deciding upon that definition? Will those folks include the worker whose employer classifies them as full-time but perhaps that worker is actually working closer to 30 hours regular time? Will overtime hours be included, for instance? Will folks who regularly work shutdowns or turnarounds be included? Further, will the self-employed individuals in a prescribed occupation be drawn from the same prescribed occupation already in consideration by the minister: pipefitters, electricians, crane operators, heavy-duty mechanics, and welders?

Further, I actually do have questions about how that list of five, although it's not included in the bill but mentioned in a couple of news conferences, developed. Who developed the list, with whose input? Engagement sessions with a wide swath of folks involved in the trades over a period of weeks or months? What data was consulted when reaching the determination of those five particular trades? And will, again, those five particular trades end up indeed being the prescribed occupations in the regulations? Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I do understand that much of the detail will be sorted out in those regulations, but given that they will appear likely by way of order in council, I'm hoping that during the course of our debate, through the course of committee we might receive some answers.

More than that, though, I do think that we also need to consider whether or not this is really the right approach to the problem that we're faced with. We do have a problem, a shortage of workers across a wide variety of sectors. The government's own data points to both current and looming shortages in the trades along with health care professions and other professions, including, for instance, educational assistants. Oftentimes shortages seem like they're sort of simple to deal with, not enough workers for the jobs that are available.

However, as with all things, it's inherently more complicated because it's not just about the lack of workers for any particular sector; it's also about wages, fair wages and wage growth. It's about safety on the job, having robust OHS standards and WCB systems, and it's about the potential for a long-lasting career to support oneself and one's family. Wrapped up with all of that, it's about the conditions for work. It's about that work seen as being valued. Are the conditions that are created conducive to a worker wanting to begin work, stay at that work, make a career out of that work, and then further stay in Alberta? Part of that complexity does involve the cost of working. If you're looking to move yourself or your family, it certainly doesn't hurt to know that you may have a \$5,000 return coming your way after you file your taxes.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if this, what I see as a rather short-term, limited, job-specific approach, again, is the right one to take. Given that we know we are looking at years, perhaps decades or more of shortages across so many sectors of employment and given that we also know that this is an issue faced by other jurisdictions in the country, knowing that the minister himself has indicated the reason why health care workers weren't included in this initiative was because of an understanding, if you will, that there was an unwillingness to take health care workers from other jurisdictions of the provinces and territories as a result of talks and collaboration between ministers, I'm wondering, then: would not that same consideration apply when speaking about skilled tradespeople?

I'm wondering if there's been a cross-country, cross-jurisdictional approach, knowing that other provinces are facing those very same pinch points and knowing, of course, that the federal government is, too. Has there been specific discussion about, you know, the mobility tax deduction for moving expenses through Revenue Canada? Regardless, in the face of this affordability crisis and this broken promise for me, again, that primary underlying question remains: will a \$5,000 attraction bonus, as included in Bill 10, serve Alberta, serve its employers, and, most importantly, serve its workers in the long run?

A March 15, 2024, article from HRD Canada's magazine asks the very same question, and its headline is *Is the \$5,000 'Alberta Is Calling' Signing Bonus the Right Approach?* In that article an expert named Tricia Williams, who is the director of research at Future Skills Centre, comments that incentives and credits should be focused on growing the current pool of workers rather than poaching currently available talent from other Canadian provinces or territories. She talks about the fact that we might be better served if we focus our attention on the people who are already in that pipeline. How do we support them to finish? How do we recruit more people into those programs to maximize the availability of those skills? She also says that what they found in their research is that there are a lot of barriers to not just starting a skilled trades program but also to completing it. In fact, they're finding a huge attrition rate, particularly for those folks who are women or new arrivals to Canada. And then she says that the whole country will suffer if these issues will not be fixed.

Interestingly enough, her comments are also echoed by folks I've recently spoken with, Mr. Speaker, stakeholders, many of whom, I understand, unfortunately, the folks opposite didn't consult with in advance of the introduction of this bill. Nonetheless, given that these are the folks working in trades and they represent skilled trades professionals, their insights and questions are important to hear, so I'd like to just go over a few of what it was they said to me recently. They have an overriding concern that the bonus in the end won't really make a difference in the long term.

They're wondering about that issue of basic affordability in our province. We know we are in an inflationary crisis with wages not keeping up, and even if those 2,000 folks arrive and take advantage, they'll be faced with the same affordability crisis that everyday Albertans face now: double-digit rent increases, wages that don't keep up with inflation and haven't for a number of years. More than that, there are high utility costs, grocery prices that keep on rising. And while, of course, that applies to all workers, it's particularly challenging for workers who are entering the profession for the first time. As one rep said: when a new worker sees their first paycheque and realizes they can't make a living at this, they say, "Are you kidding me?" and they are gone. We certainly don't want that to occur.

They have questions as to whether or not it'll just be journeypeople who will be considered, or will apprentices be considered as well? Concerned about the nature of consultations or, rather, as I noted, nonconsultation, because consultation with stakeholders means more than just one phone call, what will the actual requirements be? Why those five trades in particular? How were they chosen? More than one person I spoke to talked about it being a \$14 million program, with \$4 million to operate red tape, \$4 million worth of red tape.

But more than that, what about the folks who are here now? What incentives are on deck for them and to ensure their conditions of work are such that they want to stay here? Has there been a discussion about perhaps why tradespeople might be leaving Alberta to go to other provinces? Who's leaving and under what conditions? Has there been consultation done to answer those questions? Where's the data that can point to some of the underlying issues for this and other concerns in terms of those worker shortages?

One of their concerns as well has to do with the practice of double-breasting and how double-breasting itself will depress wages and then can also have a negative effect on health and safety issues for workers. Skilled tradespeople know that if you want to work, you might have to settle for a job that pays less than the collective settlement, settle for something, in fact, that's less than ideal. This is something that all workers are experiencing right now.

Finally, what does this issue mean for folks who are younger, who are Indigenous, women, newcomers, folks new to their trade? How will their unique needs be met in this legislation? As I said, Mr. Speaker, I find inherent gaps in this legislation focusing on only a small group of skilled trades rather than looking for another option that's positive and long lasting and will provide an outcome for a variety of workers across a variety of sectors. This bill neglects those folks. I'm looking for a much more comprehensive program that can meet all of those.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Member Ceci: I'd thank my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Your timing is just perfect, with you sitting down just as you finished your well-thought-out remarks. I also want to thank my colleague the former environment minister who provided some rather good comments, too, to us today with regard to Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. She characterized this act as one that brings a budget to light, and it's an unfortunate light because I don't think it does much for the people of Alberta. I, like my colleagues, will continue to oppose the things that are in this budget that are problematic for Albertans.

My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked a lot about the bait and switch that went on as a result of talking about Alberta Is Calling in one context, and then when it shows up in print, Mr. Speaker, that bait is not there in terms of helping out the breadth of workers, particularly health care workers, child care workers, that it purported to help out. That's unfortunate because it's just another series of broken promises that are put forward by the UCP government that Albertans have to continue to put up with.

I want to touch on a number of points as I go through. Some of them have been mentioned, but I think others perhaps have not. One of them speaks to that \$5,000 Alberta Is Calling signing bonus. We know that that will do precious little to help out Albertans who are coming to this province to work here. One example. Calgary rents are incredibly expensive at this point in time. I was talking to one constituent on the way up yesterday, and she said: you know, MLA Ceci, Calgary has taken first place in terms of the cost of a single-bedroom apartment. She's at the lower end wages of things, on a fixed income. She knows from experience the sky-high rents that people are paying in the downtown of Calgary. If they come here

as part of the attraction for Alberta Is Calling, they'll be in trouble in terms of finding something that is suitable for their needs. So they'll have to find something that's not suitable for their needs. They'll have to pay a lot for it, and they may not think very well of the attraction that brought them here to work in Alberta.

You know, I'm also concerned that we have a really high unemployment rate in this province. Western Canada is looking for people, obviously. There are many people who can't find work. If they do find work, it's at the lower end of things. It's precarious employment. That means that many Albertans are struggling. That's not being addressed by the government; they're missing their chance to help out those Albertans, and our economy is not bolstered by those unemployed Albertans. In fact, the opposite occurs.

The other thing that this bill does not assist with: you know, we know that there was a promise to cut taxes for a huge swath of Albertans by this UCP government. That's not effected. That's not put into place. So people are finding that instead of their taxes being cut, their taxes are being increased, and taxes are being raised in a number of areas. This bill is a vehicle for making that happen.

3:50

For instance, the tax hike on a \$450,000 home in Alberta – if you can find one at that price, because that's not easy to do, and if you do find one at that price in Calgary, you are lucky, and you are in a situation where that home needs a lot of work. The tax hike on purchasing that home now is another \$550 by this government, and that's not a helpful thing. The number of unhelpful things in Bill 10 are legion, and I'm going to try and outline a few more of them.

I wanted to talk about the financial information in Bill 10 that is now being less transparent. Looking at the report, looking at the bill here, changes to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act will allow this government to avoid reporting on the Alberta fund expenditures and the Alberta carbon capture incentive program: from the second-quarter financial report. It's going in the opposite direction to what not only credit-rating agencies and others want but all Albertans want in terms of transparency, in terms of the government's financial picture. We're seeing less of that as a result of this bill. Albertans don't deserve less transparency; they deserve more transparency. This government is finding a way to be less transparent.

The colleagues before me talked about this Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus and how the government of Alberta, the UCP government, is paying \$4 million to administer and promote that. Another part of the reason they have to administer and promote it is that the federal government won't do that for them. You know, typically the federal government works lockstep with provincial Finance departments. In this case they turned their back on this promotional scheme and they won't administer it. And that's telling in and of itself.

The other point I wanted to bring up with regard to this bill is in the whole area of the film and TV tax credit. That part of the act will do a number of things which will make tax credits more available to partnerships in film production and other kinds of things like that, which seems like a good thing, and I know it will be helpful to those initiatives that want to film in Alberta.

I'll give people who put that together a bit of kudos with regard to an increased tax credit for rural and remote productions. I've seen that when they did a scan of other provinces that have that sort of thing available, they found that Manitoba was having some success with that in terms of getting those productions out into rural and remote areas of their province. That's been mirrored here by this increase to the tax credit for that particular area.

We know that it's particularly helpful for rural, remote areas because there are some struggling things going on in the rural, remote areas of this province. I think there's about 14 per cent of Alberta's population that live in places that would be characterized as rural and remote. Across the province – you know, the discussions I've been having today with a member of one of the 300 agricultural societies in this province talked about how difficult it is for them to operate in a rural part of Alberta and how they need more activity, more economic development going on. If they can get a small part of that film and TV activity in rural and remote parts of this province, then hopefully agricultural societies can benefit as well. They can continue to survive. From the information I got today, it is a challenge, and they haven't had a budget increase in many years, and that is difficult – through COVID, of course – and the fact that insurance has gone up or utilities have gone up for them, and they need more ways to generate revenue. This is one potential for a revenue generator in rural and remote areas that will assist, but it can't do it all on its own.

Film and TV is certainly there in our province, and it's doing great things. I know some of the people involved in some of the film studios in Calgary, and now they're getting back up and running as a result of the strikes being settled and those film projects returning to them.

The other point I want to bring up is with regard to the agriprocessing investment tax credit. Kind of a theme around rural and remote areas and nonurban areas, I think it's appropriate that we all try and understand how to best support people who are living not in major urban areas but outside and want to continue living in those areas. The agriprocessing investment tax credit looks like it's going to be opened up a little more to projects that can access those funds, and that will be a big assist to major agribusinesses that want to locate throughout the province.

My colleague from Edmonton talked about the waste of money that's going into promoting and administering advertising, and I mentioned that earlier about the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus. I think that's unfortunate. We need to utilize every dollar as best we can in this province, and it's not going to help with the affordability crisis at all. There are many other things that if we put money into them – like the former NDP government assisted people through the downturn and made sure that children and schools were being fed, that poverty was being reduced in those families. Those are the kinds of investments, I think, not wastes of money, that would be beneficial.

The bill itself is something that has a few good points overall, but for the most part I'll continue to oppose what's here before me. I think that without seeing this government kind of invest broadly in more people, in more schools, in more educational opportunities at the postsecondary level, the kinds of things we're seeing in this bill will not generally help our economy to the extent that those other things that I was just mentioning will assist our economy with and will make sure that Albertans have a future that they can rely on, they can count on, they can believe in. These other kinds of small incremental changes, by and large, won't do it for the kinds of problems we have now with regard to sustainability, with regard to affordability, with regard to the number of people who are coming here and not finding their place in our Alberta future because of the costs that are continuing to affect them. Mr. Speaker, with those kinds of considerations before you, before this House, it's incumbent upon me to once again say that I'm going to oppose the bill before us; my colleagues will as well. We'll look forward to continuing debate on this issue in the very near future.

But for the time being, Mr. Speaker, if we're at that point in time, then I will adjourn debate on this topic. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Bill 11
Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Acting Speaker: The minister of public safety has risen to speak.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is my honour to rise this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 11, Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

This bill moves forward on this government's commitment to protect communities across the province in a number of ways. One of those ways would be by creating a provincial 24/7 ankle bracelet monitoring program to hold high-risk offenders accountable while out on bail or serving a community sentence.

Bill 11 also keeps Alberta families and communities safe by enabling the creation of an independent police agency. Public safety and policing needs have evolved in this province, and changes to the Peace Officer Act would enable the creation of a new independent police agency that would be responsible for carrying out policelike functions already currently performed by peace officers in the Alberta sheriffs. This includes duties such as fugitive apprehension and surveillance, amongst a very long list of policelike functions that they perform on a daily basis in this province in order to support police agencies all around this province. These initiatives are aimed at augmenting the efforts of local police services by having sheriffs perform some specialized law enforcement functions.

Alberta's government continues to look at more ways to modernize policing and improve accountability through further legislative and nonlegislative changes. We have already successfully expanded the role of Alberta sheriffs, and we are working to further enhance the current policing model to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of having repeat criminal offenders out on bail, reoffending constantly in this beloved province, so let me be clear. The Liberal-NDP alliance has made Canada less safe by creating an environment where organized crime and repeat offenders face little to no consequences. Bill C-75 has led to an increasing sense that our criminal justice system is not holding criminals properly accountable for their actions, and this is completely unacceptable. If Bill C-48 fails to protect Canadians and repeat criminals continue to wreak havoc in our communities, our stance remains the same, in that Bill C-75 should be repealed. Alberta's government will do whatever it can to protect Albertans, and while we assess the impacts of Bill C-48, Alberta's government will not sit idly by. We will do whatever it takes to protect our communities.

Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, if passed, will be used as that protection. Mr. Speaker, Albertans' safety is of the utmost priority for this government, and through this legislation the Premier has not only shown that she listens to Albertans, but she's also demonstrated her dedication to protecting our province and its people. If passed, this act will address measures intended to protect Albertans, hold violent criminals accountable, and respond to the evolving public safety needs of our communities.

Despite numerous benefits, the NDP have tried their hardest to misrepresent this bill. Mr. Speaker, this bill was created to augment and support the RCMP and other municipal police services and be respectful of our Indigenous communities throughout this province. It is notable, for example, that our neighbouring province, Saskatchewan, has created the Saskatchewan marshal service. This service will be operational in 2026 and have 70 officers to police the province of Saskatchewan. Despite dangerous and false rhetoric that is coming from the members opposite, the Public Safety

Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, will be used to support policing in this province.

I'd like to take this time to clarify the intent of the bill. There is nothing in this act that relates in any way to the topic of getting rid of the RCMP in Alberta. This simply is fearmongering from the members opposite. Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made on the Alberta police service. These initiatives in Bill 11 are aimed at augmenting the efforts of the police by having sheriffs perform some of the specialized law enforcement functions. The act, if passed, enables the establishment of an independent agency – that's the police service – and the appointment of a chief for that service. An oversight board, which is similar to the responsibility and scope of a police commission, will also be created to provide civilian oversight. This, in turn, will keep the new agency at arm's length from government.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, the use of the act will not harm Alberta's law enforcement; if passed, Bill 11 will strengthen it. This act is about making a safer Alberta. This government has been committed to ensuring that Alberta's voice remains strong in our priorities, our interests, and our concerns. Rural Albertans have spoken out about the level of crime in their communities.

As we continue to remain true to our word, our government is now taking action to stand up for Albertans, especially in rural Alberta. When someone calls 911, I expect someone in uniform to take that call. Full stop. Mr. Speaker, Albertans in rural parts of the province should expect and get the same level of service as you would in Calgary or Edmonton or any municipality that has a police service. Wondering if an officer will show up during an emergency when called should not be on the mind of an Albertan when they are in crisis. I expect someone to answer that call.

As I have said before, the federal Liberal-NDP alliance and Bill C-75 have created an environment in Canada where repeat violent offenders in organized crime have been able to thrive with little to no consequences. It's not subjective, Mr. Speaker; that's an objective fact. Far too often police services in Alberta issue bulletins of offenders being released who are at risk to reoffend, and just as often we read the news stories about Albertans being victimized and offenders who should not have been released.

Alberta's government continues to prioritize the safety of Albertans and is taking strong action to protect our families and our communities. If passed, the legislation would help make our communities safer by establishing 24/7 electronic ankle bracelet monitoring for offenders and individuals on bail who pose a risk to public safety, Mr. Speaker. As part of our safer streets action plan this is a key action that we're taking to help combat rising crime and restore safety to Alberta's communities and families. This program would also align Alberta with jurisdictions right across Canada running similar programs.

Again, as I have said before, the Liberal-NDP alliance has wreaked havoc on our bail system. It has completely wrecked our bail system, and we are needing to think outside of the box in order to protect Albertans in this province. Protecting residents from repeat violent offenders and defending Alberta's interests while enhancing public safety are critical to Alberta's economic future and, by extension, Mr. Speaker, the future generations of Albertans that we are here to serve.

Mr. Speaker, this act allows us to stay true to our word, to stand up for Albertans and the future of our province. That is why I support Bill 11, so that we can continue to focus on the meaningful work that keeps Albertans prosperous and our voice respected.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Thank you, sir.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to join debate? The Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in opposition to Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, otherwise known as the APP that Albertans have clearly said they do not want. An independent agency police services: if you need to put “independent” into the title, that really does beg the question as to whether it actually is independent, but okay. Albertans have been incredibly clear on this: take your private police force and – well, I’ll let you fill in the blank. As you know, Albertans are opposed to this independent police service. Now, why? Because they are worried about a hundred other things, and they do not think a police force, a provincial police force, is needed nor worth the astronomical cost. What are these other hundred things? Well, let me start with a few thoughts from Calgary-Acadia.

4:10

Last week I was chatting with some folks, hearing their thoughts and doing my best to both understand and to support them by offering solutions, you know, like our job. One of the ladies – and I kind of chuckle because I’ve mentioned it before in this House that Calgary-Acadians are not shy, and she certainly wasn’t – shared that she is completely confused by who the Alberta Premier is trying to please with her policies, explaining that it seems like the Premier clings to random ideas with no logic or cohesion and that few seem to want. This independent agency of police services is a perfect example of this.

We also receive e-mails sharing a lot of the same sentiments where Albertans share that they feel tricked and blindsided by this Premier’s policies, and you know what? They, too, do not want a provincial police force, and they definitely don’t want one from this government who is all talk and no, well, wanted or desired action.

Back to the hundred things. Well, there’s health care. Albertans cannot get access to a family doctor, but, hey, no worries; we’re going to buy ourselves a police force. Albertans cannot get the necessary surgeries in the medically benchmarked time frame, but who needs surgery when you’ve got your own police force? Ooh. Albertans cannot afford their utilities – huh – and even if they could, given the rolling brownouts and blackouts that we’ve been seeing when it’s 10 degrees outside in April, simply making for more stress, more anxiety and more, well, fear, but no worries; we’ll get a police force. Oh, yeah, and Albertans cannot access the appropriate mental health services they need and will continue to suffer with escalating symptoms, but again no worries; we’ll get a police force.

Loud and clear Albertans have been asked and have answered: they do not want an independent police force. They do not want to spend critical funds on an independent police force. The current actions and priorities of the UCP government do not align with what they promised Albertans they would do. The current actions and priorities – oh, pardon me. Remember the old gooder, “No one is touching your pension”? Yeah; that was great. But no worries; we’ll do a public survey using public dollars and then refuse to share it with the public. Ooh. I tell you. This government wonders why Albertans don’t trust a word that comes out of their mouth. On one side it says no; on the other side it says yes. Either way Albertans suffer.

One of my personal favourites: health care is not in crisis. Ha. See, I can’t even say that with a straight face, speaking as someone whose previous career was as a registered nurse who witnessed, fought, and struggled to provide the appropriate care for my patients all the while this government underfunded, cut programs, and went

to war with, well, nurses. Ah, those were good times. But no worries; we’re going to get our own police force.

Now, remember pre-COVID? Yeah. Things were bad then, too, not quite as bad as they are now, but you might remember that we had a Health minister who at the time felt it was perfectly fine to confront, bully, and generally disrespect Albertans, sometimes even in their driveways. But no worries; we’ll get an independent police force.

If health care isn’t in crisis, I really wonder whether this government understands the meaning of the word. When we have fewer and fewer resources and Albertans are forced to use the emergency room as their primary care: if this isn’t a crisis, I do not want to see what this government would consider a crisis. Yes. But no worries; we’ll get our own private police force. Many Albertans will suffer needlessly and some won’t get treatment in time to stop the progression of a disease and for others a diagnosis much too late. But no worries; we’ll get our own police force. Yippee.

Another favourite, the election-promised tax cuts, now coming in ’26, 2027, you know, just in time for the next election. What a gross bait and switch. Albertans made life decisions based on what they understood they were voting for, and this UCP government has painted them a fool. Shame on you. But no worries; we’ll get a private police force.

Calgary-Acadians have given me all sorts of feedback, since I started this job, about what they want to see in Alberta, what they don’t want to see, what they think I’m doing well, and what they’d like to see me do differently, but let me tell you that they are not happy about this government. But no worries; they’ll get a private police force.

Albertans have said and will keep saying what they feel and what they want from their government, and, Mr. Speaker, what I hear is that the Premier and the UCP government are being incredibly wasteful, and Albertans do not want a provincial police force.

While every Calgary-Acadian may not agree exactly on what’s best for the province or how we should get there, one of the things that comes up repeatedly is how Calgary-Acadians value honesty, transparency, and integrity from their government representatives. Now, Bill 11 is a sneaky, underhanded way of putting through the UCP’s own agenda, something that will cost Albertans a fortune and that Albertans have said they do not want. It is not addressing any of the issues that Calgary-Acadians have told me that they have worried about; for instance, housing or being able to pay their rent; affordability and the high cost of utilities and insurance; drought and preparing for the upcoming wildfire season; the rising unemployment rate and being able to find a job that can cover their cost of living; the rolling brownouts and blackouts, as I had mentioned before; barriers to renewable energy in Alberta; protecting our children, including the trans; and ensuring that everyone is safe and welcome in our communities. They’re also concerned about the long surgical wait times, coverage for their life-saving medications, and honestly they’re worried about their futures. Mr. Speaker, they do not want a private police force.

Albertans breathed a collective sigh of relief when the Alberta police force was nowhere to be found in the ministers’ mandate letters, but now the UCP is going behind Albertans’ backs to set themselves up for a provincial police force that no one asked for, just like they are doing with health care privatization, serving their own interests at a high cost to Albertans. This sneaky behaviour is the opposite of what Calgary-Acadians have told me they want from their government. This is not honest, this is not transparent, and this does not demonstrate integrity. If you’re going to write bills like this one that serve your own interest, just be up front with it.

What I can tell you clearly, Mr. Speaker, is that Calgary-Acadians and every Albertan I’ve spoken to do not want Bill 11.

They do not want a private police force. Further, Albertans are also tired of this government giving their friends jobs which they lack the education, experience, or expertise to hold. But don't worry; we'll get a provincial police force and an oversight board – ooh – which, of course, is going to be hand-picked by the government and, again, not the best choice. But, you know, that's what Albertans deserve, the best choice. Instead, Albertans get the UCP, their broken promises, the bait and switch, and generally a government who asks questions, then decides they don't like the answer and moves forward anyway.

Albertans deserve a lot better. Earlier today I along with some of my fellow MLAs toured the Stollery hospital. For me, I was pretty excited as it was a little bit like going home, and it absolutely made me incredibly sad to see the spread-out design, where we've stuck children into a hospital that was not designed for them. As part of our tour we were asked to look through the lens of a five-year-old, and what I can tell you is that even the entrance to that space as a five-year-old is terrifying. I worked at Alberta Children's hospital. I know what a purposely built building for children looks like, and that's not it. Stollery needs its own separate physical building, away from adults, where you can actually specialize for these children. But no; instead, we're getting an Alberta police force.

Now, I would encourage all members to vote no to Bill 11. Think about yourself, what it means to you as an Albertan. Think about what it means to the people that you represent, the people you actually work for. Have they said, "I want a police force, another police force inside Alberta that mostly is controlled by this government"? Not at all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: The minister of community and social services has risen to join debate.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you. I can see, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of my colleagues are excited to get up and respond to the urban privilege that we just witnessed on the other side of the Legislature. You know, after a decade up here in Edmonton it never ceases to amaze how little the NDP understand about the rest of the province of Alberta, particularly places like where I represent. The hon. member, I believe, is the MLA for Calgary-Acadia, the big city of Calgary, our largest city in this province, and she is policed by the Calgary Police Service, not by the RCMP, not by any other police force.

Now, if she would take the time – most of her colleagues won't. In fact, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we used to have a great colleague in this place, the hon. Doug Schweitzer, who's now retired from this place. When he was Justice minister, he used to say that he would rent a bus to be able to take the . . .

Member Kayande: He quit.

Mr. Nixon: I see the NDP laughing. Somebody remind me what riding that individual is from. He so very rarely speaks in the place that I don't even know who he is.

An Hon. Member: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Nixon: Calgary-Elbow. Oh, that's why he's laughing. There you go. I understand, Mr. Speaker. He's laughing because he realizes that he's now in former minister Schweitzer's seat, legendary Doug Schweitzer's seat. God, the people of Calgary-Elbow sure downgraded with that member. That's unfortunate for them. But when Doug was here, he used to invite the NDP to come see rural Alberta by bus. None of them would take him up on that.

An Hon. Member: The bus.

Mr. Nixon: The bus: this is what he would famously say in here.

Unfortunately, the NDP continue to want to stay inside their urban environments and then come to this Chamber and insult the people of rural Alberta with that type of craziness that you just watched that member bring up. The only thing I can say to her again is: we're happy to get a bus and show you what takes place in rural Alberta and ask her maybe to take some time to recognize all the other people in this province and the communities that we have all across the province who are not policed by the Calgary Police Service. She has a private police force, the Calgary Police Service.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Point of Order Decorum

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just standing up under 23(h), (i). We'll go with (h) and (i), maybe (j). Basically, the hon. minister knows perfectly well to speak through the chair, not to speak specifically about a member in the Chamber and specifically at a member of the Chamber. This whole conversation that we've heard from the member opposite is specifically trying to create disorder in the House. We had a great environment happening prior to this conversation and this order of debate, and I think it would be beneficial if the member could maybe go through the chair and focus on the content of the bill and not on the specific member on this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The minister of community and social services to respond.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The member just gave an entire speech talking about health care and other things not associated with the bill, so that's a little bit rich for the point of order. I was also speaking clearly through you. I was using words like "you" in speaking to you, Mr. Speaker. This is clearly a matter of debate. I know the NDP doesn't want to hear the other side of the debate. They just prove our point each and every time they do this. This is not a point of order, and I look forward to continuing my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: I'll not consider this a point of order, but I will urge members to speak through the chair and not speak directly with regard to an individual member in a derogatory manner. Respecting each other in the Chamber is part of being able to actually have proper decorum in the Chamber. I'd just urge everyone to use a sense of respect to other members in the Chamber.

The minister of community and social services.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the urban privilege of the NDP, which was my main point for rising today, what we've witnessed from the Official Opposition in the debate today: the clear lack of understanding of rural Alberta and the fact that, frankly, they don't care about the places that I represent inside this Chamber.

You know, when the NDP were in government, Mr. Speaker, you sat with me in the opposition benches in those days. You will know that the now Leader of the Official Opposition and her cabinet refused to do anything about rural crime, refused to stand with the

communities that I represented, which were being victimized on a daily basis at that time. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that the galleries were once full of mayors coming up to try to beg the NDP government and the Leader of the Opposition when she was Premier to do something about the victimization of our communities that was taking place, and she famously, in this Chamber, laughed at them, never took rural crime seriously at all.

In fact, when former minister Schweitzer, who I was just speaking about inside this Chamber, wanted to hold a town hall about rural crime – we held it in Rocky Mountain House – 1,500-plus people came out on a snowy evening just before Christmas to Rocky Mountain House. A couple of home invasions had taken place in some of the rural communities that I represent, where mothers and their children had been victimized over some very violent crime that took place. The minister was nice enough to come out with all of his officials to be able to hear some of the significant concerns that were taking place. There were also rural crime town halls that took place all across the province. The NDP, when they were in power – some of my new colleagues that weren't there, Mr. Speaker, will probably be shocked about this – could not be bothered to even drive out to rural Alberta. Instead, they sat inside their safe cities, where they're policed by their private police force, whatever that means.

Municipal police forces are from the municipal government underneath the rules that are put forward by the provincial government for policing. They certainly aren't private, but I guess that if that's how the member would like to describe the Edmonton Police Service, the Lethbridge Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, and others, that's disappointing. But that's how she does describe them. Certainly, they're policed by that, where they know for sure that no matter what happens, within minutes a 911 call will be responded to.

I would argue that the hon. member has never been out to Nordegg and found out what it's like when a home invasion has taken place in Nordegg, which is over an hour west of Rocky Mountain House, which is already an hour and a half west of highway 2, and what it's like for the RCMP to patrol that area with four reserves within 15 minutes of the town, two national parks that border – three national parks. You can't forget, Mr. Speaker, about Rocky Mountain House national park. The fact that Indigenous communities sometimes have to wait hours for their 911 calls to be responded to: that has been a significant challenge for the rest of the province for a long time.

At its core one of the big parts of that challenge is that the RCMP have not been able to fulfill their full mandate for our communities. We are constantly, at times, short . . .

Mr. McIver: What about the staff shortages? We're paying for it.

Mr. Nixon: Exactly. We're paying for it in a community like Rocky Mountain House, where we're supposed to receive 100 per cent of our officers, and we've only received sometimes as low as 50 per cent of officers. So we can't receive that full service.

What we did see in some of the work that's already been done by the government was being able to beef up the ability of fish and wildlife officers, who work for the province, of sheriffs, who work for the province, to provide a law enforcement process inside the province. I guess the hon. member would call the fish and wildlife department and Alberta sheriffs a private police force. They're not, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member. They are not a private police force. They work for the government of Alberta, paid for by the taxpayer of Alberta, and they play a very important role, particularly in rural Alberta, to keep us safe.

We started to make a process change to be able to make sure that those types of law enforcement agencies could support the RCMP,

at the very least inside our rural communities, to be able to help support when something was happening like a home invasion and when an armed fish and wildlife officer or an armed sheriff was within the vicinity but could not respond because they were not an RCMP officer. The government started to make those changes and learned from those lessons that this actually was very effective for our rural communities – it was able to support the RCMP – but that more work had to be done to be able to make sure that all of our communities could be fully staffed with the law enforcement that they deserve inside rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents deserve, at the very least, the same level of law enforcement inside their communities that I represent that that hon. member has inside her city. For her to rise inside this place and in any way disparage rural Alberta and say that my constituents don't deserve that is shameful. Again, the NDP need to check their urban privilege and start to understand that there's a much bigger province than where they represent.

We see it time and time again from them. I mean, gosh, Mr. Speaker, when they were in government, I remember standing by you with tears in your eyes, a lifelong farmer who has raised his family on his farm, as they came in here and brought legislation to try to shut down the family farm. They don't like rural Alberta, and comments like you saw today show that they don't like it and, further, that they don't understand rural Alberta. My constituents should not be ashamed for a moment that they expect their government to be able to make sure that we get proper law enforcement in our communities.

4:30

Now, let's talk about Indigenous communities, who sometimes have to wait hours to be able to get law enforcement to come and help their communities. This government is bringing forward legislation to be able to increase Indigenous policing, something we heard loud and clear from Indigenous communities. You see what's taking place on the Blood reserve as they bring in their law enforcement division through the work that this government is doing. I think the hon. member would call that a private police force and ask for it not to take place. Instead, she'd like those Indigenous communities to continue to have to wait hours to be able to receive emergency response times when her community receives them in minutes, Mr. Speaker. In minutes. Again, check your urban privilege. That is what the NDP needs to do because it's outrageous that they would rise inside this Chamber and laugh and giggle about what's happening to our constituents. This is what happened when they were in government.

In Eckville there was a famous home invasion that took place, a young mother at home with her two kids. I know her. I'm the MLA for Eckville. Four people came onto the farm in the middle of the night, brutally assaulted her in front of her children; 911 was called. It's 40 minutes before you can get an RCMP officer to that community. We now know there was a local sheriff and a local fish and wildlife not far away. Because at the time they weren't connected into that dispatch sheriff system that this government has built, that mother had to be terribly victimized in front of her children. But because of the process that's taking place underneath the Deputy Premier and previous ministers before, that won't happen again in the future because that armed fish and wildlife officer or that armed sheriff could respond to help that mother in the middle of the night or at a different time of the day to make sure that they are kept safe, the same thing that the NDP's constituents get inside Calgary and Edmonton. Again, they deserve that in Eckville. Don't you think that, Mr. Speaker? I think your constituents deserve it just as much in Barrhead, to be able to know that they can receive the same level of services.

Again, for the hon. members to continue to get up and call sheriffs and fish and wildlife officers and park conservation officers and Indigenous police officers private police forces and then because of urban privilege say to rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker, “You must continue to have less law enforcement where you live,” because it makes that member or her party feel more comfortable than the government making changes to rural Alberta – my viewpoint on this is that members and Calgaryans and Edmontonians are policed by very good police forces. The Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service do great jobs. I enjoy working with them on many different projects. They’re really good partners. But if you’re being policed already by another organization, I don’t think you should be getting up and telling other communities what is working for them and what’s not working for them when they are repeatedly telling you that it isn’t working for them.

The reality is that I don’t know if this is a union issue or what it is with the Official Opposition. They just spend their entire time trying to prevent things from changing in a way that could benefit the communities. All my communities want – at the end of the day, they don’t care who they’re policed by; they just want to make sure they have the full level of staff and that when somebody picks up the phone and calls 911, the police officers are going to be able to respond to help those individuals when they’re in trouble.

Now, I’ll tell you why this matters. The hon. members and their constituents: you know where they spend lots of their weekends and their free time? Vacationing and sometimes driving us a little bit nuts out in our backyard, but we’re very much welcome to see them there as they come to our communities to be able to go and enjoy that. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has been to my community many times, one of the most beautiful places in the world. I invite any of the hon. members who have not been there before, Mr. Speaker, to come experience west of Rocky Mountain House, the Columbia Icefield, all of that area through Abraham Lake. It’s just gorgeous and very, very remote.

This is often surprising for urbanites, Mr. Speaker, that when something goes wrong, one is that they don’t have cell phone coverage out there. Second, once they do finally get to a phone and they can call for help, there’s no help that comes within minutes. It’s different, the style of lifestyle that we have out there, but that comes with other challenges for policing, which is why the hon. Deputy Premier and minister of public safety is making sure that we bring in processes for all of our law enforcement agencies to work together to build and make sure that we can care for our communities.

Then lastly, Mr. Speaker, what’s most important – and the hon. members will be quiet about this on the other side, the NDP, because they know they’re on the wrong side of history on this – is what our Indigenous communities want. Our Indigenous communities have been clear that they want to see legislation like this and more of an ability to police themselves. That’s true reconciliation that has been asked for by Indigenous communities for a long time and delivered by the Conservative government and blocked repeatedly by the NDP government.

The NDP like to stand in the Chamber and pretend that they want to listen to Indigenous communities, but time and time again they prove that they won’t. Just recently with encampments, for example, where they tried to continue to force people to live in tents, it became the NDP’s policy that homeless people should live in tents and not in safe areas, that they should continue to be victimized by gangs and some of the horrific things that were taking place. They continued to stand up and pretend they were speaking on behalf of Indigenous people despite the fact of people like Grand Chief Thomas saying: please stop speaking on our behalf because you’re not speaking on our behalf. Yet again today you see them

speaking on behalf of Indigenous peoples about what they want in their community.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, through you to the hon. members: check your urban privilege, learn about the rest of the province, and don’t continue to stand up in the Chamber when you’re policed by a private police force and attack my communities for wanting to receive the same level of care, security, and the ability to live as anywhere else in the province. Again, in the great words of the hon. Doug Schweitzer: if you’d like to see rural Alberta, we’ll rent you a bus and you can come out and see it. But some caution to you: I would not talk with that level of urban privilege in a place like Sundre or Rocky Mountain House because they won’t like it.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? I see the Member for Edmonton-South has risen to speak.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as I rise here to speak to Bill 11, Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. As someone who has family members who have served in some of the highest ranks of law enforcement across Canada for decades, who also has family members living in rural Alberta who do not support the idea of an Alberta provincial police force, and as someone who values public safety of the utmost importance for all of our communities, I simply cannot vote in support of this bill.

While the minister has stated that this isn’t an attempt to establish an Alberta provincial police force, Bill 11 allows the government to create any kind of police agency. Albertans have been abundantly clear that they have no interest in this government wasting taxpayers’ dollars to set up a provincial police force. The provincial police force was proposed by the Alberta Fair Deal Panel, and even the panel’s research showed that a provincial police force was unpopular with the vast majority of Albertans. This will not address safety concerns of communities of our province. In fact, we could see safety concerns rise as we scramble to hire new officers in the absence of RCMP personnel. Municipalities, especially in rural areas, are all too familiar with the degradation of essential services, EMS or ambulance services, when they shifted from municipal to provincial responsibility. The result is a risk to the quality of police protection for all Albertans by bringing in an unknown and unproven service.

This is compounded by the risk of not being able to hire and train thousands of officers from all over Canada at once. Transition studies have shown that the replacement of the RCMP as a force would require the hiring of over 3,000 officers and 1,500 support personnel over a one- to two-year period. The officers alone would be the largest recruitment of public service workers in Canadian history at a time of tremendous workforce shortages everywhere, including in policing. The Fair Deal Panel report was silent on the impracticality of hiring thousands of trained police officers. So here we are, yet another broken promise. The Premier said before the election that the UCP would not pursue a provincial police force, yet here we are with legislation creating an independent agency police service.

Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust this government? The UCP said that they wouldn’t ever touch the CPP, yet they introduced legislation laying the groundwork to set up an Alberta pension plan. They said that they would build the south Edmonton hospital, yet they’ve removed it entirely from Budget 2024. They said that they would hire health care professionals that we so desperately need, yet they’ve abandoned that plan. They said that they would give Albertans a tax break, which is much needed in this affordability crisis, to pay their bills. Instead, they gave Albertans . . .

4:40

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

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called by the Minister for Mental Health and Addiction.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(b). We are far off the bill at hand here with items that are not relevant to the debate. I'd ask, through you, that we focus our conversations on the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we are on second reading, and I have heard repeatedly from the member – to clarify, it's not a point of order – quite clearly that she has been referencing her family's experience working in policing, that she has lots of knowledge and understanding of how police forces work. I've heard nothing but her speak about the impacts in communities when supports aren't available such as health care and education and how that does ultimately impact crime in communities. So I believe that she has stayed true to the bill. We are speaking about a new potential police force, so I believe the member is appropriate in her debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I don't believe this is a point of order. I believe the member is speaking towards the bill within a reasonable amount of latitude. I will ask her to continue with her comments and remember to keep within the bill at hand.

Debate Continued

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While members opposite try to paint the picture that my colleagues and I are ringing alarm bells unnecessarily, we can't deny that we're simply expecting the inevitable, that the government will turn its back on Albertans again and break promise after promise after promise. We know this bill is the foundation for moving towards an Alberta provincial police force. Even the minister has said, quote: there's no decision that has been made in regard to an independent police force for Alberta; we have to explore all options. End quote.

But what are those options exactly? To waste millions of taxpayers' dollars on something that Albertans have been clear that they do not want? A 2021 PricewaterhouseCoopers report showed that it would cost about \$735 million each year to operate an Alberta provincial police force on top of another \$366 million for initial start-up costs, compared to the \$500 million per year that currently goes to the RCMP. This is a huge cost for Albertans in the midst of an affordability crisis that shows no signs of easing any time soon.

Albertans need this government to make smart financial decisions that will take care of them and their families. The just over \$1 billion it will take to establish an Alberta police force could be much better spent on ensuring that we have doctors and nurses to take care of patients, that our hospitals aren't bursting at the seams, that our classrooms aren't overcrowded, and that Albertans can keep food on the table and roofs over their heads.

This government is beyond out of touch with what this province needs. Otherwise, they wouldn't be laying the foundation for a police force with such a steep price tag for the sole purpose of picking another fight with Ottawa. The Fair Deal Panel report even justified that the provincial police force would "send a message to Ottawa that Alberta was in charge of its destiny, and that it would rather spend its own money on its own men and women, rather than

paying for a bloated Ottawa bureaucracy." So does this UCP government expect Albertans to pick up the tab in their never-ending crusade against the federal government?

We know that Albertans do not want this. Moreover, this plan is short sighted. The provincial police force was proposed by the Alberta Fair Deal Panel, which didn't identify any significant net financial savings or detail how police services will be improved. Even the panel's own research showed that a provincial police force was unpopular, with nearly 65 per cent of respondents saying that they do not support moving away from the RCMP. Municipalities and communities across Alberta have been firm in their opposition as well. Nearly 70 per cent of members of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta voted against establishing an Alberta provincial police force. Municipalities fund police services and plan policing priorities for their communities. They have a vested responsibility for providing this service to their citizens, and those with an RCMP contract set priorities locally via local policing plans. The reality is that the federal government has zero involvement in determining policing priorities and activities in Alberta.

Why isn't this government providing more funding to municipalities so they can increase the number of officers and available resources for local enforcement agencies, including the RCMP? Why aren't they actually doing more to provide municipalities with the resources and support to address the root causes of crime in so many of our communities? Under the UCP government life has become unbearably unaffordable for thousands of Albertans. Just recently the CEO of Food Banks Alberta shared that the latest HungerCount report indicated a 30 per cent increase.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Member Hoyle: Sorry?

Mr. Williams: Will you accept an intervention?

Member Hoyle: Not at this point. Thank you.

Member Hoyle: In Calgary alone 20,000 people are coming to the food bank each month. Nationally electricity went up by 11.1 per cent. We are seeing Albertans squeezed more and more by the inaction from this UCP government to actually take real steps to address the cost-of-living crisis.

Bill 11 would introduce an independent agency to take over increasing responsibilities placed on Alberta's sheriffs, responsibilities, I might add, that have been pushed on sheriffs at an alarming rate since the UCP has been in office. And in typical UCP fashion Bill 11 was put forward with little stakeholder consultation. The vice-president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, representing around 800 of Alberta's sheriffs, said that sheriffs learned of the proposed legislation only 30 minutes before the minister's press conference. He stated, quote: "We were completely taken off guard. We had no idea this was coming. Once we received information, we were asking, 'Well, what are the details?' And at this point there are none. Were we consulted? No. Will we be consulted? I have no idea." End quote. These sheriffs are doing the hard work every day to ensure our communities are safe places to live, so why is it that the minister didn't consult with them?

Mr. Speaker, we know that safety is a critical concern for all communities in Alberta. Let me be clear. Every Albertan deserves to feel safe. We have a significant policing structure in place, but it is funding for the RCMP from this UCP government that has not kept up with the growing population and crime rates. The president of the National Police Federation, the union representing RCMP officers, said that this plan, quote, appears to be yet another attempt to force an unwanted and expensive policing change on taxpayers.

Rather than legislation, bureaucracy, and more government spending to explore alternative policing services, why are members opposite not investing in existing law enforcement structures? It makes no sense to move away from a model that works if it only had proper funding.

My constituent Cynthia, whose son is an RCMP officer who has served our community for almost over four years, who lived and grew up in rural Alberta and has family members that live currently in rural areas all over this province, reached out to me when she heard that this bill was being introduced. She said:

This is millions of dollars that we just don't need to be spending. And Albertans have consistently agreed that we don't want a . . . police force. The RCMP is a national force that has years of expertise and resources that we need here. I'm also fed up with the misinformation that the federal government is in charge of the RCMP. It is strictly the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General that has the responsibility to oversee policing in Alberta. The RCMP officers in Alberta are devoted to Alberta. Just because you're changing the stripes on the pants, doesn't mean that you're going to fix the problems of addressing crime.

Mr. Speaker, all this UCP government wants to do is work against the best interests of Alberta. The UCP is obsessed with fighting with the federal government, fighting with municipalities, and in doing so, they're using whatever tactics they can to win political games. Albertans deserve a smart, capable government that puts forward policies focused on what Albertans need, but the UCP continues not to listen to Albertans and refuses to use evidence-based decision-making when thinking up these schemes.

4:50

Maybe we need to talk to this government in a way that they will truly listen. The members opposite love to use catchy phrases, so I'll meet them where they're at and say that all this government wants to do is axe the facts. Without the facts in front of us this government runs the risk of wasting millions of taxpayers' dollars and sacrificing the safety of our communities here in Alberta.

For this and many other reasons I will not be supporting Bill 11. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Taber-Warner has risen to speak.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start my remarks today on Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, with a quote from my favourite organization, the World Economic Forum: "The oldest and simplest justification for government is as protector: protecting citizens from violence." Now, anyone who knows me knows that I was employing satire when I said that this was my favourite organization. However, they did get this right. I like the word used here, "justification." It denotes that it was not a foregone conclusion, that perhaps people were apprehensive to abrogate such levels of freedom away to an organization other than family.

Thousands of years ago, Mr. Speaker, the reason that governments were first justified was to protect the people. The importance of governments, what their purpose was, why we need to pay taxes in a common organization was justified for the protection of the people. If there were no government, no laws, no agreed-upon societal standards, how would we treat each other?

Thomas Hobbes in his literary work *Leviathan* proposed that the life of a man is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." As individuals we all have unique needs, wants, and desires. In essence, with this statement Hobbes is postulating that without laws in society we would act out all these desires, resulting in chaos. Now, I have a slightly different view than Hobbes on this, but he

does point to a conflict that has existed since time immemorial, and that is the balancing of the needs, wants, and desires of individual people with the shared goals, culture, and societal needs of all people. That is what we have to work on. The earliest forms of government were created to balance this issue, ensuring protection from within and from outside forces so that peace and flourishing could prevail.

Aristotle proposed the evolutionary theory of governments, that they formed as a natural result of the ties between individual families, clans, and tribes. Governments were created to fulfill roles that could not be taken care of just within the household. Aristotle holds that these functions would include laws, trade regulations, and protection and requires a larger form of organization which all these factions could unite under, Mr. Speaker, but I digress.

The truth that I am trying to illuminate is that the first primary role of the justification for governments is to protect the people. In my humble opinion, Bill 11 fulfills this original justification for the creation of governments; ergo, if the federal government is unwilling or unable to provide that level of security for the people of Alberta, then it is incumbent upon her equal partner in Confederation to provide it.

Mr. Speaker, there is ample evidence to show that we have a high vacancy rate in the RCMP, as high as 20 per cent. I read an article that was put out recently that said that there was at least a 20 per cent vacancy rate. Now, I have to ask myself: why is it that we have that vacancy rate? Are our men and women in blue feeling demoralized? I think that when you have a Prime Minister who is willing to take the knee with an organization that openly calls for defunding the police, no wonder we can't fill those spots. When you have members in this very Chamber that are willing to stand with organizations that want to defund the police and, in fact, have said themselves that they want to defund the police, no wonder we have a hard time finding people who are willing to step into those important roles.

Mr. Speaker, when I grew up, there were really two things that we wanted to do, be a police officer or a fireman. To this day it's still actually quite popular to be a fireman, but unfortunately, because of the rhetoric that we've seen over the last few years by even some members of this Chamber, talking about defunding the police, it has demoralized the people who are really trying to put themselves on the line.

I take my hat off to the minister for this bill to try to address an issue, a deficiency within our system. We have a minister who has decided that it's not important to build roads anymore federally. We have a Prime Minister that thinks that we don't need as many police officers. In fact, to be truthful, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the federal government has been musing for a long time to be able to get rid of the RCMP as a provincial police force, so I find it rich that the members opposite continue to negate the fact that the federal government is actually trying to move away from it already anyways. It's not even a question. It's out there. They're openly musing this. So what does that do to us as a province, as an equal partner in Confederation? We have to step up because the first role of government, the first justification for government was to make sure that we protect our people.

Now, I have personally experienced when that fails. We have a cabin that has been broken into four times in a three-year period, and the people who have broken in have stolen everything, even the toilet plunger. For goodness' sake, I liked that toilet plunger. It was a great toilet plunger. Mr. Speaker, they stole everything. They must have been griches because they did not leave anything. They sabotaged the house, and unfortunately it made my wife feel unsafe in our home so that she didn't want to go out there anymore. It's a beautiful location. We were excited. In fact, she bought the place. She was excited about it, and because she was victimized, we were victimized, she felt like she did not want to be there anymore. We

have personally experienced, when you have deficiencies in our system, how it makes people feel victimized.

Mr. Speaker, I am one hundred per cent in favour of any measure we can take in order to be able to make sure that nobody else has to feel that way, so that we have the ability to make sure people feel safer. Think about what happens when we don't feel safe. Think about senior citizens that want to be able to retire in a cabin or a place that they've built up over the years, but because they can't get the proper protection, they don't feel safe in those places.

Think about people who want to start a business. I know of a situation where there was a guy who had a heavy-duty mechanic company, and that company; he did lots of work; he was always busy. But he had the business in his Quonset, and people kept on breaking in and stealing his tools. Now, this was his ability to provide for his family. Unfortunately, the insurance said, finally: "You know what? You've been broken into so many times. We're not insuring you." They told him – basically, he knew, Mr. Speaker, that if he gets his tools stolen one more time, he will not be able to provide for his family. So what did he do? He had to stay out in his Quonset by himself with a shotgun to try to protect his stuff. He doesn't want to invest anymore. He doesn't want to expand his business even though he's really wildly busy and he's a successful business. He will not expand, and he has to sleep not with his family in his home but in the Quonset to try to be able to actually provide for his family.

These are deficiencies. I believe that this bill is designed to be able to address those deficiencies. I applaud any effort that this government, that this minister will take in order to be able to make us feel safer, less victimized, and to have the ability to feel like in Alberta you can prosper, you can have a family, you can raise your family here, and you can do it without feeling afraid.

5:00

I've been all over the world. I've travelled many places, Mr. Speaker. You know why people come here? They come here because of the rule of law. I've heard people say that so many times. They come here because they can feel safe here. That's what we can offer. That's part of the Alberta advantage. Yet, unfortunately, we haven't been able to see that.

With that, I hope that all members of this Assembly will vote in favour of this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 11 and maybe unpack some of the things we've heard this afternoon from the government. I believe that there has been – I mean, maybe they do believe some of the things that they're saying. But I will say that the facts are definitely skewed with the reality of what is actually happening within the RCMP and within policing across the province.

Now, one of the first things that we heard the minister say when he was moving second reading of the bill is that it's going to be a new agency. It's going to have a new chief, and it's going to have a new board, and it will be independent of the government. For a government that doesn't like red tape and doesn't like duplication and doesn't like to have more bureaucracy within the systems, I find it very ironic that the minister responsible for Bill 11 and creating the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, is talking about creating more bureaucracy, talking about creating more red tape and duplicating the very services that we already have existing in this province. It doesn't make sense.

The reason it also doesn't make sense is that we have continuously heard the government to say: "Well, the RCMP are struggling with recruiting. We can't get enough people, so we can't hire." I heard the minister opposite a few minutes ago, when one of our members on this side of the House was talking about: why wouldn't the government just fund the RCMP so that they can hire more people and that they can have the resources in the rural communities that the member is saying? The hon. member opposite said that this is what the bill is going to do.

But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. When the minister responsible for this piece of legislation was asked during estimates if there was going to be more funding allocated for Bill 11, he said no. He said no. There is actually no money in the budget for the public safety changes that the minister and the government are currently speaking about. It is a gesture. It is speaking to the base of the UCP with the anti federal government rhetoric and trying to undermine the work that the RCMP is doing in rural Alberta and across this whole province. Let's be clear. There has been no consultation with municipalities. There has been no consultation in regard to working with the sheriffs and the union that represents those sheriffs. There has been no consultation with the RCMP in regard to strategies that could be put in place to address some of the legitimate concerns that Albertans have around safety in their communities. None of that work has happened.

So the question that I would have is: why would the government come forward with a piece of legislation when they promised during the election that they would not get rid of the RCMP, that they would not create an independent police force yet come forward with a piece of legislation when they haven't consulted with anybody that is going to be directly impacted by this very work? In fact, the bigger question to me would be that we hear from the government saying: well, the RCMP can't recruit. Let's be real: 200 applicants every month right now to the Alberta RCMP.

Mr. McIver: Where are the officers?

Ms Sweet: That's a great question from the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Where are the officers? You know where they are? Waiting to be hired because the government hasn't funded the RCMP to hire the people. It's a joint venture between the federal government and the provincial government. It exists.

Mr. Williams: Will you take an intervention?

Ms Sweet: I will not take an intervention.

It does. It is a joint funding model between the federal government and the provincial government. The minister and the government opposite will say that it's not true. [interjections] In fact, the government is trying to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Members. Members. Order. Order. I'm having difficulty to hear the member even though she is in a very elevated voice. It's important that everybody within the Chamber – the distance here is large, and it's important that everybody holds their comments in a way that I can actually hear what the member has to say.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning to continue.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it's clear that when I start talking about the actual realities of the situation in Alberta and this piece of legislation, the government wants to shut me down. That's fine. If they want to not hear the reality and the facts that are happening, that is the government's choice. [interjections] The Minister of Municipal Affairs can continue to holler at me across the floor if he would like, but these are the realities of what is happening in the House.

This is the reality of this legislation. There has been no consultation. There are 200 applicants every month to the RCMP. There is a joint funding model between the federal government and the provincial government for the RCMP. The government has made choices, and those choices have been not to fund the RCMP to the level that it could. We just heard a member speak about the fact that – at some point there was a 20 per cent number thrown out.

Mr. McIver: Would you take an intervention?

Ms Sweet: I'm not going to accept interventions.

There is a 20 per cent number that the government keeps using about being able to have at a staffing capacity. That's not true. In fact, that 20 per cent is not accurate.

In fact, what we can also talk about is: what is the scope? Again, the minister claims that the intent of Bill 11 is to expand the authority of the Alberta sheriffs. Well, the Alberta sheriffs are actually under a different piece of legislation than the Police Act. They are peace officers. We have not seen a legislative change from this government in regard to the Peace Officer Act and the Police Act. So to have the government expanding the authority of the sheriffs when the act hasn't been changed to allow that to happen doesn't make any sense. Again, it's a step. It's like putting the cart before the horse is what we keep seeing with this piece of legislation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, again, the other question would be: what is the cost to rural municipalities and to Albertans? When we start talking about developing new systems, when we talk about training, the RCMP can do all of those things. They already have the training facilities in Alberta to train individuals, yet, again, we heard from the minister that they're going to create a new agency, they're going to create and hire a new chief, they're going to create a new board. All I hear is: that's a lot of money. That's a lot of Alberta taxpayers' dollars being used to recreate structures that already exist in this province. If the government wants to improve rural policing, if they want to support local communities, there are two mechanisms that already exist in this province to do that. There are the RCMP; there are the sheriffs. Why are we creating a new agency? Why are we hiring a new chief? Why are we creating new boards?

Mr. Williams: We tried answering. You won't take our questions.

Ms Sweet: These are questions that lots of municipalities – the ministers keep yelling at me across the floor, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure I understand why. Like, these are great questions. This is second reading of a piece of legislation.

Mr. Nixon: Will you accept an intervention?

Ms Sweet: I don't have to recognize interventions. It's now the third time. Three strikes, and we're out. If the ministers wanted to stand up and actually have factual debate, I'd be willing to do that. My understanding is that the minister has already spoken, so he'll have to wait until Committee of the Whole.

At this point those are many of the questions that have been asked. I think the other thing that I am concerned about, too, is that we start talking about scope of practice. When we talk about scope of practice, we're looking at the fact that within collective bargaining units, scope of practice is how people are compensated for the work that they do but ensure that they're also working within their expertise. We have heard, again, going back to lack of consultation, that the sheriffs haven't been approached or even consulted with in regard to what this expansion of practice would

be. They would have to change their collective bargaining practices, or they might even have to change their scope of practice. Those conversations haven't happened, yet you have a group of unionized employees who have a right to be part of that dialogue when those things change. I don't, again, understand why the government wouldn't want to be having those conversations.

5:10

Mr. Nixon: See? Right there. She just proved it. Union again. It's all the union. They can't help themselves.

Ms Sweet: Hon. member, you're right. I can't help myself talking about workers' rights and their right to have collective bargaining. I am not embarrassed by that fact. I think it's great that we have bargaining units. I think people should be unionized, and I think they have a right to be protected in their workplace. RCMP officers and sheriffs have very dangerous jobs and have a right to occupational health and safety and WCB.

It's pretty basic stuff, and the fact that the government wants to heckle me about it is just kind of disingenuous to the fact that the work that – people do have a right to be protected when they go to work, and we want to make sure they go home at the end of the day. I'm not embarrassed by that. In fact, I'm quite proud of that fact. I'm okay with that.

Now, we can continue on looking at the fact that, again, the new part of the Police Act clarifies that a new police service can be established within the act. We keep hearing from the government saying that they're not creating a new police force, yet Bill 11 does do that. So I guess the question is: why isn't the government just being transparent and honest?

I don't understand why they just don't tell Albertans that the reality of it is that they want to get rid of the RCMP because they don't like the fact that the federal government has to have a partnership with the province because they don't like to have, you know, partnerships with anything to do with the federal government. This is about trying to create another fight with the feds and at the same time cost Albertans way more money, because that's ultimately what's going to happen.

We can talk about what's going on in Grande Prairie and the whole idea of creating a city police force and the amount of money it is costing Albertans to try to set that up. Like, they haven't even been able to hire any staff up there at this point, and we're into the 30 millions of dollars-ish range of Albertans' taxpayer dollars being used because there was a decision to try to pilot this project – it's not working – because the government was adamant that they wanted to get rid of the RCMP. We've seen the same thing in B.C. when they tried to do it in Surrey, and it's costing a whole bunch of money, and it's not going well.

Again, this government really likes to fix things that aren't broken for some reason instead of just working in collaboration, because this is really about collaboration. It is about the fact that there are structures that exist that maybe need some support and improvement. I don't think any of us dispute that we would like to see the RCMP supported better, that we would like to have safe communities, that we believe that rural communities need to have the appropriate 911 response. None of that is debatable.

Mr. Nixon: Hear, hear. We convinced her.

Ms Sweet: I feel so loved in this Chamber today. I'm not quite sure what's going on. It's because the government actually kind of agrees with what I'm saying. They just don't actually want to publicly admit it to anybody, so they just keep cheering me on over here. I appreciate that.

I think I'm going to leave the rest of the arguments for some of my colleagues. Oh, but the one thing I do feel like I need to highlight: in

2015, when we were in government – because we always have to have a really good NDP-did-great-for-rural-Alberta moment – we created the crime reduction unit. Because of the crime reduction unit, there was significant reduction in rural crime. You're welcome. You're welcome. You weren't doing nothing before that. The NDP was able to look at strategies and work with the RCMP to create those things.

Again, the minister will try to say that, you know, this is an urban-rural issue. It's not an urban-rural issue. In fact, many of the RCMP officers that work: they work in other communities that are not just rural communities. They are in the Sherwood Parks of the world. They're in the Stony Plains of the world. The RCMP is in many other areas across the province. The RCMP is in Edmonton, for that matter. I mean, the K Division and I worked quite closely together when I had to work with high-risk youth. If it wasn't for the RCMP, I wouldn't have been able to keep kids safe, because they helped me transport kids from Edmonton to rural communities so that they could be with family.

Like, the honesty of it is that I support our police services, and I believe they deserve to be supported by their government. That requires funding, and that requires good occupational health and safety standards, and that requires a government that's willing to engage and have a conversation and be open and transparent and not try to say that they're not doing the things that they are actually doing, which is to get rid of the RCMP. I believe we keep the RCMP.

The Speaker: I see a number of members who have risen in the Chamber. I'll see the hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to address some mistruths and concerning language brought up by members opposite. I just want to say how great it is to rise in parliamentary privilege to be able to speak, knowing that I had not had a chance to intervene. To be able to put our points on the record is incredibly important to me and the constituents of Peace River.

First of all, I think we need to look at the reality of the situation when it comes to policing in communities like mine. The nearest police detachment to my home is approximately a 30-, 35-minute drive. That police detachment is surrounded by a number of communities that it desperately needs to serve, including Indigenous First Nations. It's an RCMP detachment, and I'm so grateful for the work those RCMP members are doing.

In the same region I regularly have sheriffs who are doing highway traffic enforcement in that area who often are much closer than that 30-, 35-minute drive. Now, if the detachment has its units out in, say, one of the neighbouring communities, not to the south and west but to the north and east, then it's over an hour-and-a-half drive down one of the worst roads – if the minister of transportation is listening, we want to see highway 58 paved as soon as possible.

Mr. Sinclair: Highway 88 as well.

Mr. Williams: Highway 88 as well and 686. We've got lots.

To the point, it's over an hour, possibly an hour-and-a-half drive, if they're not in the middle of an urgent response that they cannot leave. If that sheriff is there in my community, that sheriff, despite having sufficient training, cannot respond to the crisis ongoing in my community, potentially with my own family in my own home.

Now, this is not a problem that the Member for Edmonton-Manning or members from major centres like Calgary face. There are, happily, many more police officers in and around in short drives from the wonderful police services of the Calgary and

Edmonton police departments. I do not have that luxury where I come from. That is the setting in which we find ourselves.

Now, to turn ourselves to the concern brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Manning and the Member for Edmonton-South, the idea that it's somehow red tape, quote, unquote, to have independent civilian oversight over the actions of a police force that is now doing full-on criminal policing in my community, because I have no other option, is beyond insane, Mr. Speaker. It is the absolute responsibility of civilians to have oversight over the actions of the police. To call it red tape is disconnected from reality. To say that somehow my community does not deserve to have the same policing that you have in Edmonton-Manning or Edmonton-South is beyond connection to reality and deeply offensive to the men and women who live and work in my community, who have dear children, who have vulnerable family members, where rural crime is something that you do not understand in urban centres.

I make this point emphatically to ask members opposite to find all sorts of concern with Bill 11, sure, but do not grandstand on the safety of me and my family. It's deeply offensive and not becoming of this Chamber or an elected official in this Chamber. When you're a member of the Legislature, you should not make, you know, fallacious arguments or arguments that are nothing but rhetoric in an attempt to try and score points or oppose for opposition's sake. There are lots of concerns you might have. The idea that somehow we deserve access to policing at not even the same but something close to the response times that you have in Edmonton is a bare minimum for us in our communities. The idea that we want to have those police forces overseen with an independent civilian commission is a base requirement of democracies.

Now, the Not Democratic Party in the opposition might not feel the same way about democracy the rest of Alberta does, but we believe deeply in the democratic rights and responsibilities of civilians to have the ultimate authority over the use of force. The way that is expressed in our democracies is not in somehow calling commission oversight by civilians red tape but an intrinsic and fundamental part of the way we function and have police authorities work in our communities. Members opposite can grandstand all they want. They can turn their backs and pretend like this isn't a speech coming at them in the Chamber. But the truth is that when the vote comes and they vote against it, I want to see them stand on the record that they oppose the idea of our communities getting the same access to security that your communities have.

That's my request, Mr. Speaker, that they stand up, when the time comes, to vote with us on something that is deeply important, deeply important to our communities. They have no good reason to oppose other than opposition for opposition's sake.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, this comes from a party that has had numerous candidates in the last election get on the record and not withdraw or apologize for their position on defunding the police. [interjections] I'm glad to hear members on the other side say, "Not me," and I thank the members on the other side for not making those statements. But I call on members on the other side who have not made those statements, who oppose that, who have connections to and family members in the police to call out their colleagues who have said that and ask them to be honest about it and, at the very least, withdraw if that's not their position or at least admit that the party is divided on this incredibly important question.

This government has hundreds of funded positions for the RCMP across the province, including some in my own community, that are not filled by the RCMP with the contract policing that we have. It is not a question of "Do we need to fund it more?"; as the Member for Edmonton-Manning inappropriately labelled it. We are funding

many positions that are currently unfilled by the RCMP. This is not a criticism of the current RCMP officers, who I have deep respect for, and I appreciate their personal commitment every day to put themselves on the line.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, this is a question of whether or not the RCMP administration, not run in Alberta but run out of Ottawa, will do its fair part to make sure that Albertan communities are staffed up appropriately and therefore safe. I think that if it weren't for the concern of the overarching intimidation by the federal government, you would see more RCMP police officers saying the same thing that I'm saying right here in the Chamber, on the floor, which is: RCMP administration in Ottawa, do your job, and get the colleagues in Calgary and Edmonton, get the colleagues across our province the support they need by hiring the RCMP vacancies that have gone unfilled.

The context, Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about, isn't just concerning that they have the facts wrong on the other side. It's not just concerning that they have called civilian oversight of the use of force in our police departments, quote, unquote, red tape, which is a juvenile, childish criticism that anybody can see on the face of it is not substantive in any meaningful way. The concern beyond that is that they're making light of something that every one of my Indigenous communities is begging for, making light of the fact that every one of my rural northern communities is saying: please, can we have quicker response times?

This bill will play one piece, not a total solution but one piece, in working on that solution, not to mention the ankle monitoring technology that's going to be implemented through this legislation as well, which is deeply important for the safety of our communities. But the very real, as the Member for Taber-Warner mentioned, fundamental and foundational requirement for public safety, for personal security in our communities is completely written off by members opposite. They have some junior, 21-year-old staffer, a graduate of poli-sci from the U of A, writing the speech who thought it was fun to try and criticize the government, because they're just opposition. That's what opposition does, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to [cause] disorder." I appreciate that the minister doesn't like the fact that we do our research over here and that we talk about the facts. Going after staff and talking about the staff of a caucus and trying to insinuate that our staff don't know anything and that therefore the notes we have are poor – like, if we want to keep decorum in this place, we remove our staff out of the conversation. You can focus on what a member has said in the House, but please just stop speaking about the staff in my caucus as if they don't know what they're doing and that they're not educated human beings. I've kind of had enough with it.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader on the point of order.

Mr. Williams: Yeah. It's not a point of order. There's no point of order here. This is, if anything, a matter of debate. Whether or not they have competent staff or whether or not the speeches are based on what we believe to be fact, this is definitely within the realm of my privilege as a member to bring up. I'm happy to take the

direction and advice from the Speaker on this, but this is a part of what is my privilege and right to speak on, I believe, as a member in the Chamber.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to add to the point of order?

I am prepared to rule. I appreciate the intervention. While it may not be a point of order and matter of debate, I think that it's reasonable to provide some reminder to the member. If he keeps his remarks more to the content of the legislation, decorum, generally speaking, increases, not decreases.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Debate Continued

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that light I'll rephrase my comments. Whatever out-of-touch speech the members opposite read directly into *Hansard* from the page that they bring into the Chamber, the offensive part is that it's completely dismissing the very real human security questions that my constituents face on the daily, that they have zero connection to.

Now, I'll encourage any one of them to come up to the community of La Crête, of Fort Vermilion, of Manning, of Rainbow, of High Level, of Peace River, to any of my First Nation communities, my Métis settlement, and tell them that if a sheriff is passing by their home while a violent call comes in around, you know, household abuse, sexual violence, it's your preference as a policy position to see that sheriff continue driving by while we try and radio call for RCMP that's two hours away. If that's the policy position the NDP would like to take, read it off the pages into *Hansard*. I'd like to see you stand and defend it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein. As previously mentioned before the minister rose, I said: the hon. minister, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein. If they would like to rise, they're welcome to do so, followed by the minister.

Mr. McIver: The Speaker is always right.

The Speaker: Correct.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I am speaking in opposition. What I've seen so far from this government is that they've proven themselves very adept at redefining a lot of words and phrases in the English language. So far campaign promises and commitments are rebranded as aspirational when trying to excuse the government for not meeting its own goals. I can see now that the promise to not lay the groundwork for an Alberta police force is quickly being spun in other ways as well. What it's actually doing is evading the expectation that this government actually keep its word to Albertans.

I'm also seeing that fiscal conservatism is open to interpretation. When it comes to basic needs support on the housing crisis, providing supports needed for kids that are aging out of care, funding public schools to enrolment, actually investing in health care instead of pulling it apart and putting patients in motels, that is where we will see, you know, a significant tightening of the belt, but what I'm actually seeing here is fiscal conservatism repackaged as creating a whole other agency and more bureaucracy and red tape. Oh, wait; I thought we were trying to reduce red tape. What we're seeing here is just an effort to increase it and to do this in the service of picking more fights with Ottawa.

This is another broken promise from the UCP. Before the election the Premier simmered down on the idea of a provincial police force.

She knew it was unpopular. The UCP's own Fair Deal Panel found that it wasn't supported by the vast majority of Albertans. We know that an Alberta police force would be very costly, to the tune of about \$550 million, including loss of federal dollars if they make these moves towards replacing the RCMP. They've also mentioned, you know, that the contract ends in 2032 and cite that this is being done in case the RCMP doesn't want to renew that contract. I ask: could this have anything to do with creating the conditions in which they wouldn't want to renew?

We know that the NPF president, Brian Sauvé, said in a statement to CBC News that they were deeply concerned and perplexed about this bill. This is one of the quotes from Mr. Sauvé: Alberta has significant policing infrastructure in place through the Alberta RCMP, yet the government has not increased funding for our members to keep pace with population growth and evolving crime in the province. The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees has also asked fair questions about how the duties of sheriffs will change and if they'll be paid at the appropriate rate. These are all fair questions for these vital stakeholders to have of this government, and they haven't been consulted.

Municipalities have made it loud and clear that they don't want it. Albertans don't want it, and I'm not just talking about the big urban centres. We need to address the needs of all communities, but this is a pattern that Albertans are quickly becoming accustomed to. We're ignoring the fact that we have the information, that we have the reports that this government has commissioned, that we've had this same pattern evolve over talking about the Canada pension plan, and we're seeing it repeat itself around a provincial police force, and that's that the government commissions reports, they get results that they don't like, and then they ignore it.

Member Ceci: Axe the facts.

Member Tejada: Let's talk about – my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is quoting my colleague from Edmonton-South on axing the facts, which we see quite often.

5:30

The UCP also has very little credibility on public safety, so we'll just look at the record on public safety. They took funding away from police, from municipalities in 2019. They increased the provincial share for fine revenues from 26.7 per cent to 40 per cent. Based on 2018-19 data this was roughly a \$32 million loss in that financial year. These funds support public safety-related efforts in municipalities. In comparison, \$32 million, or roughly the salaries of about 300 police officers. They've downloaded the cost on municipalities and have put further pressures on policing and public safety budgets.

While I appreciate that I've heard members of this House talk about victims, let's talk about victims of crime. Their actions towards victims' services have shown little to no regard for victims' services, for the organizations that actually did the work to support victims and still do despite many of the moves by this government. Since 2020 they've made changes that have made it more difficult for survivors to access funds. Their actions towards victims' services have shown little to no regard for the victims' services organizations themselves. They allowed the government to direct money from the fund away from victims and to other justice-related purposes.

In reference to victims, that also resulted in reducing the application timelines for supports for victims of serious crime from two years to 45 days. I personally took calls from people who had been traumatized who had been advised of all of the processes that they had to follow to get their supports, and they were denied and left, really, with no recourse and just trauma.

They repurposed the victims of crime fund to fill the holes that they left when they made cuts to other areas of the justice system. They cut funding for municipalities, which meant fewer resources for public safety and the social supports that people need when they're victims of crime. In terms of consultation: why didn't they consult with sheriffs and the National Police Federation? Maybe because they knew they wouldn't like the feedback. They knew that the National Police Federation had made calls to reject a provincial police force.

We know that even in areas like Innisfail, you know, a rural area itself, an RCMP staff sergeant asked another fair question. "I'm not really sure what this government is doing," he said, adding that no notice was given to his office about the creation of a new provincial police agency. It seems like they're laying the framework for a new police agency, but then in the same breath they're also saying that they're not doing it to replace current police agencies.

Looking at all of this, looking at the data, knowing that we have a history and a pattern that's being established by this government to make promises and to then, for whatever purposes, go ahead with their own agenda, I speak in opposition to this bill, and I encourage my fellow members to do the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak on this Bill 11, and the minister of public safety has done an amazingly thoughtful job on this bill. I am slightly heartened to hear the NDP care about money, it seems, a couple times in their debate, which is very rare in this House – very, very rare indeed – but they're not good at it. Let me kind of explain that.

We've heard a number of arguments here, and we've heard an argument from, well, I guess, one member that was: policing or health care, tee-hee-hee; policing or education, tee-hee-hee; policing or social services, tee-hee-hee. The fact is that education, health care, social services, and public safety are all important. It's never one or the other. It's always all of the above. They all matter. They all need to be looked after. There's nothing tee-hee-hee about it, Mr. Speaker. They're all serious matters, and joking about it as part of a speech is not very helpful.

But let me say this. I also heard from a member who says that they have people they're familiar with in the police service, and they support that. I think that's terrific. We should all support the police. We should all support the RCMP and all the other police services that we have in this province. But that's where some of the arguments break down. We heard an argument that what you need is to just hire more RCMP officers. Well, Mr. Speaker, we've already hired more RCMP officers, and they're not showing up for work because they don't exist. We're paying for the spots, and the RCMP hasn't provided the officers they're paid for.

Now, let me be clear. We respect and admire all the RCMP men and women on the job. That's never what this has been about. We respect every single one. They do put their lives on the line – it's not just a trite saying; it's a fact – and we thank them. That's never what this has been about. This is about public safety. If the argument that they tried to make over there is "just hire more RCMP officers," we haven't got the ones we paid for already. And whether the number we're short is 10 per cent, 20 per cent, or 30 per cent, the fact is that we're not getting what we're already paying for, so to give them more money is not going to get more people if we're not getting the ones we're already paying for. It doesn't make sense. It can't make sense.

I heard an argument saying: it doesn't matter what stripes are on their pants, but you can only use the RCMP. Well, I agree with the first half of that. The average citizen in Alberta doesn't care what

stripes are on the pants. I couldn't agree more. But the problem is that if you try to hire more RCMP stripes, you won't get them because we're not getting the ones we've already paid for and haven't had for some time. Sending more money to somebody that's not delivering the goods isn't going to get us anywhere.

This is a common-sense, realistic approach to saying: how do we squeeze more value to start with out of the people already on the government payroll? Some of those are called sheriffs. What our very capable public safety minister, that did serve, I think, about 10 years as a police officer, knows and has done research to understand is that there is a gap of training between a sheriff and a police officer, but it's one we can overcome with a lot less expense and a lot less time than bringing somebody from zero to police officer. That makes more sense, to bridge the smaller gap, when time is of an issue and public safety is of an issue.

The members across heard these stories. They're really gut wrenching and true stories that we hear all the time from people in rural Alberta, that sometimes – like, listen, I live in the city. People in the city complain sometimes that the police don't get there on time. Their complaint is that it took 10 minutes instead of six. When your life is in danger: okay; feel free to complain that it wasn't fast enough. But out in rural Alberta it's not six or 10 minutes. It can be two or four hours or more or sometimes the next day, and it's not because the RCMP officers aren't doing their job. Quite the opposite. It's because their job is bigger than the number of officers that are provided. That number, by the way, is a lot less than what we're paying for.

So the argument that “only the RCMP can do it, and hire more” just doesn't hold any water because the RCMP administration in Ottawa isn't sending us the officers we paid for. Why would you send more money to somebody that's not providing what you're already paying for? That's crazy. But that's the argument we're getting from across the aisle.

This is about the safety of Albertans, and it matters. The folks across there don't seem to put any weight behind that. They seem to dismiss the arguments, the legitimate public safety issues of those in rural Alberta.

Let's also talk about reconciliation. One of the things that our First Nations sisters and brothers have said in many cases is that they want to provide their own police service, which is a great idea. There are a couple of examples in Alberta of them doing a great job of exactly that. That's one of the things that this bill is going to enable more of, yet the folks across want to vote against it. Well, my answer is: I dare you. Stand up and vote against it. I believe that the folks over there will be held to account. There are lots of bills they can agree with us in this House, but on this one I dare you to stand up and vote against this one, because public safety is not for fun; it's life and death.

5:40

The folks there just don't seem to get it because they don't want to. In fact, they want to get it so little that they tried to turn it into a money issue though rare is the day that they ever care about money. We know that because one of the reasons that they were the only government in the nearly 120 years' history of Alberta that was ever fired after one term in office – it was called the NDP government. Because they did such a bad job, one and done. They left Albertans with a debt approaching \$100 billion. Clearly, when they had a chance to care about money, they cared not a whit about money. Any time they talk about caring about money, I don't think anybody should take any of them seriously because they were the worst government on that in the history of Alberta, the worst Finance minister in the history of Alberta, the worst fiscal record in the history of Alberta. Their hit parade of lowlights is very long, Mr. Speaker,

yet they just can't bring themselves to want to keep Albertans safe. They just can't do it.

They talk about scope of practice. Oh, I think I have an intervention. Sure. Certainly.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for allowing me to ask this intervention. Minister, I just wanted to ask you in terms of the amount that we actually don't have – it's about 20 per cent. So if we're supposed to have about 1,911 RCMP officers and we're at around 1,522, it's almost 400 RCMP boots we don't have on that. Times two, obviously; two feet. That's around \$50 million of services that the taxpayer pays for that we don't actually get to provide services to Albertans. Can you just maybe elaborate on: what would that do to rural Alberta, where we are trying to be able to make sure that the crooks don't have the power to be able to take over?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Well, I guess we can't say, but if it's 400 officers, a lot of difference. In fact, that takes me right to the next point of my debate. I'd heard it said a couple of times: no one was consulted with. I'll tell you who's been consulted with. When the city of Calgary asked for support to make the LRT system more safe, our government lent them some sheriffs, some officers to help do that, some peace officers. When the city of Edmonton needed help with public safety, we lent them officers. We've been doing this for a long time. We try to have our sheriffs co-ordinate efforts the best we can with the RCMP though the RCMP are police and the sheriffs are largely peace officers, but still that gap exists. What a difference: 400 more bodies. It's not like Albertans haven't been consulted. In fact, Albertans have been consulted.

This isn't about an Alberta provincial police force. Our public safety minister has offered to municipalities money to actually look at providing their own municipal forces. Grande Prairie has taken us up on it. Many other municipalities are actually in the process of accepting a grant so that they can determine whether they want to do that or not. Nobody's making anybody do anything. There's a great deal of interest in Alberta of bolstering the police service we have now, and no one, including this government, is saying they don't like the RCMP. We respect the RCMP. We admire the RCMP. They're doing it, but they're not providing the officers we're paying for, and consequently we need more policing. This is a bill solving that issue. I think just about everybody in Alberta understands that except the RCMP and some of their union bosses that they're beholden to.

Now, I appreciate that the union's job is to protect the RCMP. That's what they do, and I respect that, but you've got to admit that it doesn't leave them extra open to alternatives when they're only getting paid for looking after one police service when Albertans obviously need more. The RCMP, I believe, will likely be here as long as the federal government allows them to be. What's not up for debate is that the public safety minister of the federal government, in his mandate letter, is asked to consider getting out of contract policing. That's 2032, 2033, two to three federal elections from now, two to three provincial elections: who knows who will be in government, what they'll think then? But there is at least some signal from the current government in Ottawa that they're not sure they want to stay in the business.

We have the RCMP, it looks like, for at least eight or nine years. Maybe we'll have them for 109 years. I don't know. None of us, I don't think, really know that today. But on the other hand, they're not providing the officers that we've contracted for, not providing the officers we paid for. A responsible provincial government should look for ways to keep their people safe, and that's what this responsible provincial government is doing under the capable leadership of our public safety minister and our Premier.

Mr. Speaker, if you care about the safety of Albertans, you need to vote yes for this bill. If you don't care, I dare you to vote against this bill. There are lots of things we can debate about in this House. I dare you to vote against this bill because if you do, it sends a strong signal that you do not care about the safety of Albertans and you particularly don't care about the safety of rural Albertans.

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

Mr. Haji: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this bill. Yes. I said it. This bill has two main functions. It creates a new police agency and a new framework for an ankle monitoring program. I will focus on the police agency. The bill establishes the framework for the creation of an independent agency police service. It enables the province to establish such a service, lays out how oversight of the police force under this framework will work.

Well, this is exactly how you will start creating an Alberta police force. You develop a framework, create the architecture, and establish the governance. Then the rest is operational bolts and nuts. I just don't understand why the government can't accept that Albertans don't want an Alberta police force. Why does the government have to create the steps and pretend that it is not creating a police force? Transparency is the most important aspect in our democracies.

The provincial police force was proposed in the Fair Deal Panel report. However, even the panel's research showed that a provincial police force was unpopular. The Fair Deal Panel's public opinion research found that only 35 per cent supported the Alberta police force replacing the RCMP. This is not the only survey result where Albertans disagree with the direction that this government wants to proceed with. The Canada pension plan: the majority of Albertans said no. Political parties in municipal elections: the majority of Albertans said no. But this government still wants to create the steps and continue with that direction where Albertans don't want to go.

Despite the minister's claims that it is not clear why the RCMP has recruitment challenges, well, challenges may result from inadequate funding. The Edmonton Police Service continues to have the same challenges in terms of recruitment and high vacancy rates. Funding that supports front-line staff, the administrative support that creates and enables proper recruitment processes and retention as well – use the example of Alberta Health Services. The annual report and the last report itself shows that recruitment was a challenge. It was taking longer to recruit. Vacancy rates were growing.

Going back to the Fair Deal Panel's report, the panel heard from many Albertans, especially those in rural Alberta, about the challenges facing law enforcement. However, many expressed their appreciation of the local RCMP.

5:50

The major challenge that we have here, Mr. Speaker, is that the UCP took funding for police away from municipalities in 2019. They like to blame the Alberta NDP members as being antipolice, but they're the only ones that have defunded the police. The UCP increased the provincial share of fine revenues from 26 per cent to 40 per cent. Those are resources taken away from municipalities. These are funds that would have supported different public safety-related efforts in municipalities. This is \$32 million, roughly. If you calculate, that is about 300 police officers' salaries. Downloading the costs on municipalities has put further pressure on policing and public safety budgets in our major municipalities. Well, don't axe the facts.

In 2022 there were a reported 165 shootings in Edmonton compared to 150 in 2021. The 2023 data is not still available, but I

bet the numbers have not gone down. This is a 10 per cent increase in shootings between the two years, 2021 and 2022. This amounts to an average of 13 shootings per month in 2022. You calculate that, 165 shootings. Mr. Speaker, these are not just numbers. These are lives that are taken away through gun violence. It's not that we're saying that safety is not important. What we are saying is that the approach that this government is using is not helping to resolve the problem.

Members from the government expressed the bill on policing in relation to their respective constituencies, but let me share some realities of my constituency, Edmonton-Decore. Last year a young constituent at the age of 20 was shot dead at 6 a.m. while going to work. I visited the family. I followed the story. The outcome of the investigation was a mistaken identity.

I won't even go to last year, Mr. Speaker. On Friday last week I joined members from my constituency to bury a constituent whose life was cut short through gun violence. This was in the heart of Edmonton-Decore. He was a young, hard-working man. I met and spoke to his brother at the funeral. He called him a role model. He called him a mentor. He called him a brother.

Mr. Speaker, we don't need to create structures that will not affect to save the lives of today. Not that long ago, yesterday, in Edmonton-South through gun violence two lives were taken away. What we need is not creating red tape structures after structures while we are taking away revenues from the municipalities that would have funded law enforcement where it is needed today. That is not what this government is proposing. They are capable of doing it, but they are deciding and choosing not to do it. They are capable of doing it, but they are disagreeing what Albertans want – Albertans want safety today. Albertans want protection of their lives today. Albertans do not want re-creating and restructuring and retooling of all its infrastructure, starting from health care, from policing, from every aspect. What we need today is taking the right actions, funding municipalities so that they can deploy the law enforcement services that are needed.

Just to continue this story, a week before another constituent at the age of 29 years was visiting in Calgary from Edmonton. He was killed in Calgary. These are stories; these are lives that are happening day in and day out. Mr. Speaker, what we need is a genuine intervention that provides resources to the municipality, that strengthens existing infrastructure that helps save lives, not re-creating, retooling, restructuring. That does not impact the lives of Albertans today.

With that, I conclude and say that creating another agency is not saving lives. Creating another agency is, as previously said, a red tape expansion and will not address these problems. Mr. Speaker, we have had conversations with the city of Edmonton. We discussed with some of the councillors, and what we are hearing from them is that they have higher vacancies within the Edmonton Police Service. The same applies to Calgary.

Ms Sweet: Care to do an intervention?

Mr. Haji: Sure.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Member. Member, as someone that worked in the nonprofit area and had lots of experience working with different communities prior to being elected, I'm just wondering: when you look at the increase in crime across the province in all the different communities, do you think that maybe some of the factors might relate to the fact that, you know, health care and education funding cuts might contribute to an increase in crime?

Mr. Haji: Well, good question. I think, yes, quite a number of the issues that we keep talking about in the House: it's not one or the other. The member from the government raised that it sounded like

we are doing one or the other. It's not that. It's that those are the social determinants of safety. Those are factors that contribute to the public safety. The lack of housing is a key factor. Not having affordable housing is a key factor because we don't have the resources that will provide to those families because of the cost of shelter. These are some examples. If we don't fund education properly, if we don't fund our housing properly, if we don't fund our health care system properly, those display factors that will feed into social unrest and public safety issues.

Yeah. I want to recognize the intervention.

Member Kayande: Will you accept an intervention?

Mr. Haji: Yes.

Member Kayande: I'm quoting here the National Police Federation president, who is deeply . . .

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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