



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 22, 2024

Day 42

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
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(UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Dyck
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Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 22, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

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

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you will note, we have a Polish flag adorning the Chamber today. That's because I had the pleasure of meeting His Excellency Andrzej Duda, the President of the Republic of Poland. He joins us with members of his official delegation.

Alberta and Poland are strongly connected, dating back before Alberta was even a province, with the first Polish immigrants to settle the prairies of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. They made up a large percentage of the labour force in the natural resource sector, which helped establish Alberta as an economic powerhouse, that it still remains today.

Today there are over 170,000 people of Polish heritage in Alberta, who continue to play an incredible role in shaping our province. This strong connection was formally recognized in 2021, when the Member for Peace River and now the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction sponsored the Polish-Canadian Heritage Day Act, which declares the second Sunday in June as Polish-Canadian Heritage Day. It passed unanimously and is now celebrated annually.

I enjoyed meeting President Duda earlier today, where we discussed ways that we can continue to strengthen the connection between Alberta and Poland. It's my pleasure to introduce to the

Assembly His Excellency Andrzej Duda, the President of Poland. He's joined by His Excellency the ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Canada; the Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Undersecretary of State in the chancellery and head of the International Policy Bureau; the consul general of the Republic of Poland in Vancouver; the adviser to the President, ambassador and special representative to the President; the adviser to the President of the Republic of Poland; and the deputy director of the International Policy Bureau. I ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, when I met the President this afternoon, I was honoured to be joined by a dear friend, the MP for Calgary Shepard, Tom Kmiec. Tom has been a strong friend and mentor to me, and he personifies the strong connection that Alberta and Poland have. Tom was born in Poland and immigrated to Alberta with his family in 1985. Tom is joined by his children: Maximilian, Jolie, and Enoch Kmiec. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Today, members, we were led in the singing of *O Canada* by Victoria Rocki. Victoria has been singing since she was a child in Grande Prairie. Victoria has a bachelor of arts and music from the University of Alberta. She currently lives in Edmonton, where she works as a speech pathologist. She has joined us today in the Speaker's gallery. She also is joined by her husband, Maciej Rocki, who is also Polish, as luck would have it today; their sons Elliot and Sebastian; and mother-in-law Teresa Rocki. I ask that you all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I would like to introduce A.L. Horton elementary school from Vegreville. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly I'm honoured to introduce 33 students from a grade 6 class at Michael Strembitsky. They're accompanied by their teacher, Tanya Boyko. I ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some great folks from Fertility Alberta: Michelle Chidley, Ashley Eberle, Trista Harrison, Erika Santos. They are here promoting Fertility Awareness Week. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a lovely young lady named Elana Campsall. She just joined our constituency team in Slave Lake. It's no secret that I like having guests here, and today is no different. I can't actually see her, so I really hope she's in a seat behind me somewhere. Please rise, Elana, and if not, I'll have to send her the video.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you the mayor of Canmore, Sean

Krausert, and the deputy mayor, Jeff Mah, who are also my mayor and deputy mayor because I'm from Canmore. They continually remind me of the importance of municipal service. Thank you so much for being here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my mom, Josie Fir. She's a frequent visitor to this Legislature, and every Sunday night at dinner she likes to tell me everything that happened in the Legislature during the week, on which I tell her: I know; I was there. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce Sebastian and Mateusz Szwiec. They're brothers. Sebastian was born in Bialystok, Poland, and Mateusz was born here in Edmonton, Alberta. They are a true example of a Polish-Canadian family, speaking Polish as their primary language, and they make their mom very proud, my friend Izabela. Thank you for rising. Please, colleagues, join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce both to you and through you the members of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, including their executive board, 25 chiefs from across the province. These chiefs have been working around the clock to ensure our communities are protected heading into this year's fire season. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to introduce members of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association: chiefs Schroeder, Evans, Mohl, Brice, Cornforth, Rosario, Paulson, Stewart, Harris, Moore, Munshaw, and the executive director, Lisa MacLean. Thank you so much for your service, and please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 51 students and six teachers and staff from Minchau elementary school from Edmonton-Meadows. I ask everyone to please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has a statement to make.

Alberta-Poland Relations

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by echoing your warm welcome of guests representing the Republic of Poland, an ally of Alberta and a friend of democracy in Europe. To the President of Poland, His Excellency Andrzej Duda; the First Lady of Poland, Agata Kornhauser-Duda; Poland's ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Witold Dzielski; and Poland's consul general, Aleksandra Kucy: welcome to our beautiful province of Alberta. We sincerely hope that you enjoy your stay here and find your meetings and events helpful and productive.

Mr. Speaker, our distinguished guests are visiting our province to reaffirm and expand the ties that bind us. We often speak of the strength of the Ukrainian community in Alberta, but our province

is also home to a strong Polish community that numbers over 170,000, and our capital city of Edmonton is home to the second-largest Polish community in Canada, with only Toronto counting more Poles among them.

But the ties we share go beyond ancestry and history. Our trade relationship continues to grow, and Alberta's exports to Poland have increased by over 72 per cent from 2022 to 2023 and by an incredible 200 per cent in the last five years. The highest growth has been from our agriculture industry, and that's one more reason why it's so important we continue to grow agriculture and agrifood processing within our province.

We share an interest in a diversified, low-emission energy industry that meets the world's needs and in partnerships that will be required to build it. Tomorrow President Duda will join me at the Canadian Hydrogen Convention to explore new ways to create those partnerships and move energy safely to global markets. We are still not far past the start line when it comes to hydrogen, but the potential is incredible, and both Poland and Alberta recognize that fact.

Mr. Speaker, hydrogen is forecast to be a multitrillion-dollar industry by 2050, and I'm pleased to say that Alberta is pursuing global leadership in the file. Poland is also pursuing leadership, and I hope we can work together to achieve both of our goals on this front, because both our governments understand that hydrogen presents us with an opportunity to reduce emissions while working toward global energy security. We know that it can revolutionize industrial processes and our transportation system, and we know the value of expert collaboration, which is why this week's Canadian Hydrogen Conference is so important. I know we're both looking forward to the discussions that will be had there and the sharing of information, technology, and success throughout the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Poland and Alberta also share an unyielding devotion to Ukraine's freedom. We are united in opposition to Russia's criminal war. We have both welcomed Ukrainian evacuees, and we are supporting Ukraine's valiant defence for as long as it takes because Ukraine is on the front line of the fight for democracy and freedom, values that all of us in this Assembly hold dear. Poland and Alberta believe in a free, fair, and just international order, and we are working together to secure and protect it, whether that involves standing up to tyrants or producing energy that is sorely needed for peaceful and democratic development.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to growing co-operation and shared values, the friendship between Poland and Alberta will only deepen in the years to come. I have no doubt the results will bring tremendous benefits to both sides.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition to respond on their behalf.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Alberta's Official Opposition I, too, would like to welcome President Duda and his delegation to our great province. As the Premier outlined, Alberta is home to the largest Polish community outside of Toronto. That privilege means that Albertans have benefited greatly over many years from the historic level of community engagement and volunteerism offered by Polish Albertans. While specific Polish organizations have worked hard to preserve and maintain the culture, to the great benefit of all Albertans, even more have taken on broader leadership positions in our economy and our public service. As I'm sure the President knows, Alberta remains the only province in Canada to have elected a Polish citizen to its Executive Council.

One of the most recent examples of that strong sense of public service was on display when key leaders in Alberta's Polish community

spearheaded efforts to collect and provide relief to citizens of Ukraine. Moreover, they continue to work tirelessly to keep the urgency of the war in Ukraine at the forefront of the consciousness of Albertans while also providing a warm welcome to many Ukrainian evacuees to our province. Given that so many Alberta Polish people fled to this province to escape historic oppression, they also have a strong history of advocating to protect human rights and equality here in Canada.

Albertans and Canadians are deeply concerned by the war in Ukraine. As such, there is great appreciation for the support and the advocacy provided by Poland to Ukraine. From welcoming Ukrainians into their country and their homes to the President's international advocacy for additional resources to Ukraine from allies, Albertans appreciate the important role played by Poland in supporting Ukraine.

The importance of standing up to Russian aggression cannot be underestimated. Russia's invasion represents an unacceptable violation of the rule of law on an international level, and the rule of law must always be protected, Mr. Speaker. Not only is it a critical component of democracy between nations; it is a critical component of democracy within nations. The rule of law serves to protect minorities – religious, sexual, ethnic – from the tyranny of the majority. It is a fundamental tenet of modern civil society and the democracy it cultivates.

It is with these values in mind that we recommit ourselves to the dialogue and the engagement that is necessary to maintain the strength of not only NATO but also that of all peaceful democratic nations across our world, and it is in keeping with these values that we welcome the conversations that the visit of President Duda will encourage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a statement to make.

Passover

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight at sundown Jewish people across the province and across the world will be celebrating Passover. Passover celebrates the Jewish story of emergence from slavery in Egypt. Some would say that it marks the birth of what it means to be Jewish today. Passover celebrates hope, freedom, and liberation.

This year, however, the Jewish people are celebrating under a bit of a dark cloud as anti-Semitic hatred is on the rise. The October 7 terrorist attacks by Hamas were acts of unbridled violence and hatred, killing civilians and taking hostages. I was in Germany at the time, physically where in the past the most horrific, systematic plans to dehumanize and exterminate people based on their ethnicities and beliefs – that was profound to me. I shuddered as the news rolled in, and I walked past the monuments of remembrance. I took the time to reach out to my friends and co-workers in the Jewish community to see how they were holding up. A Senator from Chicago that was with us was calling to find out the status of two of her constituents, a mother and a daughter, that were abducted by Hamas. Mr. Speaker, we're seeing the same patterns that fuelled the hatred in the past being used in the present. When I visited the Topography of Terror in Berlin, I discovered that the recipe for such heinous acts is well documented. Their hope was to educate people so it would never happen again.

Sadly, it is happening here at home, and here are some examples that'll show that. Our current Prime Minister formally honoured a member of the SS in the House of Commons. We had members of the Alberta NDP flirting with the anti-Semitic fringe. Just last week

the Member for Edmonton-Glenora proudly stood at a rally where Nazi salutes were on clear display. The Member for Calgary-Klein, the opposition critic for antiracism and diversity, referred to Israelis as barbarians and accused them of genocide. The Member for Edmonton-West Henday posed for pictures in front of a map that doesn't recognize Israel.

To the members opposite: this has to stop before you cause any more harm. You need to speak with people from the Jewish community and perhaps the MLAs that viewed the raw footage of the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks. Let me be crystal clear. There is no room for anti-Semitism or hatred in the province of Alberta.

To our Jewish friends, families, and neighbours: I hope you can find joy and peace this Passover as you reflect on your history. God bless and Happy Passover.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when the UCP introduced their emissions reduction development scheme, it was criticized as a plan to make a plan. Turns out that critique was optimistic. A new report now shows the only emissions reductions, turns out, methane and coal, were a result of our NDP government's work, and the Premier's plan has achieved and will achieve nothing. To the Premier. Every serious political leader in 2024 needs a real plan to reduce emissions. When will the Premier stop dragging Alberta backward from a leader to a laggard and start taking actual action?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of our emissions reduction and energy development plan, which charts a pathway to be carbon neutral by 2050. We know that this is an achievable target because the pathways group, which is our largest oil sands group, has a plan to reduce emissions through carbon capture, utilization, and storage, through rolling out small modular reactors, through looking at direct air capture. In addition, we have a number of our large electricity producers who think that they can be carbon neutral by 2045. Things take time, but I'm confident we'll achieve that target.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, CCUS is good, but it's not the whole answer, and it certainly can't happen overnight.

In the meantime other action is required now. Today is Earth Day, and today in Alberta we have the worst drought conditions in 25 years, and it's only getting worse. We've already burned five times as many hectares as this time last year, and there are at least 500 people in Saprae Creek and Lac Ste. Anne on evacuation alert. To the Premier: what is it going to take for her to take this issue seriously and start putting in targets now?

Ms Smith: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have put a target in place, carbon neutrality by 2050. In point of fact, there are many companies who are going to achieve that earlier such as Air Products with their net-zero hydrogen facility, which will roll out hydrogen infrastructure all across the province – the first station, in fact, opened up just a couple of weeks ago – as well as Dow Chemical, a net-zero petrochemical project, which will reduce the emissions from petrochemicals, 20 per cent of the total petrochemical production, and, of course, Heidelberg

with their net-zero cement. It's going to be exciting to see all of that development.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, there is a cost to climate inaction, and here's the Premier's record: opposing further methane emissions reductions, still fighting to strip-mine the Rockies, and stonewalling emissions reductions in the oil sands. To the Premier. Albertans don't know how much access they'll have to water this summer or how much they'll see the sun through the smoke. No matter how deeply she buries her head in the sand and focuses on aspirational goals 25 years away, the problems aren't going to go away, and they need action now. When will this Premier introduce a real plan with real targets before 25 years from now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At least we know that the member opposite is taking her marching orders from Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh. Yes, I know they want to crush our economy. We know they want to phase out oil and natural gas production altogether. I'm just astonished that the Official Opposition would align themselves with such an extreme viewpoint when we know that by 2050, working in conjunction with our industrial emitters, we'll be able to not only continue to have the prosperity we all enjoy to support our vital social programs, but we'll also achieve emissions targets. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Last week Edmonton doctors sent an open letter to the Minister of Health warning about a crisis in Alberta neonatal ICUs, saying, quote, that our most vulnerable and frail patients are at risk. That open letter followed warnings sent to the UCP in 2022 and 2023 and again as recently as February. The doctors wrote this open letter stating that these briefing notes were ignored, leading to the need for a public warning from these doctors that, quote, the situation has become so critical, the deaths of infants may soon follow. Can the Premier explain why it took four warnings over two years for her government to respond?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report to Albertans that, in fact, we do have 58 NICU beds available right across the province. My office received a letter in February, and I directed my officials to investigate those concerns. The workforce and NICU capacity have been an ongoing issue, and we are continuing to work on the capacity as well as the workforce, making sure that we have the right people in the right spots at the right time. This is a huge priority. We're going to continue to work on it.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, in the words of a front-line neonatologist, this government's response is severely short sighted. Albertans have a right to know why warnings have been ignored, especially when the consequences are so serious. This minister tries to claim she's only been minister since June, so she's not responsible, but warnings came in 2022 and 2023. What specific action was taken after the first briefing in '22? What about the second in '23? Will the Premier accept responsibility for her government's actions and ignoring warnings from these front-line workers and apologize to them for keeping them under this pressure due to their lack of action?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time of the February letter my department had already been engaging on how to address this issue. Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and Covenant Health have continued to work closely to address these concerns in short- and long-term planning for both capacity and for workforce. But I want to assure every Albertan that, in fact, we do have capacity across the system. While it's strained, we continue to make sure that every single one of those babies that requires help is getting that help.

Mr. Shepherd: To again quote the front-line doctors, current staffing is inadequate to meet the acuity needs of those patients. Now, this minister's excuse for ignoring these calls is that she's only been minister since June, only 300 days, but in that time we have seen hospitals cancelled, patients taken to motels, Edmontonians told to drive to Red Deer for care, countless service disruptions across Alberta, and a crisis in our NICUs risking the lives of the most vulnerable patients in Alberta. Rather than just passing the buck, this minister could take responsibility for her government's failures, commit to doing better so Albertans never have to experience another year in health care like they have under this minister and government. Will she?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to create fear in the public. I want to reassure the public that, in fact, we do have capacity. We have over 58 NICU beds available as of this morning right across Alberta. And after receiving the second letter just last week, I directed the ministry to expedite this issue. I am looking forward to making sure that we have the capacity both in the beds but also in the workforce to meet the demands across this province. We continue to make sure that every baby's life is prioritized.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a question to ask.

Bill 18

Member Hoyle: The Canadian association of postsecondary teachers has called out this government, making it very clear that Bill 18 puts academic freedom at risk. The University of Alberta and the University of Calgary consistently rank in the top 10 universities in Canada. They are renowned for their research and maintain strong international reputations as a result. To the minister: why is this government attacking academic freedom, fighting to inject political ideology into evidence-based, federally funded postsecondary research?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday I had a very productive meeting with the postsecondary presidents and board chairs across the province, and I was able to take the opportunity to answer questions and alleviate concerns. What was very interesting is that several presidents and board chairs mentioned that this is a great opportunity to make sure that Alberta is getting their fair share in terms of research grants. So we are going to be working together very closely with all of these stakeholders to make sure that we do an in-depth analysis to make sure that we are indeed getting our fair share.

Member Hoyle: The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations condemns Bill 18 as, quote, an unprecedented attack on ethical research and calls this government a gatekeeper that stifles economic innovation. The U of C Graduate Students' Association said, "With Bill 18, Alberta is at risk of creating a brain-drain into other provinces." It would appear from the public outpouring of frustration and disappointment that the

government did not adequately consult with institutions, faculty, and graduate students. Who did the Premier consult with before launching this aggressive attack on postsecondary?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Quebec has successfully implemented similar legislation. If Quebec can do it, Alberta can do it. As I've said many times in this House, we're going to work closely with our postsecondary institutions. We are going to make sure that we have all the data at our fingertips, and we're going to leverage these dollars as well. It's important to know where these dollars are going, and why not partner when it comes to important research that's happening in our province?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order at 1:59.

Member Hoyle: The president of the academic staff association at the U of A says that Bill 18 "risks colouring [the] research coming from Alberta post-secondary institutions as propaganda." Students will now have to consider if they want to pursue their studies in a place where provincial policy threatens the legitimacy of their research. It appears that the Premier did not think this portion of the bill was noteworthy. She didn't even have the Minister of Advanced Education at the press conference. Did the minister not care about Bill 18's unprecedented impact on postsecondary?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Advanced Education, both the ministry and the department, has worked very quickly on the international students file in terms of getting the attestation process in place. This is going to be no different with Bill 18 in terms of putting the approvals process into place. We're going to make sure there's no red tape; it's going to happen quickly. Again, this is going to be an exercise of collaboration and co-operation . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. minister has the call.

Mrs. Sawhney: Again, this is going to be an exercise of collaboration and co-operation with the postsecondary institutions, and we do have support in making sure that we are going to get our fair share in dollars in terms of research grants.

Wildfire Season Preparation

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, yesterday at 4 p.m. an evacuation alert was issued for Sapræe Creek Estates in Fort Mac, Fort McMurray, due to a wildfire, and another was issued for Lac Ste. Anne county. This is a huge cause for concern for many Albertans. We know that Albertans will always step up to support their neighbours, but it is critically important that the provincial government steps up to help those who might have to be evacuated. Can the Premier inform this House about what supports are available for Albertans in case a community is forced to evacuate?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Yes, we've had some evacuation alerts go out across the province in a couple of areas, and our hearts and our prayers are with those families as they are in this stressful time. We know that we have the wildfire teams on the ground taking care of these fires right now, so we have that ready. If these families are evacuated, we have the Alberta emergency services that would be working with those communities to make sure that they're taken care of as

they evacuate, to make sure they have a place to go, make sure that they have the means to take care of their families while they're away from their homes.

Mr. Sabir: There are 66 wildfires burning as of this morning, including at least one out-of-control fire in northern Alberta. It is important that Albertans know that their government will be there to support them with all the resources and preparations done so that no one is ever forced to wait for support. Can the Premier confirm for the House that all elements of emergency response are fully staffed and resourced for this year's wildfire season?

Mr. Loewen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have sufficient staff right now. We're bringing on more staff, as we get to the May 15 deadline, to make sure that we're fully staffed for this wildfire season. As we move into this season, we've seen 185 fires start this year, and I just want to let everybody know that we've extinguished 176 fires already this year. The people in Wildfire are doing great work. They're making sure that they have things in hand and making sure that communities feel safe and feel that they're supported at times when they're concerned, when they have wildfire near their homes. That good work is continuing on.

Mr. Sabir: All Albertans are grateful for the dedicated work of the Alberta emergency management team, who also did tremendous work during last year's devastating wildfires. It is critical that we are continuing to learn from the past and adopting any lessons learned from the 2023 wildfire season. Will the Premier commit to tabling the 2023 wildfire report in the House today?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we can rest assured that the analysis that we did on last year's fire season, which, as was mentioned, was unprecedented – that analysis and the report that came as a result of that is what we're actually doing right now. It's actually what we're doing right now with Wildfire being prepared. We hired additional firefighters this year. We brought our firefighters in early this year. We've got additional air tanker contracts. We've got additional night-vision helicopters running. We have 13 teams that can run 24 hours a day fighting wildfire. We're doing that work right now.

Rent Regulation

Member Irwin: Skyrocketing rent increases are not acceptable. No one should have to face 50, 60, 80 per cent increases on their rent ever, but we know that this is becoming common in Alberta. Housing is an essential need; it's a human right. But the rental market is volatile. Low supply and high demand lead to unprecedented increases. We need affordable housing, but housing built years down the road won't help struggling renters right now. We need an immediate temporary rent cap. Luckily for the government, Bill 205 does just that. Will the UCP pass my bill today, or are they really willing to show Albertans that they just don't care?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what we do not need is rent control in our province, because you will see the same thing take place that we're seeing take place in both Toronto and Vancouver, who have forms of rent control that the hon. member is asking this House to pass. Instead, what we need to do is continue with our stronger foundations plan, investing in real affordable housing solutions and also making a path forward for our construction industry to build houses. I'm happy to report that we continue to see record-breaking numbers in this province. I want Albertans to rest assured: we will not do the NDP's plan, which will bring that to a stop.

Member Irwin: Once again the minister loves to talk about how affordable it is to live in Alberta compared to Toronto, but CMHC reports that Calgary rents will reach Toronto levels by next year. Yet he'd rather fearmonger about rent caps than solve the problem. Their inaction has impacts.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Irwin: Hundreds of thousands of Albertans are at risk of homelessness. On this side of the House we believe that all Albertans deserve a safe and affordable place to live, and that's why we're offering tangible solutions. Will the minister admit that his government's inaction has allowed once affordable Alberta rents to reach Toronto levels?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, what CMHC said was that the prairie provinces are in very good shape when it comes to affordability and that Alberta was leading the way in the country. We are going to continue to make sure that the Alberta advantage ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. minister was very reasonable in listening to the question. I believe he deserves the same respect.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that the Alberta advantage of affordable housing will continue inside our province, and we will not be bringing in NDP socialist policies that you see taking place elsewhere in the country, that are driving rent up higher than anywhere else, are making more people homeless, and are slowing down supply.

Member Irwin: You can't make this up.

Given that evidence shows that rent caps do not have a negative impact on the housing market and that they actually provide renter stability and predictability – and I'd urge those members to read some of that evidence – ensuring Albertans have affordable places to live is this government's job, but they would rather pick fights with municipalities, target queer and trans youth, force Albertans to get medical treatment in motels. Shall I go on? I've yet to hear this minister offer one policy to take action on skyrocketing rents. The status quo got us here. It will not get us out. Why is the minister so afraid to pass my bill and actually help Alberta renters?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I would be afraid to pass the hon. member's bill because every major economist compares it to bombing our economy, devastating our cities, making more people homeless, and, most importantly, slowing down the construction of new homes, particularly purpose-built rentals, which we are having take place in our province in record-breaking ways. I don't want to predetermine what will take place with this House, but I certainly do encourage all members to vote against that hon. member's bill because we do not want to bomb our economy. We want to continue to make Alberta the most affordable place to live.

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

Drought Preparations

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday our government announced a remarkable conclusion to the largest water-sharing agreement in Alberta's history. Our water-sharing agreement stands as the best tool that we have to combat significant drought conditions and water shortages in the weeks and months to come. The last time Alberta held such negotiations, our oldest and largest water consumers came to prevent us from reaching an emergency situation. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas:

could you please inform the House as to why these 2024 water-sharing agreements are a historical achievement for our province?

The Speaker: My apologies, but for the benefit of *Hansard* at 2:07 a point of order was noted by the hon. the Government House Leader.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour last Friday to announce the largest water-sharing agreement in Alberta's history. Thirty-eight of our largest and oldest water licensees in southern Alberta have come together and voluntarily agreed to use less water, if needed, this spring and summer. These groups represent irrigators, municipalities, and industry, making up close to 90 per cent of the water allocated in the Bow, Oldman, and Red Deer river basins. I do want to once again thank them for their leadership, dedication, and, of course, demonstrating the community spirit that makes Alberta such an amazing place.

2:10

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that over 38 of our largest water shareholders came together in community spirit to commit to reducing their water usage if severe drought conditions persist and further given that municipalities and small communities across the province are already taking proactive and direct actions on the drought as we speak, to the same minister: can you please tell this House about the importance of all Albertans, north to south, coming together to maximize our water supply?

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

Ms Schulz: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see municipalities across our province and, specifically, southern Alberta step up and be proactive when it comes to water consumption. Again, it's also a reminder for folks across Alberta, whether in your homes or in your business, to do what you can to conserve water as every drop that you're able to conserve can be used by another user downstream. This is not only important for this situation that we're seeing when it comes to a potential drought; it's important for our bigger picture water use conversation and allocation discussions as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister for that answer. Given that Albertans have taken strong actions on the drought, more so than any government in history, and have successfully secured a historic water-sharing agreement on top of proactive actions like a drought command team and a multiyear drought and flood prevention program and given that drought conditions are persisting in parts of southern Alberta, including my home riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat, and that many reservoirs remain at record lows, to the same minister: can she please share with the House what the government's emergency response plan involves if the drought conditions worsen?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I will say, of course, that with the snow we've received in the last number of weeks, things are looking better across Alberta. However, we are still seeing some concerns in the Oldman River basin and, of course, in river levels in northern

Alberta as well. Our plan will help our province and, of course, all major water users through any and all drought conditions. It will cover everything from conservation plans and water-sharing agreements to how and when we would declare an emergency and how we will prioritize water use for human health and safety. Again, I'm grateful to partners right across Alberta who've been helping us fine-tune these plans. More news later this week.

Supports for Wildland Firefighters

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, health and safety is a shared responsibility between the employer and worker, but when it comes to health and safety, as an employer this government does not adequately support wildland firefighters. Unlike urban firefighters, wildland firefighters do not always get compensation for serious illness contracted while protecting Alberta's communities and natural resources. A number of cancers and other illnesses that are presumed to be occupational diseases for structural firefighters are not for wildland firefighters. This is unfair. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: can you explain to the Assembly why the double standard exists?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's presumptions for certain work-related cancers recognize the great risks that firefighters take to protect our lives and our property. Presumptions help them get through the process faster without needing to prove that their cancer diagnosis was work related. Wildland firefighters and firefighters with cancers outside of those presumptions can still apply for benefits through the regular claims process. We continue to evaluate the research, the science, the evidence to see what further presumptions we should add and for whom and what the benefits should be.

Thank you.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's wildland firefighters eat and breathe smoke and ash, just like their structural firefighting counterparts, and given that wildland firefighters are also exposed to cancer-causing materials like burning debris and chemicals and given that they also increasingly deal with structural fires in the interface areas between urban and wildland fires, the ability to still apply is not adequate. To the minister: will you change the rules and allow for presumptive cancer coverage for wildland firefighters so that they can do their job knowing that they will be supported in case of injury?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the great question. We continue to review the science, the evidence, and the research and to calibrate our presumptions and benefits accordingly. We are also looking at our heroes' fund, which currently is relevant to structural firefighters but not wildland firefighters, and we're looking at potentially expanding that to include wildland firefighters in recognition of the tremendous risks that they take to keep us and our property safe.

Ms Gray: Given that expansion of the heroes' fund and extension of this coverage would be welcomed by wildland firefighters and given that they respond to fires that can be stressful, dangerous, and traumatic situations like first responders, like police, paramedics, and sheriffs who also respond to stressful, dangerous, and traumatic situations, and unfortunately wildland firefighters do not have access

to presumptive coverage for traumatic psychological injury and given that the NDP government extended presumptive psychological injury coverage to all workers, but the UCP repealed this support, will the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade work with his cabinet colleagues and restore presumptive psychological injury coverage to all workers including wildland firefighters?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the great question and for her advocacy. We have a grant program called the supporting psychological health in first responders grant. It supports research and the programs that support the mental health of our first responders including firefighters. We're pleased to continue investing into those programs. Again, we're re-evaluating the heroes' fund. We're continuously evaluating our presumptions and our benefits as they relate to all firefighters, and we're happy to continue to meet with the firefighters as I did with the Fire Chiefs today and with firefighters from across Alberta a few weeks ago.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across the Alberta landscape drought and higher than normal temperatures are leading to an intense wildfire season. Reducing wildfire risk at the local scale where fires start is a critical proactive measure. Recent research suggests that understanding where fuel load is highest around communities may be one of the best ways to predict risk. Many rural communities know their surrounding forests and grasslands put them at high risk of a devastating wildfire. Grants help, but more immediate support is needed. What is the minister doing today to reduce fuel load around rural communities?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the question there. What we're doing is we're working with communities to make sure that they have the fireguards that they need. We started the community fireguard program, and we have many communities right now working with FRIAA on developing where those fireguards should be and how big, so that work is continuing on right now. We also have artificial intelligence that we're using to help map out the province of Alberta to try to decide where the fuel load could be to create the worst fires, so that work is ongoing to make sure that we do the best for Albertans.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that managing wildfire focuses on protecting communities from evacuations or worse and given that many rural communities are surrounded by dry grasslands and/or dry forests and given that residents are frightened about the summer ahead and worried that their town might literally go up in smoke and given that reducing fuel load around these communities is essential to protecting people, their homes, and potentially their livestock, what is the government doing today to map which Alberta communities are most at risk and help these communities reduce their fuel load before catastrophic wildfire?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks for the question, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for that question, too. We're working with communities across the province. We've sent out letters to many communities that we feel are at higher risk to make sure that they're working on

fireguards. Again, those communities have been responding back to FRIAA, and they're working at the fireguards right now. When I look at Kananaskis in particular, there's a group that meets together talking about how to protect the Kananaskis area, in particular the Canmore and Bow Valley corridor when it comes to wildfire. That work is continuing on right now, and we want to make sure that we protect our communities to the best of our abilities when wildfire does strike.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that we need action, not meetings and given that the town of Canmore wrote to the minister in November of last year requesting support to reduce fuel load on provincial lands around town, and the MD of Bighorn has also raised similar concerns and given that these municipalities also requested the Bow Valley wildfire and vegetation management plan be used to guide municipal and provincial fuel load reduction and given that this vegetation plan hasn't been released and no fuel has been removed and the towns of Banff-Kananaskis are simply waiting for the government to take action and protect them, will the minister release this vegetation management plan and reduce fuel load now?

Mr. Loewen: Thanks again for the question. When we look at Banff, of course, that's in Banff national park, and the feds will be working on that program there. We have our group that's working on the Bow Valley corridor, and we're waiting for those reports. Those are members of your community, hon. member, that are working on that. Hopefully, they're doing good work there. I'm sure they are. Maybe you have doubts, but I don't. I think what Albertans want is calm in a crisis, not fearmongering like the members of the opposition are doing. The good work is happening. Mr. Speaker, the people are on the ground, and we're making sure that we protect our communities to the best of our ability.

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

2:20 **Alberta Emissions Reduction
and Energy Development Plan**
(continued)

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few weeks ago Justin Trudeau's government increased the already expensive carbon tax on Canadians by 23 per cent. Now the NDP are double-crossing Albertans by voting against the motion that was set to challenge the constitutionality of Trudeau's carbon tax. As the saying goes: you can't serve two kings. Clearly, the NDP subjects have fallen in line under the federal government's terrible reign. Our UCP government has a plan to achieve a carbon neutral economy by 2050 without the need to impose a consumer carbon tax. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: can you please expand on our government's plan?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can say this: Ottawa should stay in its own lane and stop undermining our provincial success. Our made-in-Alberta plan is working. Overall emissions continue to decline while energy production goes up to meet the demands here and around the world. We've reached our 45 per cent methane reduction target three years ahead of schedule while saving industry over \$600 million. Unlike the NDP, we will not risk the livelihoods of Albertans, the Albertan and Canadian economies, or access to safe, reliable, affordable energy. We will continue to chart our own path.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that Alberta's government remains undeterred in finding ways to make life more affordable and sustainable for Albertans and given that while the NDP and their overlords in Ottawa come up with new ways to make life more expensive for Albertans, our government is in the midst of creating achievable strategies to help reduce emissions and to help our province achieve a carbon neutral power grid by 2050, could the minister of environment please expand on how our government is striking a balance to achieve emissions reduction while still ensuring that affordability is not compromised for Albertans?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. Unlike the federal government and, of course, the members opposite, we do not believe that Albertans should be forced to choose between reducing emissions and keeping life affordable. We're investing in nuclear, geothermal, hydrogen, carbon capture, and many other technologies while working with job creators to reduce emissions in ways that actually work. We will not set rushed and reckless targets because of ideology. Our plan focuses on practical changes that keep life affordable, reduce emissions, and keep our Alberta economy strong.

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, given that our current reality is that the cost of living is up and life is becoming increasingly more expensive for all Canadians and given that the carbon tax increase will only exacerbate the high cost of living that Albertans and Canadians are already experiencing and further given that the carbon tax achieves higher costs, not reduced emissions, can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities please explain the trickle-down effects of the federal carbon tax, which has caused Albertans to suffer?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the excellent question. The carbon tax is a tax on a tax on a tax. They tax a farmer who grows your food. They tax a trucker that transports your food, the store that sells your food, and then they tax you when you go to buy your food. The carbon tax makes everything from your food to your power bill more expensive and is causing inflation to increase. Unlike the Trudeau-NDP alliance in Ottawa, our government is working tirelessly to make life more affordable for all Albertans.

Indigenous Consultations on Energy Development

Member Arcand-Paul: It's Earth Day, but Indigenous communities have not seen this government actually move the needle one bit towards working on a climate change plan with their full participation. Last week I asked the minister of environment why the government has not made any progress. The Indigenous knowledge keepers circle is in that plan, but it has no movement or progress. The minister ignored this part of the question, so today, on Earth Day, I'll ask this time the Minister of Indigenous Relations: why has this government not established the IKKC?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've shared with the members today and as I shared with the members of this House last week, we are proud of our made-in-Alberta emissions

reduction and energy development plan. Absolutely, consulting with Indigenous communities is going to be part of that plan as we work to reduce emissions in all sectors and industries across our province. This is absolutely key to our shared success, and I know myself and the Minister of Indigenous Relations feel the same way.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that there is a wealth of knowledge from First Nations and Métis communities in our province to protect the environment, ensure clean air and water and bountiful nature for generations to come and given that this government's own plan calls for an IKKC that has not been struck to date and given that the longer this government fails to consult with Indigenous people, it sets back opportunities to ensure our environment and our economy are connected, just as Indigenous peoples have done since time immemorial, why is this government ignoring their own plan that requires them to work with Indigenous peoples as knowledge keepers of this province?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the member opposite that this is absolutely a vital perspective to have. I've seen it first-hand when I look at the Indigenous Wisdom Advisory Panel that we have through the office of our chief scientist here. We know that that was why this consultation and bringing in Indigenous ways of knowing was vital to our emissions reduction and energy development plan. We're going to continue to work on that as we move forward.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that this government has said that they will make reductions in emissions but has so far shown no practical results and given that their own plan says that Indigenous people are key to making these reductions and given this government has not allocated one cent to getting the IKKC up and running, what is this government waiting for, why haven't they provided funding, why haven't they done the work, and why are they abandoning their own climate plan before implementing it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea what the member opposite is talking about. We are proud of our emissions reduction and energy development plan, and I am happy any day to compare our record with theirs. While they chased headlines, they also saw economic decline. They chased 180,000 jobs out of our province. Do you know who suffers? Not only regular, everyday, hardworking Albertans but municipalities and First Nations and Métis communities across the province that rely on those industries for jobs and, of course, to support the important social programs that people rely on. We will remain committed to doing all of that work. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 28 serves the needs of the northeast region of Alberta, connecting Edmonton north to highway 63 and Fort McMurray and east to Cold Lake and Saskatchewan. Individual families and industries rely on this corridor for economic activities and their daily commute. The condition of this vital corridor has raised significant safety concerns among the municipal leaders and residents from my riding. Can the

Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors update this Assembly on the government's plan to address safety concerns to help facilitate the safe movement of goods and people?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highway 28 is a very important highway in this province. That's why we are actually committed to having passing lanes from Smoky Lake to Bonnyville and also twinning on highway 28 from Smoky Lake to Cold Lake. There are billions of dollars' worth of oil and gas activity in this very important area of the province, and we want to make sure that the infrastructure in this area is adequate for obviously the safety of the people living in that area as well as the businesses, so that it's adequate for the investment that we're seeing in this very important region of the province. We are committed to improving highway 28.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the significance of highway 28 as a crucial route to CFB 4 Wing Cold Lake, a pivotal base for Canada's fighter jets, and considering anticipated increase in traffic due to upcoming construction at the base, given the indispensable role of this highway in contributing significantly to Alberta's economy, can the minister explain the government's long-term plan and investment strategy for enhancing the capacity, condition, and overall safety of highway 28 to meet the evolving needs of the northeast region?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform this House that I've met with the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock MLA as well as the Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul MLA as well as communities of Vegreville, Thorhild county, Bruderheim, Lloydminster, St. Paul, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, Bonnyville, Elk Point, Vermilion, Two Hills, Lamont, Myrnam, Métis Nation of Alberta as well as Smoky Lake county and the town of Smoky Lake, and I'm happy to inform them that large-scale construction will start after land purchases and permits are secured for this very important project. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the urgency of addressing the safety concerns and maintenance issues on highway 28, especially at the intersections with highways 63 and 829, the intersection at the entrance at Radway, and others and given the reliance and importance of maintaining and improving these intersections to the northeast region and particularly in my constituency for economic activities and daily commute, can the same minister outline the specific measures and timelines for implementing upgrades and improvements to ensure the safety and efficiency of highway 28 at these intersections within my riding?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that construction will actually start this year on a 20-kilometre project on highway 28 at the intersection of highway 63 and highway 829; as well, a turning lane at the intersections of highways 28, 63, and 829; and relocation of township road 584 away from the intersection and building a service road along highway 28. We are building Alberta despite being left with an \$80 billion NDP legacy

debt, to which we have to pay \$3.3 billion every year, just annually, to cover the debt-servicing costs of that failed legacy.

School Construction in Edmonton

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, school divisions, particularly in metro areas, are facing a looming space crisis. Enrolment at Edmonton public schools is growing so quickly that they will run out of space by 2027 if new schools don't open imminently, and we'll need 50 new schools in the next decade just to meet demand. But this government is simply not funding school construction adequately. Planning or preplanning funding doesn't cut it. School boards have been asking for full construction funding in all three years of their capital plans. Will the minister commit to addressing the space crisis immediately and get shovels in the ground?

Mr. Nicolaides: Absolutely, yes, Mr. Speaker. We are eager to get to work to build schools in our growing communities, including in the member's riding, where Budget '24 moved three projects forward. I'm proud to announce that in the member's riding a new junior high and high school in Glenriding Heights achieved and received construction funding, an elementary school also in the member's riding received design funding, and a K to 9 school in the member's riding also received design funding. We will absolutely move forward as quickly as possible to build schools in our fastest growing communities.

Mr. Ip: Given that the city of Edmonton has built nearly 50 new neighbourhoods since 2005 and given that Edmonton school divisions have experienced unprecedented enrolment growth, the fastest since the early 1960s, and given that many new schools already open with full registrations on day one and given that the stage-gated process introduced by this government simply prolongs and drags out funding before approval for a full build, why is the minister slow-walking construction? Will he commit to building the much-needed schools now?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the gated approval process and the stages don't do that at all. In fact, it helps respond to concerns from the Auditor General, which we take very importantly and we listen to carefully.

I'm also proud to announce, Mr. Speaker, that in Budget '24 14 projects in the city of Edmonton have moved forward. Collectively these 14 projects will add 12,500 spaces. This includes construction of five projects this year immediately. As I mentioned, a 7 to 12 school in Glenriding Heights has received full construction funding in addition to other schools across the city.

Mr. Ip: Given that the government is not building schools quickly enough despite school divisions submitting three-year capital requests, not a five- or 10-year plan, and given that the UCP has only funded 70 new schools and improvements since 2019, despite student enrolment rising for all but one year, and given that when the Alberta NDP were in power, we funded 244 schools, showing that it can be done with the right priorities, what is it going to take for the minister to take the school space crisis seriously? Does he not realize that he is failing Alberta's children?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we are taking the issue of increasing enrolment extremely seriously. I know the member opposite is proud of the schools that they funded. I will note for the House that these were all projects approved by previous Conservative governments. When they were in power, in 2015 they added no new projects to the capital list; in 2016 they added no new projects to the capital list. As it stands, 98 projects are in the pipeline, and we

are moving forward to build these schools so our communities and families have the infrastructure they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Wildfire Management Co-ordination

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are currently 66 wildfires burning in Alberta. Many of these are carry-over wildfires from last season, a season that saw 48 communities evacuate and 22,000 square kilometres burn. That's the size of the state of New Jersey. In November the rural municipality association raised the alarm and called for establishment of an advisory committee to guide development of a long-term strategy to mitigate wildfire risk. We're still waiting for the committee to be established. To the minister: why aren't you listening to the RMA?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've been working very hard, working with our municipal partners in Wildfire. We've been meeting with the Fire Chiefs. In fact, we met with the Fire Chiefs today. I met with them twice. The Premier was there. The other ministers were there, too. We've been working with our municipal partners to make sure that they know what's going on, to make sure that they have the confidence that we're doing what we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, we added an enormous amount of money to the budget this year. We've done a lot of changes going into this fire season, probably more changes than have ever been done in history in wildfire from one year to the next. We responded to the unprecedented fire season we had last year, and we're doing the good work for the people . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that the RMA's call for an advisory committee is echoing similar calls from the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, that you met with today, and given that the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association reached out to this government as far back as August 2022, almost two years ago, and given that these fire chiefs are the true experts on this file, some of whom happen to be in the Chamber today, can the minister explain why he isn't listening to them? Does he not value their expertise?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I and other ministers in this government and our Premier have been listening to Alberta municipalities and Alberta Fire Chiefs. We've added a deputy fire commissioner, who is a former firefighter himself, been working closely with the Fire Chiefs. They actually acknowledged some of the great work coming forward with our Forestry and Parks minister this morning, but they want more because they're good at their job. They care about Albertans, as we do on this side of the House. As we said this morning, we will continue to work with them. Today's meeting was never the last meeting. It was this meeting, and we have been doing great work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood-Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that municipality-supplied firefighters take on high costs and are sometimes evacuated during fire season and given that municipalities absorb much of the risk during wildfire season and are simply asking the government to work with them on a long-term solution for spaces outside of the forest protection area, to the Minister of Municipal

Affairs: do you intend on ever taking the wildfire advice from the RMA or the Fire Chiefs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Yes, Mr. Speaker, of course, we listen to the Fire Chiefs. They're the experts in Alberta. We're certainly not going to listen to the folks on the other side, which is why we spend so much time talking to them. We've committed to working with them on the things we have done and further improvements that we can make.

In fact, just this weekend the Minister of Forestry and Parks, the emergency management minister, the Premier, and I were all engaged in the fire up in Wood Buffalo. Mr. Speaker, the mayor told me that he was very happy with the help and the service he got. We intend to do more of that for every municipality in Alberta with the Fire Chiefs.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Alberta boasts 70 per cent of Canada's total irrigation land, supporting 60 specialty crops in a robust value-added food processing industry. Albertans, in fact the world relies on our irrigation and our waterways for business, daily needs, and sporting activities.

Recently the federal government has ignored requests to implement mandatory federal boat inspection services at Canada's borders to protect us from invasive species. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what is our provincial government doing to put pressure on the federal government to take this issue seriously?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this very important question. Thanks to provincial efforts so far, we've kept Alberta invasive mussel free, but of course international border control is a federal responsibility. I've written the federal minister, calling for mandatory inspections and decontamination on all watercraft entering from the United States. This is absolutely critical to preventing zebra mussels and other species from entering Canada. I have yet to receive a reply from Ottawa, but we are not giving up. We will ramp up defences and increase the pressure on Ottawa to do their job and properly protect our own borders. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her response. Given that so far we have been able to keep out zebra and quagga mussels from Alberta but that one only has to look at what happened in Ontario to see what the consequences are when these invasive species are allowed to get into our waterways and given that last year in southern Idaho they found an infestation of quagga mussels in the Snake River, to the same minister: what is this government doing to increase inspection services and ensure our waterways stay safe?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. There are huge potential risks and potential costs if these invasive species do in fact enter our waterways. This year we're investing more than 2 and a half million dollars to add more watercraft inspection stations and more dedicated inspectors across our province. We're also launching a roving crew that will add extra protection wherever it's needed most. Just last week we did stop

our first invasive mussel from getting into Alberta. A boat returning from Arizona had zebra mussels stowed inside. Thankfully, our inspection crew stopped the boat and caught the mussel before it could do any damage. This is why it's so important to step up protection this year.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for her response. Given that Albertans are so reliant on our waterways and irrigation for our way of life and given that the low estimate of \$75 million per year is the financial and economic cost associated with these invasive species getting into our waterways, can the same minister inform the House of her plans to ensure that Alberta continues to stay invasive mussel free?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have seen the impact that zebra mussels, quagga mussels, and other invasive species can have, and we know the threat is not going away any time soon. Having added more inspectors and inspection stations this year, our goal now is to add four more stations next year, which would mean that we essentially doubled the number of stations in just two years. We'll be launching a new aquatic invasive species task force, of course, led by the Member for Taber-Warner, to help find ways to strengthen our programs and ensure we stay invasive mussel free for years to come, but it's also safe to say that boaters should expect to be inspected.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Affordable Housing

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, we are in a housing crisis. This crisis is being driven by demand for housing outstripping the supply of housing. This supply-demand imbalance is driving up prices in all categories of housing, including both renting and home ownership. This government has done little to alleviate this crisis. While we hear the government quote numbers about increasing housing supply, the truth is that new supply continues to be widely outpaced by rising demand. Population growth is a good thing, but all of these people need somewhere to live and to live with dignity. All over this province people are struggling to find housing options they can afford. The challenge is most acute in Calgary and Edmonton, which are experiencing the highest year-over-year increases in cost of housing in the country. Certainly, this government's dream-killing housing tax isn't helping.

In response we know that housing of all types and all price ranges needs to be built across this province, and this needs to be done immediately. We need a co-ordinated approach across all levels of government. Even with a co-ordinated approach it will take a few years to catch up with demand. Rather than co-ordination, this government is choosing to pick fights with Ottawa, delaying millions in funding support from the federal government. We need to build homes, not walls, Mr. Speaker. It is our responsibility to provide immediate relief to Albertans.

We can take immediate relief by passing Bill 205, Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act. This act is short term

in nature, designed to be in effect until market forces can bring balance back to the market. This act is not a rent cap. It is designed to mitigate the increases that can be applied to renters, providing renters with stability. Bill 205 provides the immediate relief Albertans need today. I urge all members of this House to think about the Albertans that need our help and support Bill 205.

Canadian Fertility Awareness Week

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring awareness to a topic that has left Albertans struggling to build their families. It's estimated that nearly 1 in 6, or over 250,000, Albertans will face challenges in trying to conceive. That means each of us here knows people impacted by infertility and has friends and family who have required fertility care to build their families.

This week is Canadian Fertility Awareness Week. CFAW takes place annually during April to raise awareness about fertility and its impact on more than 1 in 6 Canadians. It aims to educate the public about the causes and treatment options for those experiencing infertility as well as the emotional, physical, and financial toll it takes on those affected by it. CFAW also aims to catalyze increased advocacy for equitable access to fertility care throughout Canada.

Seven years and more than \$100,000: that's what Edmontonians Devonee and Ryan Gilson have invested into trying to have a baby. The Gilsons suffer from unexplained infertility. Despite having well-paying jobs, it took the Gilsons years of saving to pay for needed medications and treatments. The financial and emotional toll the journey has taken on the couple has been immense. Time is of the essence in fertility treatments. The Gilsons believe they would have a baby by now if they didn't need to keep taking extended breaks in their treatments to save money for the next round.

Mr. Speaker, seeking professional help to try to have children is something I'm personally familiar with. I'm aware of the stress on finances and on relationships that can be caused. I'm aware of the jealousy and resentment that can build when you see others with their own families while you try desperately for your own. I'm aware of sleepless nights, feelings of inadequacy, the frustration, anger, hopelessness, and even shame that ensues. Thankfully, I'm one of the fortunate ones who got the right help at the right time and was finally able to have a family. CFAW provides an opportunity for us to learn about the Gilsons and others in similar situations. I'd like to encourage anyone struggling with their own fertility issues; there is hope.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has a statement to make.

National Volunteer Week

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During National Volunteer Week, which took place last week, I had the honour of attending a volunteer appreciation event organized by KARA community resource centre. In a gathering surrounded by fellow Albertans in my constituency committed to making a difference, the importance of this year's theme, Every Moment Matters, echoed profoundly. National Volunteer Week is not merely a designated time frame; it's a recognition, appreciation, and celebration of the countless moments, both big and small, that volunteers dedicate to enriching the lives of others in our province. From lending a listening ear to extending a helping hand, each interaction, each effort encapsulates the essence of compassion and selflessness. In Alberta, where the

spirit of community thrives, the impact of those moments is immeasurable.

As we are now in the wildfire season, I want to take a moment to pause and acknowledge and appreciate the many volunteer firefighters who risk their lives to protect Albertans. On this side of the House we appreciate everything they do. The collective contributions of 1.9 million volunteers underscore the significance of every moment they invest in making Alberta a better place. Beyond the numbers lies a narrative of empowerment and transformation. Every tutoring session, every meal served, every act of kindness reverberates, leaving a mark on hearts and communities alike. As we reflect on the theme Every Moment Matters, we recognize the ripple effect of these moments in shaping the future full of hope and possibility.

As we commemorate our volunteers, let us cherish and celebrate the invaluable moments shared in service to others. Every moment matters because each moment transforms lives.

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

Federal Budget 2024

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is said that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it, and I can't think of a better way to describe last week's federal budget than that, at least not without using a few choice four-letter words. History has shown that the best way to tame out-of-control inflation and address an affordability crisis is through responsible fiscal governance. Sadly, the federal budget does the exact opposite, a \$40 billion deficit this year as part of \$68 billion in debt-servicing costs per year by 2028. A staggering number, that \$68 billion every year just to cover Liberal debt. It's no wonder Trudeau admitted to not thinking about fiscal policy, because anyone who thought about it for even two seconds would understand that this is unacceptable.

The federal government's historically bad financial management, reckless green agenda, and inflationary spending have crippled Canadians and Alberta. The tagline for this disastrous federal budget is generational fairness. That's comical, Mr. Speaker. The only thing that this budget will lead to is generational failure.

Previously I have described the failed NDP policy development process in three easy steps. Well, Mr. Speaker, it looks like their coalition partners were listening. This budget failure can be broken down following the same formula: step 1, create a problem, eight years of gross financial malfeasance leading to a devastating inflation and affordability crisis; step 2, propose a solution that makes the problem worse, in this case federal Budget 2024; and, of course, step 3, attack anyone who dares question their plan no matter how damaging and backwards it is. This is why our government will always stand up against this flawed and dangerous Liberal-NDP coalition and their illogical policy development.

Thank you.

2:50 Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans' retirements belong to them, not the Premier, not the Finance minister, not the UCP. Last week I attended the public meeting of the Canada Pension Plan Investments Board. Hundreds upon hundreds of Albertans showed up to have their voices heard, but this government is not listening at all.

On this side of the House we have heard from thousands of Albertans who are opposed to the UCP's pension plan gamble. We've heard from thousands more at open and transparent in-person town halls that this side of the House organized. We heard it during the sham consultation that the UCP launched, that managed to only talk

to 150 Albertans despite spending millions of their dollars. And if this government ever decides to stop hiding their pension surveys, we will see that Albertans are resolutely opposed to having the UCP play games with their life savings. In the end, Mr. Speaker, that is all this plan is, a game for the UCP.

The Premier during her leadership campaign talked about using an Alberta pension plan to pay for a provincial police force or to create a provincial revenue agency and more. Albertans are already worried about health care under the UCP, about education at all levels under the UCP, and now they are worried about their financial security in retirement under the UCP. So while the UCP is claiming that Albertans are looking for more information, let me be completely clear: the only piece of data that Albertans are still waiting to hear about from the UCP is the date the UCP will finally end this ridiculous scheme. But until they do, the Alberta NDP will never stop fighting to protect the retirement security that Albertans have spent their lifetimes building. We'll never stop doing that.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is an honour to table the committee's annual report, covering its activities for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This report fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(c) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. This report will also be available on the Assembly website online.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 19 Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Making life more affordable for Albertans is a top priority of our government. If passed, this legislation will help make utility bills more affordable and predictable across the province by prohibiting the use of variable rates when calculating local access fees on utility bills. It would also ensure that the Alberta Utilities Commission has stronger oversight on these fees and will officially change the name of the default electricity rate to the rate of last resort. By making these changes, our government is protecting Albertan ratepayers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a tabling.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table five copies of an article posted by CBC announcing that FlixBus, a large German-based multinational corporation, has started operations in Alberta, with smaller operators saying that they're there to monopolize rural bus

transportation once again. The operators are asking for provincial leadership in the matter.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'd like to table five copies of an article by Ricardo Tranjan and Paulina Vargatho entitled Arguments against Rent Control Don't Hold up to Scrutiny. This was just written a couple of days ago. I'll urge all members to read this article.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite copies of Cree Kinship Terms, posted on October 24, 2011, by âpihtawikosisân, an author, and Nehiyaw instructor Chelsea Vowel.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an opinion article written by Scotiabank's vice-president and head of capital market economics, Derek Holt, on the federal budget, which states: "Canada's Budget basically cements structural deficits forever . . . Trudeau and Freeland are ripping off Canada's youth who will be the ones left to face the bills for many years to come."

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a *Globe and Mail* article entitled Calgary Tenants Shocked by Heavy Rent Hikes, pointing out the need for Bill 205.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an e-mail from someone from St. Albert to support Bill 205, talking about the out-of-control rise in cost of living in St. Albert and cost of rent.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at approximately 2 o'clock a point of order was raised.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise. As I've recently found out, I have a fan of the points of order that we do, so I'd like to dedicate my performance today to a fan of mine, Josie Fir, the mother of the hon. minister of culture, multiculturalism, and status of women.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a little bit of frustration that I rise on this point of order because I feel like we've gone over this thing about personal attacks in the Chamber a number of times. At the time that you noted, in this instance the Member for Edmonton-South, I believe, was speaking. Yep. Got it right. Bang on. Edmonton-South was speaking. In her remarks with regard to the Premier and postsecondary institutions there were a bunch of things said here, but not having the benefit of the Blues, I will use a loose recollection, which is: who did the Premier consult before launching an aggressive attack on postsecondaries?

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier did no such thing. Under no circumstances has the Premier ever launched an attack on anyone. Our job on this side of the House is to serve the people of Alberta, the ones that elected us and the ones that didn't vote for us. We serve all Albertans. The point of this House is to debate and disagree, but to

suggest the hon. Premier launched an attack on postsecondary institutions is certainly unparliamentary. It is language that would rise to the level, I believe, of a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that this is a point of order; I believe that this is a matter of debate. The language that was used was very deliberately chosen and does not refer to an individual but, rather, the Premier. Talking about the Premier and the Premier's actions is talking about government and government policy, the role of policies impacting, in this case, our postsecondary sector. In fact, we do not even refer to attacking on individuals but, rather, an entire sector. I would note – and I think it's pertinent to the fact that this is a matter of debate – that the Member for Edmonton-South began with a quote from the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, who condemn Bill 18 as “an unprecedented attack on ethical research.” In this case we have seen a public outpouring of frustration and disappointment around a lack of consultation, around the potential negative impacts of actions of this government, the policy they are putting forward under the guise of Bill 18.

I believe the language here would fall under the bounds of a matter of debate in this case given that just five days ago, I believe it was, we talked about when people talk about things a Premier does or does not do, and in the point of order that I am thinking of, we were talking about the former Premier when the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was in that seat. Talking about things a Premier does is not the same thing as talking about he or she, which is the points of order that we've seen in this House, so I believe this is an extension of debate. I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. However, if there is anyone else wishing to join in the debate, I'm more than willing to hear other arguments.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South said the following: “Who did the Premier consult with before launching this aggressive attack on postsecondary?”

3:00

I do agree that this is a matter of debate as it's not a point of order. There's no personal attack of any variety in such a ruling, and from time to time members will use aggressive language in this Assembly. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 205

Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned April 15]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a couple of moments remaining, should she choose to use it.

The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has risen.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is honestly my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 205, the housing security act. Sadly, it's my pleasure, but it's mostly my pleasure because affordable housing is for sure the number one issue that I hear from my

constituents. So being able to rise today to speak to this important bill is important for me and all of the people who live in my riding.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Every Albertan deserves a place to call home, and that place should be safe. It should be welcoming. It should be loving. It should be all of those things, but above all it should be affordable within somebody's means. The reality is that rents across Alberta are skyrocketing. While we spend time in this House talking about Edmonton and Calgary and the impact of increasing rents in our two major cities, I will spend the majority of my time – nine minutes remaining – talking about the affordability of housing in Banff and Canmore specifically, since those are the communities that I represent.

Rents are skyrocketing. Property prices are through the roof, and this bill creates a scenario where we can take immediate action to help some of our most vulnerable Albertans. This bill proposes a temporary rent cap, two words that I know cause a lot of angst, but I'd like to focus on the word “temporary” here. This is a much-needed action today. It's not something that's going to last forever. It's not going to change the face of the Alberta market and economy. It is a temporary action that we could implement immediately, and it needs to be part of a bigger, more comprehensive plan to fully address housing.

I want to talk a little bit about Banff-Kananaskis riding and in particular the Bow Valley because that is where we are feeling the housing crisis most intensely in my riding. The communities of Canmore and Banff have been in a housing crisis for over a decade. And when I say the word “crisis,” I mean crisis. We kind of talk about crisis a lot. I feel like sometimes we use words to inflame our arguments and inflame the importance, but in this particular case, I do think we're in a crisis. The word “crisis” means a time of intense difficulty and a time when important decisions must be made.

In Banff-Kananaskis and in the Bow Valley of Alberta we have been in a housing crisis for more than a decade. I am frequently seeing people, especially in the summertime – we have a lot of people living in their vans in various places in town. While some people are travelling through and they are enjoying living in their vans, that's not the ideal situation for a lot of people. Some people would like to live in a home and perhaps grow to call Canmore and Banff home over the long term. But because of the cost of rent and because of the cost of housing, that's not an option available for them. Some people call Canmore and Banff home for a short period of time and then are forced to leave because rent is too much and they can't afford to stay.

What am I talking about for rent in Canmore? Well, rent in Canmore has increased 25 per cent since 2022. Just to give you some numbers, because I'm a scientist and I love to throw data around, the average 2023 rental rate in Canmore for a one bedroom is \$2,350 a month, up 25 per cent since 2022. A two bedroom will cost you just over \$2,800 a month – that's 7 per cent higher than 2022 – a three bedroom \$4,000 a month, and a four bedroom over \$5,000 a month. This is very expensive. I feel pretty confident, although I don't have the data to say for sure, that Canmore is one of the most expensive communities in Alberta to live.

Eventually people like to buy homes. Well, you're not going to be able to do that in the Bow Valley unless you fall into a big chunk of money from an inheritance. In 2024 the median residential property assessment in Canmore is now over \$1 million, and a single-family detached home will cost you almost \$1.4 million. That is not affordable. It'll cost \$761,000 to buy a residential condominium. This incredible increase in housing cost has started to affect our whole entire community in the Bow Valley. If I was a renter in Canmore and Banff, what would I be able to find? I found

about six properties on Kijiji listed right now. A room for rent in a house in Canmore costs between \$900 and \$1,400 a month for a bedroom. That's not for an apartment. One room in a house will cost you around \$1,000 a month. A master bedroom in Canmore with an ensuite – so if you want a bathroom – will cost you a little bit extra, \$1,250 a month. And a four-bedroom townhouse in Banff is listed for \$3,600 a month right now.

While this government has increased their rental supplements program, it doesn't really go all the way to addressing the need in the Bow Valley, and we're just talking about two small towns in the province. The rental supplements are aimed to get people closer to having their rent cover approximately 30 per cent of their income, which is what banks recommend when you're creating budgeting. But even our rental supplement program doesn't always get renters to 30 per cent of their wages going towards rent. The reality is that most people in Canmore who are making, you know, minimum wage or slightly higher are being forced to pay a lot more than 30 per cent of their wage towards rent. And what does that mean? Well, that means that there's no cushion, Mr. Speaker. There is no ability to absorb an unpredicted rent increase because already a very high percentage of your wage is going towards rent.

So rent has increased 25 per cent or more, and wages have not. This creates a very difficult situation in the Bow Valley, Mr. Speaker, because we're looking at a situation where people are already paying more than 30 per cent of their wage towards rent, and now it's going even higher.

What this means is that businesses can't attract and retain workers. We're under pressure from the provincial government to double tourism by 2035. Most of the people who work in hospitality might come to Canmore or Banff and be working minimum wage jobs or slightly higher, but they can't afford to stay. It starts to impact the viability of tourism-based businesses, the viability of all businesses in our community, and that starts to change the fabric of our community.

We also have reduced municipal funding for the municipalities in the Bow Valley, which means that the pressure to address affordability starts to fall to municipalities. The municipality of Canmore has responded by implementing programs to reduce Canmore's living wage from \$38 an hour. It reduces Canmore's living wage by having town programs like free transit or social programs to try to make life more affordable so that we can continue to build our community. The thing about being in a housing crisis, when it is affecting all aspects of your town, from teachers and nurses and doctors to hospitality workers and servers and everything in between, is that your community starts to change. People don't stay.

One of the reasons why people are attracted to living in small towns is because of the sense of community, is because how people come together to support and build community. But we can't do that when people are forced to leave because their rents keep going up.

So this bill is not going to solve the housing crisis in Alberta, but it takes important critical action today to help some of our most vulnerable Albertans be able to live where they choose to live and be able to stay there.

3:10

This government hasn't done enough when it comes to addressing affordable housing. I think we all know that the number one solution for affordable housing is more units, but those take time to build, and this government hasn't even set minimum numbers of types of affordable and social housing. This bill would do that. It would require that data collection and that minimum number and those targets to be set.

Ten minutes have gone by incredibly fast, unfortunately. I just want to close with saying that we're in a housing crisis. Why wouldn't we do everything possible to address it? Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Beddington has risen.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 205, the housing security act. My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood presents a really excellent plan in Bill 205 to do something about the housing crisis that's happening here in Alberta.

What we know about rents in Alberta is that we need immediate action because rents, frankly, are skyrocketing. People are coming to Alberta in droves, and while the government does love to pat themselves on the back for it, they certainly haven't done the work that's required to accommodate all of those people who are coming here. We see that in a lack of investment in our schools. We see that in a lack of investment in our health care system. Most clearly right now, I think, we see that in a lack of investment in housing in Alberta. People are coming here. Where are they going to live?

I mean, you know, it's possible that the members opposite maybe just aren't that interested in taking action on the crisis, and I think that they've shown that with the introduction of a different bill, with that Bill 18, right? What that signals to me is that they don't want federal dollars to flow to Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They want to make that process more difficult. This is perplexing for me, especially because the minister responsible for housing just a year ago said that he was happy to see Ottawa invest in housing in any way. In any way. In fact, the criticism he levelled at the federal government at the time had nothing to do with how housing money came into Alberta. No. His concern was that adequate funds weren't flowing. Speaking on the need for housing funding, the minister said, quote, we need more significant money brought to the table by the federal government to support both the province and municipality's ambition.

How things change in just a year. I guess that was just some blah, blah, blah from the government that's more interested in talking in circles instead of rolling up their sleeves and just getting to work on what needs to be done to address the housing crisis that we see in our province today. To be clear, what needs to be done is building more housing, a lot, a lot, a lot more housing to accommodate all the people who are coming here.

Certainly, I mean, in my opinion that means clearing the path for funding from any level of government that wants to step up, and if this provincial government won't step up, like, I'm sure glad that our municipal and federal leaders are willing to do so, to step up and address the crisis in housing. Why on earth would the provincial government stand in the way of that?

Alberta used to have some of the lowest cost rentals in the country. We used to be one of the most affordable places to live, and that is rapidly becoming history under the UCP. Rent prices are increasing faster here in Alberta, faster than anywhere else in the country, in fact.

What are we asking for in this bill, Bill 205? Well, it's temporary rent caps. There are a few other things we're asking for, too, but I'm going to focus on the temporary rent caps because when I have seen members opposite speak on this and light their hair on fire about this bill, they always seem to miss out on that: temporary. The temporary is a big part of this bill because all we're doing is seeking a rent cap over four years. That cap would be set at 2 per cent for the first two years, and then the following two years would be tied to CPI. For all the avid Yukon provincial government followers out there, you'll recognize this, because this is similar to what we have seen with the Yukon's temporary rent cap.

Again, you know, in spite of some of the rhetoric that I've seen coming from the members opposite, yeah; the Yukon has rent controls, and in fact more than half of Canada's provinces have some form of control on rent. Manitoba, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario, P.E.I., the Yukon, and Quebec: all of these provinces have some form of rent control. That doesn't look the same, the exact same, from province to province. It does often come in the form of controlling how much rent can rise by. Some provinces, like Manitoba, implemented a complete freeze on rent – that would have been in 2023 – because some provinces, like Manitoba, are taking the housing crisis seriously. They understand what happens when you have pressure on supply, when you have your demand outpace your supply; the costs in your existing stock have nowhere to go but up, up, up. That's the free market, right?

There are measures that we can take to address a crisis, and we are facing a crisis in housing here in Alberta. Houses: the thing about them is that they don't just spring up overnight. My family are of a generational family business of home builders, and I can tell you that it's a long process. It's a long process to get the house all the way up and ready to be living in. In fact, it's going to take years of concerted efforts to build the housing that we need to accommodate everyone who has come to Alberta.

But in the meantime, while we wait for that housing to be built, people are suffering. The UCP has increased the cost of living in so many ways for Albertans, whether that's, you know, high electricity prices, high insurance prices, never-ending school fees – my gosh, those add up – so I want to share a couple of folks from my constituency who have reached out about this. Kristin, a young mother who lives in my riding of Calgary-Beddington: her rent went up \$600 a month. Six hundred dollars a month.

An Hon. Member: Jeez. That's brutal.

Ms Chapman: It's absolutely brutal.

That's on top of, as she explained, the high cost of food – she's got kids that she's got to feed – the cost of her utilities; she's trying to save for college, for postsecondary for her kids; costs of after school activities. I mean, she's saying those things are gone, right? Those are the things to drop out of her budget so that she can pay for the increase in her rent.

Virginia: she's an 85-year-old pensioner who – I hope all of you have a Virginia, actually. She's very lovely. She calls the constituency office every week on Monday mornings. She gives us sort of her hot takes from the week before, you know, what she thinks we should be focused on. But when she called about her rent increase – \$500. There was a change in landlords in her building. This is a building that she'd been living in for decades. Five hundred dollars. Virginia is a pensioner, right? There's no way for her to generate additional income, so she simply has to cut other things out of her budget.

Virginia when she called us – and this would have been a few months ago, when the bill came up. She called us to make sure that we knew that she was very much in support of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, very grateful to see this bill come forward. Virginia knows that this is a huge issue, and she was so pleased that the NDP was trying to do something about it, something to address this crisis.

Workers. Okay. Yeah. I have a minute, so I'm going to try this. I think one of the biggest failings I'm seeing from this government, too, is a plan to address the shortage of workers in construction building trades. If we want to take some action – and we would very much love for the government to take some action on this – this is an area where we would suggest they could take some action. We know that there is a shortage of workers. There is currently a shortage of workers in construction building trades. This government's own reporting, Alberta's Occupational Outlook, has

identified that almost 20 per cent of the existing workforce in construction trades are now 55 or older. The shortage up to this year: we have a shortage already of 3,000 workers. By 2030 they're looking at a shortage of almost 8,000 workers in this field.

3:20

This government is using programs like Alberta Is Calling to attract people. Why aren't they attracting people? Why isn't everything in this focused on building homes? If this government cared, they would be putting everything they can into building more homes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to oppose the proposed Bill 205, the housing statutes amendment act. While the intention of the proposed piece of legislation seems noble, putting it in place would have genuine consequences for Albertans and would limit the supply of housing in our province. Our government is committed to ensuring that every individual and family has access to safe, affordable housing. This is why our stance on rent control is clear: our UCP government will not endorse rent control.

Introducing rent control would be a disaster, and it would limit the supply of housing in the province. We've seen this happen before, in the mid-70s. When rent control was implemented, construction of new properties dropped, vacancy rates decreased, and fewer units were available for rent, which caused rent control to be phased out in the early '80s.

We need to learn from the past rather than repeat it. Bill 205 is a Band-Aid solution which would harm the rental market over the long term by discouraging new development. At a time when people are moving to our province in record numbers, this policy would make it harder for many new Albertan families trying to find a home. It would discourage increases to the housing supply while also incentivizing higher income earners to stay put in rent-controlled units.

The reality is that rent control would ultimately harm the very people it aims to protect, tenants. This legislation would not help lower income earners as it would discourage the building of new houses, encourage higher earning renters to remain put, and significantly reduce investments in units subject to rent control. In essence, it would distort the housing market and create many unintended consequences. Moreover, rent control would discourage landlords from maintaining and improving their properties as they would no longer have an incentive to spend additional funds to renovate and upgrade their units. Due to the restriction of rental income, landlords who otherwise would have invested in the upkeep of their properties could be unable to continue investing in renovations, eventually leading to the deterioration . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to close debate on Bill 205.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to the thousands and thousands of Albertans who've reached out, who've shared their stories, who've signed our petition, more than 5,000 and growing on that alone. I'm thankful to folks like ACORN and activists across our province who've been pushing for action on skyrocketing rents and to my colleagues for speaking so eloquently in debate and to our leader for supporting this important piece of legislation.

We've been so clear: rent caps aren't a panacea for the housing crisis, but they're one step that we can take immediately to support folks. You all know there are, of course, limitations to what I can do in a private member's bill. If I were able to put forward a money bill, it would of course focus on building a whole lot of accessible affordable housing. But I can't do that. So my Bill 205 is one step, one tangible action that this government can take now, an action we can take at a time when for nearly a year rents in Alberta are increasing faster than anywhere else, increasing 18 per cent across our province last month, with our major cities of Calgary and Edmonton leading the country in rent increases.

But it's important to point out that this is not just an issue in Alberta's major cities. Lloydminster saw a 27 per cent increase this past month, Airdrie and Grande Prairie saw increases around 10 per cent, and we heard my fantastic colleague from Banff-Kananaskis talk about the out-of-control rents in her riding, in Canmore especially. While the members opposite minimize this data and dismiss it, pointing to markets like Toronto having much greater rents, we can now point to the fact that Calgary is on track to have rents as high as Toronto by next year.

And, as I've mentioned so many times, we've got a government unwilling to support our bill. Not to pre-empt the decision, but the minister has made it clear, although I still remain optimistic that this speech may change his mind. If this holds true, they won't support our bill; they won't support caps on rent increases. But they also won't boost rent supplements at a time when thousands and thousands of Albertans are waiting on wait-lists. They're not waiting for a home, but they're waiting to get a rent subsidy just to get some of the funds that they need to secure a home. This is a UCP government that's using Albertans who are facing massive rent increases as a political football in their petty game with the federal government.

Their game is becoming tiresome. We've seen other provinces step up with funding to address the housing crisis, and we've seen, as my colleagues have said so eloquently today, that municipalities have taken on much of the responsibility. Yet the UCP have been missing in action, and I dare say they've been openly hostile. So they can set their partisanship aside today, they can work with all government partners, and they can support the tangible measures that we've offered to support Alberta renters. We've put an offer on the table. What have they offered back? Nothing but the same old, tired arguments they keep using that aren't supported by evidence. I truly don't understand how they can stand and face their constituents while offering nothing, because while they're doing that, we're listening, and we're thinking of the real Albertans whose lives would be improved by this legislation.

I'm thinking of Christina, a renter in Calgary who was given a 23 per cent rent increase. She shared that housing is no longer affordable in this province for people who work really hard and are trying to get ahead. She said: if my rent goes up \$500 per month, I know my salary isn't going up that much, so what do we do? I want a government that will represent all of us.

I'm thinking of Jay in Edmonton, who searched months and months for anything affordable. Jay is a full-time university student whose partner has a good job. Despite having a decent income, a good credit score, flawless references, they couldn't find anything except places that would require them to make 2.5 times the rent.

I'm thinking of Paxton in Calgary. Paxton just found out that the two-bedroom apartment he and his partner had been leasing since 2020 would be going up by 83 per cent. Eighty-three per cent. How many Albertans can absorb that? Very few.

I'm thinking of Linda, a senior in Spruce Grove who received a 21 per cent increase to her rent. She's lived and worked in Alberta for over 50 years. She's retired. She's living on a fixed income, and

she says these steep increases to her rent mean that she's having to choose between paying rent and buying groceries.

I think of all these people and so many more Albertans today, and I'm so sorry to all of those renters who are being let down. I just wish that sometime these politicians on the other side would understand how hard it is for so many of our constituents, for so many of our neighbours. So many Albertans are, like Linda, having to choose between paying rent and paying groceries. Albertans need certainty. They need predictability. Bill 205 offers that, and I urge every member in this House to support my bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:28 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Notley
Boparai	Goehring	Pancholi
Ceci	Gray	Renaud
Chapman	Ip	Sabir
Dach	Irwin	Schmidt
Deol	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Tejada

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 24 Against – 42

[Motion for second reading of Bill 205 lost]

Bill 206

Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today in this Chamber to move second reading and to speak to my second private member's bill, Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024.

You may remember, Mr. Speaker, my first private member's bill, Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act, which was the only private member's bill introduced by a Wildrose MLA to unanimously pass under the NDP government seven years ago. I sincerely hope that we can achieve the same unanimous support for Bill 206.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The motives behind this bill are deeply personal. There's someone very special and dear to my heart whose challenges inspired this amendment, my nephew Matthew. Diagnosed with severe autism spectrum disorder as a toddler, Matthew faced numerous difficulties, including those typical to autism but also swallowing problems, balance issues, and slow reaction times. His needs were substantial, but thankfully Alberta has a robust support system for children like him. However, navigating these systems can be overwhelming for many parents. They often struggle to understand the available resources or even be aware of them.

The distinction between services provided by schools and those offered by family support for children with disabilities, the FSCD program, can be unclear. The agencies sometimes work in silos, leading to duplicated services or conflicting treatments. Matthew's mother once told me that so many families give up because they can't navigate the system anymore. They're exhausted, discouraged, overwhelmed. You have to advocate to the schools, to the teachers, to AHS, the FSCD, and it feels like there's always more. The list could go on and on, so they've given up. This sentiment is why I ask for unanimous support for Bill 206, or what I'd like to call it, Matthew advocacy amendment. Currently there is no centralized advocacy resource for parents and guardians dealing with such difficult situations. The parent and guardian adviser will fill this need, Mr. Speaker.

If passed by the Assembly, the Matthew advocacy amendment would require that a Child and Youth Advocate be designated on the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, an adviser to carry out the duties and functions set out by this act. The adviser would serve to refer parents and guardians to a proper outlet and resources that would be able to help them resolve their concerns most effectively. The parent and guardian adviser would be able to support parents and guardians on a wide variety of issues, including education, adoption, custody issues, and much, much more. The adviser would be able to meet with families in order to understand their unique needs, make referrals to other organizations' programs and services best suited to help resolve their issues, and provide information to the Assembly regarding their concerns and barriers related to the public programs that may be navigated, impacting families and the well-being of their children.

3:50

The parent and guardian adviser will prepare an annual report on the exercise of their duties under this Act and provide this report to the Child and Youth Advocate. This report would include statistical information and details of systemic barriers identified by the adviser with respect to public programs and services that negatively impact families and the well-being of children.

The parent and guardian adviser would have very clear limitations, though, Mr. Speaker. They would not act as legal counsel in person or by agent, and they would not assist in respect to any matter that is subject to investigation by a law enforcement agency to determine whether an offence under an enactment of Alberta or under an act of the Parliament of Canada has been committed. However, the adviser may provide information to families concerning the justice system and legal and administrative processes as well as updates on criminal investigations, court proceedings, fatality inquiries involving a family's child if the information is publicly available, and counselling and spiritual support.

Mr. Speaker, I hope for bipartisan support for this bill. You know, you will not often hear me quoting the United Nations in this Chamber, but the United Nations convention on the rights of children states that "parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child." This tells me that it is not a contentious issue for parents to be

supported in the upbringing and development of children that they are primarily responsible for.

When Matthew was first diagnosed with severe autism, his parents worried: we have no idea what to do and who is going to help us. Thanks to the resources provided by our government and their own tenacity, Matthew's parents have raised a fine young man, who is currently employed at the Cold Lake John Howard Society, a local homeless shelter, Mr. Speaker, in the pursuit of helping others. That's admirable. I am extremely proud of him and his parents. They managed to muddle through this even though they had all the odds against them.

However, many other parents still feel lost and frustrated, which is why I am proud to stand as the first speaker to support Bill 206. I am sure many of my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber would support this bill as well. At any stage of this bill's process the door to my office is open to any member on any side of the House to discuss ways we can constructively amend this legislation to make it something we all can vote for. Just like the former NDP Justice minister's door was open for me with my previous private member's bill, Bill 202, I believe that we can come to some consensus.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is through working together as a House that we can truly put forward stronger legislation. I am certain that with the help of the NDP, of my colleagues, of the cabinet, and of the Premier, we can actually put forward meaningful legislation that puts parents in the driver's seat, something that we need to have happen in my constituency, in this government.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that for myself I'm very proud of all those that helped draft this legislation, the staff, and I'll tell you, when it comes down to it, the people within my constituency telling me there needs to be something done. We have to do something to make sure parents have the resources they need to get in charge of their lives again.

Now, what I will say is that when it comes to our ministries, I hold what they do with the most admiration. I know that the people working on our front lines are putting their hearts and souls into making sure our children are protected, and I'll tell you that I'm certain that almost every member in this House has faith in those front-line staff. The issue, though, is that when a parent doesn't know that those services exist, that child falls through the cracks. Nobody wants to see that, Mr. Speaker, not one child to be left behind.

I know that for myself I can say that I look forward to hearing what the other side has to say. When it comes down to it, I believe that they can see common sense in this bill. They can see that this is driven from the heart and the soul. I'll tell you that when it comes to our children, they'll always be put first. In this cabinet, in this caucus, in the UCP party we want to make sure parents are heard and their children are kept safe for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to hearing some more on this.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. Just listening to the member's comments, I certainly do remember when his first private member's bill passed, and that bill was not this. There are some very deep problems with this bill, and let me just start to outline some of them. My colleagues will stand up, I'm sure, and continue this work.

Let me just catch the member up, Mr. Speaker. The last time the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services updated open data about the wait-list for family supports for children with disabilities,

that's FSCD as we call it – they don't update it anymore because they don't really want people looking, I suppose – there were over 4,000 children and families waiting for service. Over 4,000. That was in December of 2021, but the ministry doesn't update anymore.

Now, at the last committee meeting of Leg. Offices we were looking at the bill that was presented by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. They asked for a little, tiny increase, and they justified that increase. They were doing more travelling, they were doing a lot of work around reconciliation with the Indigenous community, and, naturally, wages need to go up annually. I think there are some additional legal expenses because, as we know, that particular office does a lot to support children and youth with legal services. You know what this government did? They voted no. They cut that budget. But here we are with a private member's bill that wants to increase this budget by directing some of the work that they do: once again, overreach that is not needed.

Let me just back up a little bit. Now, what the member would have heard had he paid attention to the work of that committee and then, perhaps, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate – he would have seen this report that was tabled in this place. It was put out January of 2024, and it's called *Beyond Barriers: A Special Report on Young People with Disabilities in the Child Intervention and Youth Justice Systems*. Very clearly, they did some really great work, because we know that there are very deep, very profound problems in disability services in this province. We have some serious problems with wait-lists. We have underfunding. We know that FSCD, the program that the member referenced, actually doesn't even keep up with the pace of growth and inflation. It was cut this year, so there are fewer kids getting support with FSCD. That is the most important support for children and youth that have disabilities in this province, particularly people that are on the autism spectrum.

Anyway, I would encourage members to have a look at this report. It's called *Beyond Barriers*. In your time just go to the OCYA website. It is right there. It is crystal clear. You know what is really great about this report? Right at the very beginning – you don't actually have to read very much – they have eight recommendations, eight very clear, very clear recommendations about how to fix things so that children in this province get access to the support that they need. That includes education. That includes early education. That includes intervention. That includes accessible health care. That includes supports for families. That includes money for mileage and for parking so they can go to all of the many appointments that families go to.

It's all right here. It's all very clear, and it was consulted. It was consulted with the people that matter. It was consulted with children and with youth and with experts. It wasn't just somebody thinking about an interaction they've had in their community. It was well researched, and it was consulted.

The first recommendation is that the ministry publicly release a plan to address challenges identified by families in 2021 in a report on FSCD engagement. Surprise: in that report we heard about wait-lists and delays and the dangers of delays, like the member explained. What is the danger of delaying early intervention? What is the danger of approving someone for FSCD and then waiting a whole year until they actually get services? There's a danger in that. They talked about it and how to fix it.

They talked about the problems, the inherent problems in the disability supports for children in this province. Do you know that you actually have to pay for the support first and then bill the government and then sometimes wait a few months to get reimbursed? Naturally, it's not very accessible to families that don't have that kind of financial ability to do that. Those recommendations are very clear how to fix that.

Number two, the second recommendation: that the ministry provide FSCD direct services for emergencies, for urgent care. As the

member I'm sure knows during his consultation for this bill, sometimes children and youth just cannot remain in their homes with their guardians or parents because things have escalated to the point where they need to go. I've certainly seen examples of that, where there is too much violence for a family to be able to handle. Perhaps that violence is targeted to a sibling or a parent or a caregiver or a guardian. There aren't a lot of abilities for this ministry to get people out of the home quickly and to put them in out-of-home placements that are safe, that are reasonable, that are appropriate for the child and the youth, but the recommendation was very clear on how to do that and how to prevent the problems that we are seeing. The examples of the problems that we are seeing are extensive, but I'm sure the member knows that from his consultation.

4:00

The next one is for the ministry to increase out-of-home living arrangements, very much building on the recommendation before it that we need to have more options, not just paying for staff and supports to go into a home. There are, sadly, times that children need to be removed and youth need to go elsewhere. That's just the reality.

The fourth and fifth ones actually start to look at PDD, which is disability support for adults. We know that children with autism or whatever kind of disability eventually need to transition to adult services, and that transition period is a disaster. People are waiting for supports. They aren't getting similar supports. It is not seamless in any way. There are all kinds of problems. In fact, some people that get FSCD cannot get PDD because perhaps their IQ is just two points higher, because we have restrictive criteria for adult supports. The member would know that had he done the research and consulted and looked at the recommendations, but this bill does not do that. It might make you feel pretty good to vote for it, but it does not solve the problem because it was not consulted, it was not tested, it's not based on fact, and it doesn't talk about the issues that we have currently in this province.

The next recommendations: I'm not going to say too much. I'm just going to hope that all of the members in this place really want to make things better and will go look at those recommendations themselves because they're very specific and they have all kinds of information.

You know, if you go to page 12 of this report – and I'm not going to read all the report here; obviously, we don't have enough time – there are some very poignant pieces that I encourage the member to look at. One of the most important things that we get wrong as politicians and as legislators is that we don't talk to the correct people. We might talk to a friend, a family member, a couple of colleagues, maybe do a little Google research, but we don't actually take the time to fully consult about the changes that we want to propose. But this report does because they took the time, because they know that the forefront of everything that they do must be the child, must be youth.

Here's a quote from them on page 12:

Many young people told us they wished their families had received more support to care for them.

They're saying the very same things that members are saying.

Research suggests that families caring for a young person with disabilities may experience long-term impacts and challenges.

Ensuring that caregivers have access to support can help reduce stress, which may in turn improve the well-being of [the child].

Well, it's all connected, Mr. Speaker, because a lot of times the support for families, whether it be through AISH or through income support or through rent subsidy or any of those things, has been decimated under this government, so you see how it all plays together.

Having a private member's bill that wants to overreach and install somebody into an independent office and then strip them of the ability to actually work together is not going to solve the problems that the member seeks to solve. We all know where the issues are. It's about investment. It's about who you're listening to. It's about the systems that we have today. You know, this particular bill talks about the ability to make referrals. We already do that. We all do that. The problem is that you need to be able to refer them to a service or a place that could actually help, and that means they need the resources to be able to help. That is not the case right now. That is not where we are right now.

I know that a lot of my colleagues have a lot to say. I could certainly go on at length for some time, but I'm going to sit down and allow them to do that. I will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Camrose has risen to speak.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to speak to Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, which has been introduced by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. This bill aims to create a parent and guardian adviser within Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate. I am hopeful that this bill can find support on both sides of the House because, of course, there are parents on both sides of the House.

Being a parent has filled me with such pride. Nothing else in life is as transformative as being alongside your child as they grow and mature. Despite all the work I do in my life in politics, I know my children are the best legacy that I can ever leave for the future. However, there is also no job as challenging, as complex, as unpredictable as being a parent. Article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of the child declares that "parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child." The moment your child enters the world, you become their primary caregiver, their confidant, their first educator, and their friend.

Being responsible for another person's upbringing and well-being can bring unique challenges, and that is why I'd like to applaud the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for how he has chosen to use his private member's bill. Ultimately, Bill 206 seeks to support parents through all the decisions and events raising a child can bring. Currently there is no central advocacy body for parents or guardians who are seeking advice to deal with difficult situations. This lack of a single point of contact can create confusion for parents who are looking for support.

If Bill 206 is passed by this Assembly, the Child and Youth Advocate would be required to designate an adviser to carry out the duties in this act on the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. Through this adviser, parents and guardians would be able to go to a trusted source for information on issues like education, adoption, and custody disputes, among others. Sometimes the supports families and children need, whether for their mental, physical, spiritual, cultural, academic, or social needs, exist, but they can be difficult to navigate. The parent and guardian adviser would be able to refer parents and guardians to the most effective outlets for support to help them through whatever challenges they may encounter. In carrying out their duties, the adviser may meet with families to understand their unique needs.

This would also position them to identify barriers which are negatively affecting the well-being of parents, families, and children. This advice would be formalized in an annual report to the Child and Youth Advocate on the parent and guardian adviser's activity under this act. The annual report would ensure transparency

while encouraging ongoing improvement in support services. I also want to make clear that the adviser would work with clearly set limits. They would not be able to act as legal counsel, and they would not intervene in matters that are the subject of investigation by law enforcement. The adviser would be well appointed to give focused recommendations on any systematic barriers concerning government programs and services that negatively impact families and the well-being of children.

Our United Conservative government cherishes the role parents play in their child's life, and we want to support them in all that they do. Mr. Speaker, parents and guardians are a child's first educator and primary caregiver. Children and youth are the future of our society, and families are a fundamental building block of any healthy society. Our government recognizes all of these facts, and Bill 206, if passed, would continue to prove our commitment to parents, guardians, children, and families.

Mr. Speaker, this is the second private member's bill which has been sponsored by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, and if passed, it will be an additional win for Albertans. I'd like to applaud him for extending an open door for input to all MLAs regardless of partisan boundaries. Thank you, Member. I'd like to once again call on all members of this Assembly to support this bill. Please join me in supporting the parents and guardians of Alberta and vote in favour of Bill 206.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I must say that it's always a difficult act to follow my colleague from St. Albert, who is very well versed on this issue beyond anybody else on this side of the House and, I dare say, anybody in the House. Because of her passion and her advocacy the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is front and centre in this Legislature often in debate, and I certainly learn from her every day when she speaks to legislation that touches upon this office.

4:10

I echo a lot of what she had said in terms of wondering aloud, Mr. Speaker, exactly why this bill was brought forward and what purpose it's serving, what positive purpose it actually serves. I can think of some negative consequences to this legislation, that would bring in an adviser and insert this adviser into the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

I know that in looking to do a little research about Bill 206, I too did take a look at the recommendations made by the report that was recently brought forward by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and that is the one that was referred to by my colleague from St. Albert, Beyond Barriers. I know that in her debate there were a number of recommendations that were made that she covered, and there's a total of eight.

Mr. Speaker, it begs the question given that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has made multiple recommendations showing glaring deficiencies that need to be acted upon, yet indeed the government's response or this member's response is to promote and produce Bill 206, which inserts an individual sort of overseer into the ministry to act as an advocate or sort of a liaison between parents and the youth advocate. Given the example of this report, the Beyond Barriers report, that I've just referenced and has been tabled in this House, it shows how unnecessary this oversight role actually is.

I mean, in reading and preparing for the bill, you see quite clearly that in recent news reports the youth advocate, in response to questions about the budget that recently passed – rather than the increase that she was asking for, there ended up being about, I think, a \$400,000 decrease in the money that the youth advocate was asking for to perform her duties adequately. This reduction was justified, Mr. Speaker, by the current UCP government in its recent budget, and it now seems even more confusing why, having given a reduction to this office, this legislative officer's budget, we see the government in support or ostensibly in support of a private member's bill that would increase the budget or increase the burden upon this office by inserting a parental advocate into the office.

I don't understand exactly why they're doing this. I certainly don't think – if I can be so bold as to try to imagine what it might be like if I was the Child and Youth Advocate in this province right now, to see the proposal contained in Bill 206 for an advocate within the office: I wouldn't be overly comfortable with it. I'm wondering exactly what indeed this person would be doing, what the role would be. I mean, the bill contemplates the possibility that the Child and Youth Advocate could potentially fire this individual, the advocate, or suspend them, but they aren't really able to direct them in other ways. The relationship between the two is an unusual one within an independent legislative office. It seems to me that it would somehow throttle the independence of this office to a certain extent, if not by intent, by actual day-to-day operations. Now you've got somebody involved in advocacy within the office of the Child and Youth Advocate who is sort of independent of the independent officer.

It seems to me that there is an intention to take away some of that independence, the freedom to be openly advocating, that this current Child and Youth Advocate has. Maybe that's the reason, perhaps, for this piece of legislation to come forward. It's not a government bill; it's a private member's bill, but indeed perhaps it's because the current Child and Youth Advocate has been too vocal. Maybe, indeed, it's not appreciated that this Child and Youth Advocate is so openly public about demanding a budget increase for her office and critical of the government when that increase wasn't forthcoming. I know that in past circumstances with legislative offices, independent legislative officers, the UCP government has been less than hospitable indeed where they felt they weren't pleased with the actions of an independent legislative officer. Perhaps this is another tactic, Mr. Speaker, to change the behaviour of a legislative officer, not necessarily by firing the legislative officer, as has been in the past an action of this government, but perhaps by sticking a nanny into the household, sticking an overseer into the legislative office, the independent legislative officer's operations.

That's what it feels like to me, Mr. Speaker. I don't understand the motivation otherwise. It seems to be that the member doesn't feel that the legislative officer is operating in full capacity to benefit the children that are in their care, that they are responsible for serving, and therefore there's some oversight mechanism that's needed to prod the independent legislative officer to behave in the right way or in a way that the member thinks the legislative officer should behave. I'm concerned about that.

I don't understand the need for this adviser role. I mean, the advocate's role is to represent the rights and interests and viewpoints of vulnerable children, to advocate on their behalf, not to provide a referral service for parents, and that seems to be what the member is setting up here, something that I don't believe the member has shown or demonstrated a need for or has not demonstrated a lack of this ability of the independent legislative officer, the office of Child and Youth Advocate, to do already.

I mean, there are hundreds and hundreds of examples on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, of individuals coming through the office

of the Child and Youth Advocate who receive services that they are referred to from that office. To suggest by Bill 206 that, indeed, this mechanism isn't working and we need to insert an interlocutor, an adviser, to somehow mediate between the Child and Youth Advocate office and parents because there's somehow a deficiency in the communication or in the referral network isn't borne out by the facts, isn't borne out by the operation of this office.

I hope that others will see it my way and vote against the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Minister of Children and Family Services has risen.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the ability to be able to speak to this bill that's before us. I have to admit that as a member of the class of 2019 one of my more favourite times in my role as an elected official is actually this time, Monday afternoons when private members' bills and motions get to come before the House.

4:20

The one thing I always found that was fascinating was when individual members came up to put forth bills or motions. I always found that was the best way to look into where their heart was. It's always been fascinating, as private members especially, when they have the opportunity to come out to this House and be able to put forth their bills and motions. It really kind of gives a reading a little bit into their soul and finds out what makes them tick.

I think of some of the more interesting discussions that we've had in this House over the last almost five years now: you know, a couple of them, for example, like seeing the passion that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has regarding economic corridors or the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction when he had the opportunity to put forth the acknowledgement about the close relationship between Alberta and Poland, the fine work that the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville did ensuring that EpiPens are more readily available to families right across the entire province, and, obviously, at the same time, as a private member being able to put forth Motion 501, making adoption easier for families here in the province of Alberta.

These are the types of motions and bills that I just really appreciate, the ability for private members to put forth. That really is what brings us here today. I just want to applaud the member and my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul again for, I think, just putting forth a great bill that really resonates. I find it tells a little bit, Mr. Speaker, how he's wired in terms of his support for families and, at the end of the day, making sure that children are looked after.

I'd like to speak in support of the intention of this bill and some of the suggested outcomes. As I'm sure you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Children and Family Services much of my time is spent working to improve supports for families right across the province and bringing them closer to each other, their communities, and their culture as well as improving their resilience so that they may have every opportunity to grow and thrive together. I believe this bill is aimed at just doing that.

As the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has explained, the goal of this bill is to establish a parent and guardian adviser within the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. By doing so, as my colleague spoke to when he was introducing this bill, parents and guardians will be provided with support, information, guidance, and a compassionate outlet for concerns around their child's well-being, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard first-hand from parents throughout the entire province as they've been trying to navigate the system. Having an additional resource and support to help ensure that those parents

have a favourable experience in the midst of a very troubling time, when they're seeking help, I think will be well received.

As a father myself I know it's not always easy for parents to find the resources they need, especially when they're trying to overcome challenges. As minister I thank the member for his contribution and efforts to better support parents and families because I'm deeply committed to empowering children and parents with the tools that they need to thrive. I welcome any efforts that are intended to give parents and guardians the information they need when they need it most, and that includes those involved with the child intervention system.

Mr. Speaker, the safety and well-being of children is my ministry's primary concern and one of the top priorities that I have each and every day when I'm here at the Legislature. We know that strong families lead to better outcomes for children, and that's why reunification with family is our ultimate goal whenever possible. For context, I'd like to share a little bit more about how my ministry works to reunify families.

Children and Family Services supports children, youth, and families to find the least intrusive solutions possible, working with the family when we can to help keep the child or youth safe in the home. When that's not possible, we work with extended families as much as we can to care for the child in order to reduce trauma and preserve connections to family, culture, and community. This is important to all families, but something we know is paramount is our commitment to working with Indigenous communities.

The office of the Child and Youth Advocate plays a key role in the child intervention system as well, and per the Child and Youth Advocate Act the advocate is an independent officer of the Alberta Legislature, which many other speakers have already alluded to. They offer individual and systematic advocacy for children and youth receiving designated services under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The advocate also conducts investigations into serious injuries and deaths involving children in care. I just want to take this opportunity to say how much my heart grieves alongside those families that are affected by the death of a child. Children and Family Services values this critical work, and their recommendations have led to amazing programs like our family resource networks that build stronger and more resilient families, which leads to stronger and healthier communities. I also see how vitally important parents and guardians are in the well-being of their children.

Bill 206 offers a new role that would amend the Child and Youth Advocate Act, creating the parent and guardian adviser, as previously mentioned. If recommendations focused on children and youth can lead to a program like family resource networks, I can only imagine that having a dedicated parent adviser would lead to even more opportunities that would bring families together. I think that's what each and every one of us here in the Chamber wants. Obviously, this would lead to better outcomes for all.

As minister I want to foster continuous improvements to our system, improvements that support our most vulnerable and make a real difference in the lives of young people and families. I believe that an independent adviser will enhance our ability to identify and address consistent issues within our system. Parents, guardians, and children rely on our critical supports each and every day, and it's important that our system allows them to access them quickly and efficiently. I support and welcome efforts to improve that access to make sure families get the help and support that they need.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for his contribution in putting Bill 206 forward. Just in the brief time I've had to get to know him a lot better, I truly see where his heart is when it comes to the reasons why he's putting forth this bill. I think it will make a difference, a positive difference, for families throughout the entire province, to

the betterment of children, not just for today but for many years to come.

Anyways, thank you again to the member for putting this bill forward. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate that's coming out here in the Chamber.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South West to speak.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak against this bill. There is no question that every single member in this House – we all agree that we need to better support families as they navigate the care for their children. In some cases these children require specialized supports. I think we probably – we should in fact agree unanimously on this issue. The question before us, then, is whether this specific bill is the best way forward. The reality is that it isn't. The question: is it going to help families? Emphatically, the answer is no. There is a pattern of poorly thought out policy from this government, because rather than adequately funding existing structures and offices and adequately resourcing the tools that we do currently have, the government would rather create yet another layer of underfunded government bureaucracy, potentially, than to address the root causes and the systemic issues.

Mr. Speaker, patterns tell a story. On that front, I think it is appropriate for me to raise this government's record when it comes to supporting children and families. When you look at program unit funding, for example, to FSCD, the government has cut supports to the most vulnerable children. When I was a trustee at Edmonton public schools, this government actually cut program unit funding by 40 per cent. Most recently we have seen a significant reduction to the Child and Youth Advocate office.

I also want to refer you to an article from May 31, 2022, by the CBC, in which the headline says Children with Disabilities Getting Inconsistent Government Support, Alberta Auditor General Finds. I'll just quote very briefly, Mr. Speaker, the contents of that article. It says that

Alberta families hoping for financial help for their children with disabilities are often at the whim of their caseworker, rather than consistent rules, the province's auditor general has found.

Furthermore, only about one in five caseworkers and supervisors with the Family Support for Children with Disabilities... program had completed all mandatory online training [and] about a third of those who did finish training whizzed through the multi-hour modules in less than five minutes, the auditor's office found from digital data.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, there are existing challenges, systemic challenges with the sort of systems of supports that we currently have, and rather than resourcing them adequately, I'm very concerned that what is happening is that this bill is another way for this government to water down and undermine existing offices like the Child and Youth Advocate and the disability advocate, and I'm concerned that, in fact, this bill would create an additional burden on the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Frankly, the OCYA is an office that is responsible to the most vulnerable Albertans and whose guardian is the government themselves. My concern is that this adviser position not only creates ambiguity; it also creates potentially some confusion.

I also want to point out that, when it comes to referral processes, there is already a structure that exists, and that is by way of the family resource networks that provide a range of services and supports that focus on strengthening parenting and caregiving among other supports. The question that, really, one must ask is:

why? Why this bill? If we cut through the fluffy rhetoric, the reality is that this bill doesn't accomplish very much at all.

If you look at the report from the Child and Youth Advocate from January of 2024, there are some very, very specific recommendations when it comes to the family supports for children with disabilities program, in which it says that the advocate has "heard from families who had difficulties with the FSCD," and that includes

- challenges obtaining agreements to meet the needs of the young person;
- difficulty managing the records and payments required to coordinate help [meaning that] many families [have to] pay out-of-pocket . . .
- [there's a] lack of services that are sensitive to culture, language, and religion.

When I see very specific identification of systemic challenges and what folks who are facing these challenges are saying and the contents of this bill, I really have to wonder: does this bill solve any of those challenges? It really doesn't. It frankly doesn't, Mr. Speaker.

While I, you know, in this case, will give the government the benefit of the doubt, I think we need to go back to the drawing board and truly listen to the families and stakeholders and folks who are impacted by the systemic challenges that are burdening our current system of supports for families. We just have to do better, and this bill is not it, and so I stand in opposition.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak in second reading of Bill 206, and I have to share my colleagues' concerns and voice my opposition to this bill.

I want to begin by acknowledging that the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul appears to have very good intentions with this bill in the sense of trying to address the incredible challenges that families, particularly, of children with disabilities have in accessing the supports they need. However, Mr. Speaker, having good intentions does not mean that this is a good piece of legislation, and unfortunately it simply is not.

Let's begin with the fact that you've already heard numerous examples from the members on this side of how the access to supports, particularly for children with disabilities, have been affected over the last five years. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA of a constituency who – I'm honoured to serve many, many, many families, and I've spoken to many parents over the last few years, particularly of those with disabilities, and their heartbreaking stories about not getting the supports and services, not even understanding how to navigate the systems, have been exacerbated because of the dramatic underfunding and underresourcing by this government of those supports and services.

I want to raise a couple of examples. I recall having a conversation with two sisters who both have children with disabilities. Those children actually both have the exact same diagnoses, and they both went to FSCD to get support. These are two children around the same age with the same diagnoses, happened to be that their mothers are sisters. And guess what? FSCD gave different levels and quality of supports to each child just because of the caseworker they contacted. That had nothing to do with what that child actually needed; it had to do with the fact that FSCD seems to be focused almost entirely on preserving and protecting a budget.

Caseworkers would get a phone call from a parent, they get an application, and instead of saying, "What does that child need? Let me deliver that service," they begin from the position of, "I have a

budget that I have to protect. I only have so much money, and I'm going to give out as little as I possibly can. I'm not going to give out something unless the parent knows to ask for it," which, by the way, strongly disadvantages parents who don't speak the language, who may have cultural barriers, who have socioeconomic challenges that prevent them from knowing what to access. Those are the real challenges being faced by families. They don't even know what to ask for, and if they don't ask for it, they're not going to get it. That is a significant problem, Mr. Speaker, that this bill does nothing to address.

I want to also give an example of a story that to me as a parent was incredibly heartbreaking. I had a parent in my constituency come up to me at a community league event last fall. It was shortly after the beginning of the school year. She had a seven-year-old son, who had just started in grade 1. She was genuinely confused because she had gotten a diagnosis for her child, gone through the process, which any parent with a child with disabilities knows takes a long time to do – the diagnosis said: this is the support your child needs – went to the school, and the principal said, "I'm sure that is what your child needs, but we simply don't have it," and she looked at me and she said, "How can I, as a parent, know that my child needs something and they're not getting it and they're not getting it because there's not enough funding?" The funding has not kept up with the rise in the number of increases in student enrolment growth and costs. We all know that. We know that there are thousands of underfunded students not funded at all across this province right now. So if we want to address access to supports and services, particularly with children with disabilities, we have to begin by funding them – every single child – not based on what our budget is, that we're trying to protect, but based on what supports that child needs to be successful.

Now, the member indicated that he was interested in this bill because he wanted to have a navigation system between the school system and various supports that are out. You know what? That sounds like a really, really important service. It sounds like something called regional collaborative service delivery, Mr. Speaker, or RCSD as many school boards will know. RCSD was actually a system that was about a regional partnership between school authorities, AHS, child and family services, and many community organizations designed to support a child navigating all those systems to get the supports they need. RCSD was a pretty important network for helping families find the supports they need in their communities in collaboration with schools. But guess what? The UCP ended the RCSD formula and system and program in 2020 and haven't brought it back. A lot of those people who were actually supported, like SLPs and OTs that worked in the school system, were let go during the pandemic, or they got rerouted to somewhere else. They used to work in schools, and they got rerouted to something else, and they were never brought back because the funding wasn't there. I agree that there does need to be more work that is done to help families navigate, but it begins by making sure that the programs and services that are available actually meet the needs of those children. That's where I would say we need to begin with.

Now, I was really disappointed to hear the Minister of Children and Family Services get up and support this bill. Perhaps that minister has not spent the time that he should have speaking with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. If that minister had done so and if the member had done so, the member who has introduced this bill, they would know that over the last four or five years the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has had to deal with and investigate an incredibly alarming increasing number of deaths of children in the child intervention system. That number has steadily increased every single year. Their budget, however, has not increased, Mr. Speaker. Just for

2023-2024 the office of the Child and Youth Advocate received 83 total notifications of death or serious injury of a child or a youth in the child intervention system, yet this government refused the advocate's request for an increase in their budget.

I began by saying that I understand the intention of this member saying: we want to make it easier for families and parents to access supports. While I believe this bill is misguided, it's actually also detrimental to vulnerable children because it's going to take away from a limited budget that is already far too small for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to do their work, to investigate, to make recommendations, to do reconciliation work, to do education work, to work with Indigenous partners. All the work that the advocate does: this would actually take away from that.

4:40

Now, a generous interpretation, Mr. Speaker, might be that, of course, we know that a private member's bill can't introduce something that would actually increase funding or actually cause the government to have to fund something. This is my generous interpretation. I think perhaps the member was trying to achieve through the back door what he couldn't do through a private member's bill. He couldn't get funding for an independent officer of the Legislature through a parent advisory, so he thought: let's just put it into an existing office. That's what I believe perhaps might have happened. Again, if it had no impact, I'd be like: okay; fine. But we already know that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is woefully underfunded while the work that they have to do continues to increase. We cannot take any more resourcing and time away from this office to do something that, frankly, cannot be achieved by this bill.

This bill envisions a single person, a parent adviser, essentially doing the government's work for them, which is essentially navigating for families through all the various systems and programs that exist, through school boards. Every individual school board will be different. Every individual school will be different, and of course we talked about FSCD, all these programs that are, I admit, a complete labyrinth to navigate. But this one person is going to be the parent adviser for a million children, Mr. Speaker, because the way this bill is framed, this person is the adviser for every child in the province. I have to say that, frankly, it's a little ridiculous. That's completely untenable. In the meantime, again, it's ridiculous, but it's taking away resources and funding from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. It simply is not going to achieve the objectives that this member had intended.

Now, listen. I'm glad that the member in his previous time had the opportunity to have a private member's bill passed in this Legislature. I was not a member of that Legislature when that happened. It was while the Alberta NDP was government back in a time when the government would pass opposition private members' bills. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I have been an opposition MLA for five years now and have yet to see a private member's bill introduced by the Official Opposition even make it past second reading. In fact, for the first many years this government actually prevented any private members' bills introduced by the opposition to even get to second reading. I'm glad that previously under an Alberta NDP government we were willing to consider good ideas from the opposition and pass those private members' bills.

If this was a private member's bill that had good ideas, I would be willing to support it as well, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately Bill 206 is not going to achieve what this member is intending to do. I would encourage the member to go and speak with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Understand that they are the only – only – institution in our government that is designed purely to serve children. That is the only role of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and that should be what their sole focus should be on,

servicing those kids through its mandate, particularly the most vulnerable kids. If the member wants to support parents, that's a great thing. He can begin by talking to his government members over there and encouraging them to fund these programs properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen to speak.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Assembly and speak in support of Bill 206, Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I appreciate the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul bringing this bill forward. The bill focuses on enhancing support for parents and guardians through the establishment of a parent and guardian adviser within Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate. It does not exclude the work of the Child and Youth Advocate. It enhances the work of the Child and Youth Advocate and the department.

It perhaps corrects a little bit of an imbalance. It recognizes that parents also do need support in this changing world that we have. Let us recognize what is happening in our society today: smaller families, more dispersed throughout the country or around the world, social changes. You know, as somebody who is married, for example, to a new Canadian and recognized and saw that they came to this country and to this province a little confused sometimes as to what is the nature, the responsibility, how families operate within governments, including the Alberta government – there is a role.

It's not just new Canadians, of course. It's all kinds of people. The family unit as it once existed has evolved and has changed, and the family supports in many cases and that advice and information and perspective that we also know many in the past could depend on isn't the same today. The role of government has become bigger in that space. There needs to be a balance and making sure that there is support for those families that are trying to manage in this fast-changing, complicated world where the role of government and technology and society is evolving faster than sometimes is positive or managed. Let's remember: parents are the primary caregivers and educators of their children.

Ms Renaud: Not always.

Mr. McDougall: Not always, but in the vast majority of cases that is the case. We're not going to make rules and processes and government services based on just that small minority of cases that are problematic.

Most parents, by far, love and want to support their children and are looking for advice and support and guidance in many cases as to how best they can do that. Any parent, if you have children, can think about sitting around with your friends and colleagues trying to discuss how to handle certain issues and where the supports can be available, where those are available. Where do they go? Well, we now have a solution. We go to the parents' advocate to help guide them and provide advice and information as to where those supports and advice can be found.

Ms Renaud: One person.

Mr. McDougall: What is wrong with that? Why wouldn't you want that? Because Big Brother doesn't control everything?

The government is there to serve the people, including parents, and this government is committed to ensuring the well-being of their children in this province. Parents and guardians are a child's first educators and primary caregivers. We cannot forget that.

Ms Renaud: Not always.

Mr. McDougall: If the members opposite would like to make a different argument, I'd love to hear it.

Ms Pancholi: I just did.

Mr. McDougall: No. Okay, so you don't believe so. What we have here is the opposition members saying that they do not believe that parents and guardians are a child's first educators and primary caregivers. Let's put that in quotes, and let's go out and talk to the parents that support you about that perspective. I can tell you that most parents, the overwhelming number of parents, would not buy the contrary argument that the members opposite are proposing.

Families are the fundamental building block in any healthy society. Our UCP government recognizes the role and value that strong family units play in developing a vibrant, healthy society in line with international conventions such as article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which recognizes that "parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child." Period. That does not mean that we do not provide additional supports for those situations where the parents are not able to provide that support or are not providing that support. Currently there is not a centralized advocacy body for parents who are already dealing with difficult situations, and I've talked about some of the social issues that revolve around this. A centralized point of contact dealing with all the different issues that parents and guardians face is the right step to supporting parents and achieving what is best for their children.

Parents love their kids more than anyone else in this world. Sometimes they may face unique challenges and don't know where to turn. This is for all kinds of parents. I've talked about new Canadians coming to this country and trying to sort out how to manage and how to be parents in this particular society under our norms and our types of government services. They're not the only ones. Bill 206 would establish a parent and guardian adviser to provide support and guidance to these families. The bill aims to ensure that parents and guardians have access to knowledgeable assistance to help guide them on their rights and connect them to important resources. What's wrong with that?

Bill 206 also establishes an accountability mechanism through the preparation of comprehensive annual reports on the adviser's activities, which would also highlight any systemic barriers identified in public programs and services affecting families and children's well-being.

The key amendments that are being proposed here are the establishment of this parent and guardian adviser, like I said, within the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The duties of the adviser are to provide information and assistance and referrals to families. An adviser will help support families in addressing such issues as education, adoption, and custody disputes. The purpose of this adviser is nurturing, guiding, and fostering growth and well-being of the children. Why are you against that? Why would anybody be against that? Supporting this ability of families is a critical component of a healthy society. This is a given. We all know this. Healthy families make healthy citizens, a healthy society. It is a building block of what our societies are built on.

4:50

An adviser will carry out the duties described in section 15.63 in a manner that ensures that the best interests, safety, and well-being of the children are paramount. The duties of the adviser, as described under 15.63, are to, as I indicated,

- (a) provide information, assistance and referrals to families for the purpose of improving the well-being of children,

- (b) assist families with respect to an education program offered by a school, as defined in the Education Act, for the purpose of promoting academic success and well-being of children, and

as I indicated,

- (c) identify systemic barriers.

We've heard some conversations about systemic barriers. That's part of the role with respect to government programs and services that may be negatively impacting families and the well-being of children.

In carrying out these duties under section 15.63 the adviser will do any of the following as required: meet with the families to understand the unique needs of each family member and provide information and assistance to promote the well-being of the family's child; make referrals to organizations, programs, and services for families and children, including with respect to mental and physical health, spiritual support, academic services, human and social services, language and cultural supports. And it would report to the Child and Youth Advocate on any systemic barriers, as I've talked about before, and per any other functions prescribed by regulation.

I've heard and listened to the opposition give long discussions about all the issues and problems within, you know, the social services and health care, et cetera, by government. Any of those types of issues that are being identified do not exclude the idea of a fair advocate. It's complementary. It has nothing to do with what budgets – there's nothing in this bill that says that we're taking money from one place and putting it to another. There's nothing in this bill that says that it's one person. It's an office, and I'm sure that as we move on, we will determine how many people or what kind of staff is required to fulfill the obligations, demand that that position requires.

Let's address the actual question. Is it a useful thing to have in this province, an office that's dedicated to providing support to parents? Yes or no? I mean, it's so obvious to me. I don't understand how anybody could be speaking against this unless, of course, you don't believe in parents and you don't believe parents should be supported and you don't believe that children are best served by supportive parents that are getting the help that they need.

Anyway, I am confident that, if passed, Bill 206 will have a positive effect on families, and I support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was interesting to hear. Let me start from what the Child and Youth Advocate does. It has the responsibility to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of vulnerable children, in particular those who are in our child intervention system and those who are in our youth justice system. It's a defined mandate, and she is an independent officer of the Legislature. That is what this person does.

This office has written a number of reports: Beyond Barriers, about young people with disabilities in the intervention system; Renewed Focus, about youth opiate use in Alberta; another one about the use of OC spray in youth offender centres; another one about youth opioid use. There are a number of reports which are focused on issues facing these vulnerable youth, and if the government is really interested in helping these families, they should listen and read those reports.

With this, what they are doing is that they are interfering with that work of the advocate and asking the advocate to designate an adviser, just one person, who will help navigate the entire province

– all the families, all the kids, parents: everyone – navigate all these services. Essentially, the work of the government now will be done with this person. As was mentioned by my colleagues, when the Child and Youth Advocate asked for additional funds for the important work that that office is doing to help families, help youth, the government declined that request.

The second thing I would say about this bill is that either the government caucus is completely unaware of the work that the child and youth office does, or they're trying to create so much work and water down everything that office does. It's one of the two, and many things that are written in this piece of legislation – like, that's something that the entire government needs to be doing. They talk about helping families. If you really want to help families in my riding, help them navigate and find schools that are closer to their homes. Because of this UCP government's lack of investment in helping families in school, kids are being bused one hour one way to other quadrants of the city.

If they really want to support youth mental and physical health, I think first and foremost they need to do something that those youth, those families have access to family doctors. That's not happening. They're talking about academic services, spiritual support, language and cultural support, and that's the only adviser that will help families, 4.4 million Albertans, navigate all that. I think that's good that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul wants to help families navigate all that, but this office is not the place for this adviser. This is just the job of the government.

The Minister of Health should be helping people navigate, families navigate where to find a family doctor, which 800,000 Albertans can't find. The Minister of Education should be doing the same thing. They should be focused on academic services, build schools that are needed by the communities, and not increase fees to the extent that education becomes a luxury. There are many things that this government should be doing to help families, help parents, help youth, but I don't think that designating one adviser in an independent office of the Legislature will cut it. It won't make any difference. It's just, I guess, this government caucus trying to water down the importance of the work that that office is doing.

They have been sitting on these reports and not listening to those recommendations. In the last two years more than 48 kids in care died, and instead of coming up with some action plan to implement the recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate, they are adding more work without paying anything extra to that office. I don't think that this is a bill that we should be supporting. We should be supporting the work of the Child and Youth Advocate and standing up for what she is recommending.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Parental and Guardian Rights

510. Mr. Dyck moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize

- (a) the importance of the family unit in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society, and
- (b) the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development, education, health care, and well-being of their children, and except in

cases of child abuse or neglect these duties should not be assumed by any other individuals or institutions within our society.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured to rise and speak about my private member's Motion 510. Just as I rise today, I'm really thoughtful of what has brought me here: my family, particularly my mom and dad, Doc and Ruth Dyck. Really, their support and their focus on family values, their desire to see us, each one of their children, lead a successful life according to what our gifts and our desires are brought me here to the Legislature. It took a few years, but I value that so immensely. I just value their love. I value their sacrifices and their commitment to our family. It instilled in me the values that really have begun to shape my values here today in this House and in other ways as well.

I know, just as for my wife, Sandra, and our three beautiful boys – Nash, Jayce, and Creed – as I stand in my father's shoes of sorts, I'm more aware of the impact of family, the impact that our choices as a family unit have, and the impact that our family has upon our social construct and our society.

I'm pleased to stand before you today and speak about Motion 510. This motion really just confirms the fundamental importance of the family unit in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society. We acknowledge the rights of parents and guardians to be the primary decision-makers in the development, education, health care, and well-being of their children. It just outlines that this role cannot be replaced by anybody else, but it is the family that plays this nurturing role for the next generation and our current generation and in shaping the future of our province as a whole. These are just really important aspects of family that are a baseline for this.

Mr. Speaker, we have a historic value that reaches back centuries. Some of our most profound thinkers, both in the Greek and Greco-Roman worlds, wrote about the importance of family and the incredible opportunity and value of the family unit in their writings. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, once said, "The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants." Aristotle understood that the family was a union that transcends and predates humanity. It is a concept that comes from our very nature itself. We belong together, and we want to see the success of our family. It's a part of our nature to do so. It's in our nature to hold our family together and to be firm and strong and be able to seek out a good social construct from that. This is an incredible union. You know, just in simple terms, it's family. It's what every single future generation will need to succeed in this world.

I think of my own journey here. For me, part of this value is just my mom and dad. When I think of my own life when I was younger, about 13 years old, I wanted to go boxing. My mom and dad said no. They told me: "No. You can't go boxing. It's too violent. Nolan, we're going to tell you no." But, without me knowing, my mom went and checked out the boxing club. At that point I was living near Medicine Hat. She went and saw that there was a huge community there. There was huge passion there. There was a huge team there. Even though it is an individual sport, you work together to get better, so there was an opportunity for each one of us who is part of that club to join a team.

My mom eventually just said, "Get in the vehicle" one day. We drove to Medicine Hat and to the boxing club. From that point I was able to box for five years, box and be trained by a couple of guys that went to the Olympics, actually. It was just an incredible experience, all from mom and dad saying: "Let's go. This is important to Nolan. Let's go check it out." They made a choice. They made a choice for me in particular to be able to have some skill development and also be able to input into our family from outside.

Part of this motion as well is that we want to reinforce the voice of families in matters concerning their children. It recognizes that parents and guardians, more than any other institution or body in our society or government, possess the knowledge, love, and dedication necessary to make informed decisions for their children's welfare.

As well, from my own life, I grew up on a ranch for a few years and had a desire to rodeo. Some of the first things, when I was a kid, were that I would watch rodeo late at night when I couldn't sleep. As well, I have uncles and aunts, particularly an aunt, who rode professionally in barrel racing. So I decided that I wanted to go to rodeo school. I went to steer riding, and there I got to learn how to ride some steers, but it was my dad being in the chutes – for those that don't know, in the chutes is the hardest place to be. It's actually significantly more dangerous in the chutes than it is being outside, well, when the bull is trying to buck you off. That just taught me a lot. Once again, it taught me that my family was for me, that my parents were for me, and that they wanted me to try new things. There was encouragement as well as a drive to continue. These are things that family come around you to do, to be able to encourage and also begin to build upon those things for their children. This was an informed decision by my parents to seek out and do something that I wanted to do.

As well, this motion also seeks to recognize the growing concerns that parents right across our province have where there are external influences and institutions where there could be interference upon the sacred domain of parental responsibility and parents' guidance. As I said before, the family unit is not merely a social construct. Families are the building block of our society. It has been written about for thousands of years, and it is within the opportunity of loving parents that children learn the fundamental values, create their identities, and navigate the very complexities of our modern world. There are a lot of complexities to our modern world, and that is best served in the context of the family unit.

This Motion 510 recognizes the importance of preserving and protecting this bond between family members, between parents and children, and ensuring that parents and guardians retain their rightful place as the primary architects of their children's futures. I cannot say that enough. This is so important for us to be able to communicate here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we must also ensure the protection of vulnerable children, and I do want to assure everyone that this government cares deeply about those children that are vulnerable. We are committed to protecting those vulnerable children. We have strict laws in place, some of the best laws in the world, to protect our vulnerable children across Alberta. Just one is the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, and this supports children who are abused, neglected, or otherwise in need of intervention. We have this already in place, so this opportunity, as we step forward in valuing the family unit and those choices, does not take away from also being guided by these legislations we have currently in place.

Now, we have stated that families should always be the foremost advocate for their children as well, especially in their most formative years. Currently kids of all ages are inundated with competing voices, conflicting ideologies for how a child should be raised and what they should believe, and it is imperative that we safeguard the integrity of the family unit to be able to showcase and demonstrate and also teach their children what their values are, what direction they should go in, and be able to guide that child in the direction that they believe is best.

Every parent in this room and beyond knows the incredible joy and profound responsibility that comes from raising a child. It is an incredible journey marked with countless decisions, big and small, to shape the path of a young person. In a world where everyone seems to have an opinion on how children should be raised, the

family must remain the bedrock of the decision-making process. It is so foundational to our society and the success of our future.

Parents are the cornerstone of the family, and giving parents and guardians as well the opportunity and clarity to make decisions for their own children recognizes that parents and guardians are in the driver's seat and know what is best for their children. Mr. Speaker, you don't put a new driver in the driver's seat without somebody else teaching beside them. We have rules in place for that. In the same way, parents are there guiding their children, and we need to make sure that parents and guardians are able to step out and guide their children and be able to drive their life forward.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 510 affirms the rights of parents and guardians as the primary decision-makers in their children's lives in decisions regarding education, health care, and well-being, and this is a way of recognizing that families are not passive recipients of services and that parents and guardians will not take a back seat in the upbringing of their children. Parents deeply care, deeply love, and deeply look forward to seeing the success of their children in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: We need to ensure that the Member for Grande Prairie is moving Motion Other than Government Motion 510. Member for Grande Prairie, you're moving the motion?

Mr. Dyck: Yes. Sorry. Moving the motion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 510, and I would like to introduce an amendment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Just one second. If you can get the amendment to the page. We're going to get a copy of the amendment to the table and to the mover of the motion.

Now, standing orders require that an amendment to a private member's motion must be provided to the mover prior to 11 o'clock on the day of such a motion being moved. I look to the hon. member for confirmation that he, in fact, did receive that. He has. The amendment is in order.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

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

Member Batten: I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 510 be amended as follows: (a) in clause (a) by adding “, and extended family or community as per local custom,” immediately after “the importance of the family unit”; (b) in clause (b) by adding “, in the best interest of the child,” immediately after “the rights of parents and guardians to”.

I wanted to start today by speaking to the first part of the motion, that, if this amendment were accepted, would read something along these lines: “The importance of the family unit, and extended family and community as per local custom.” This amendment allows the motion to be reflective of all Albertans and all Albertan families.

As a registered nurse I had the privilege of providing care to families of all shapes and sizes. In nursing you learn very quickly not to assume who family is or who family isn't and especially not who the family is sitting next to your patient's bedside. In the NICU I certainly was guilty of assuming that mom was grandma or that brother was uncle. Most times the families were okay with that; other times, not. But that clearly demonstrates that I – and, I would

argue, probably all of us – have an assumption of what a family unit is. Therefore, we need to challenge that a little bit.

The composition of a family can be different for all of us. The traditional family may be one adult male, one adult female, and their 2.5 children, one boy, one girl, but that's no longer the norm, Mr. Speaker. Families grow in unexpected ways. There may be a divorce. The family may be divided, and then one adult remarries, and the family becomes branched and so much more complicated. Maybe there's a death in the family, or a family member ages and requires more support, sometimes even moving into their children's homes. Multigenerational homes are quite common across the world.

I know some of us in this House right now might be feeling what's known as the sandwich generation, where you're both caring for your own children but also your parents, all at the same time and sometimes in the same house. Or maybe someone lost contact with or lost all of their blood relatives and have made themselves a new family with those who now surround them. Maybe that's a neighbour they've known since birth or their childhood friend, or it could even be more fluid, where who falls into the category of family may change day to day, year to year, location to location.

The composition of the family may impact decision-making. Some families may be directed by the adults, or maybe there's a consensus of the members on how a family determines their choices. Who is the final decision-maker in a home with multiple generations? What role do the elders play in the family? What if that differs from home to home, and what if the entire family consists of only one adult and one child?

This is why this amendment is so important. We absolutely believe in supporting families and providing them with the resources they need to make the best decisions in the interest of their child.

I now want to speak to the second part of the amendment, “, in the best interests of the child” after “the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility.” I have served almost all my life in service of advocating for children and families in one capacity or another. I have had to explain complicated procedures to families where grandma makes the decisions, where the whole family weighs in, or where the decision-maker is a 15-year-old mature minor.

I've explained thousands of procedures and interventions to all families of all sizes, all combinations in different languages with varying experience and education. Each of these families were their own combination of people, diverse and functional in their own way. There are, of course, differences between the families, but one thing they all had without fail is that they love their children and they want what is best for them. They want what is best for their child. They want direction and ideas on how to best represent the child's interest.

But what if a family is not capable of providing the needed support or the environment for a child to thrive? None of us are born knowing how to raise children to adulthood. I suspect many family members here would argue that the old saying that it takes a village is absolutely true. Some families might need basic supports and guidance, but unfortunately there are some families where a child is simply not safe – physically, mentally, emotionally unsafe – and cannot stay with that family simply because they are unable to provide an environment that is in the best interests of the child.

This is an incredibly important amendment because, again, families love their children, but children are vulnerable. They're immature, and they require a supportive environment in order to thrive, and not all families are able to provide this. The additional amendment provides better understanding of the true responsibility of families and provides a framing to guide their nurturing. When given a framing “in the best interest of the child,” especially when we're dealing with such complicated situations as of children, it

provides that gut check to the hundreds of questions and decisions families make every day with and for their child.

I encourage all members to vote for this amendment. It provides clarity, inclusion, and sets Alberta children and families up for success. These amendments continue to build on Alberta's long history of supporting families and truly allows for recognition that children and their families, however they may define it, deserve to be considered, included, and guided to provide whatever it is that is in the best interests of the child.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1 is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? Perhaps the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe my motion actually encompasses everything that the member has stated in her amendment. Extended family and communities play a role in the upbringing of children – teachers, friends, cousins – but this motion is about the primary role of parents and guardians, not the peripheral but important people in a community. I would encourage my colleagues and those across the aisle to vote this amendment down.

The Speaker: Member of the opposition, the mover of the motion is not, generally speaking, considered to be a second speaker. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was on his feet at the same time that the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia was, so we'll now move to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for the chance that I have today to rise and speak to the motion made by the Member for Grande Prairie, the motion as is, Motion 510. As a parent and now a grandparent I have felt that responsibility for caring for the younger generation and doing what I can to protect them and help them grow into the wonderful people that they are today. Parenting can be tough and can be hard, and there isn't a guidebook or a manual that comes with a new child, but as the family grows, and as our family grew, learning how to figure things out, we have to do that together. I've had the privilege of seeing my children grow into wonderful parents themselves, and I strongly believe that the strength of a society comes from strong families. We see the importance of the family unit in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society.

5:20

The overall important takeaway from Motion 510 is that it urges the government to recognize

the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development, education, health care, and well-being of their children, and except in cases of child abuse or neglect these duties should not be assumed by any other individuals or institutions within our society.

Mr. Speaker, our government values Albertan families. We value the family as a strong foundation on which our societies are built. Families, parents, caregivers have important responsibilities to care for the well-being and development of the children in their care. In fact, even the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, the CRC, is clear that parents and guardians “have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.”

In embracing the role of parents and guardians, we affirm their authority and right to make critical decisions regarding the education and health care of their children. We understand that meaningful parental involvement is a catalyst for greater student achievement and

parental satisfaction. By empowering parents, we empower our children to thrive. Within the nurturing embrace of a family, children find solace and security. It is with these family bonds that children learn to navigate life's challenges, cultivate the resilient need to overcome adversity. A safe zone is provided by families, a sanctuary where children can seek refuge, find solace, and grow in safety and love.

When a child is struggling, they should know that they can turn to their family and feel safe. Parents have the unique ability to connect with their children. Mr. Speaker, the mental well-being of children is supported by their parents. Families serve as the first line of defence against trials and tribulations of life, imparting the values, resilience, compassion, and empathy and fortifying our children's spirits.

Another impactful effect of strong families is the fact that families teach us how to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. I will be forever grateful for my family, who always shared their faith in me and the fact that they encouraged me to be the best version of myself that I could be. Through conversations with my parents they shared how they wanted the best for me, and they encouraged me to make good choices, and I am where I am today because of the loving impact of my family.

I urge the members of this House not to underestimate the significance of strong, stable families in building a healthy society. Families are not just a cluster of individuals. They are where character is forged, values are instilled, and dreams are nurtured and supported. Good family policies can also enhance the family well-being by addressing the diverse needs of families and children.

Our government is unwavering in its commitment to the well-being of all children within our province. However, we recognize that this commitment must be balanced with the necessary commitment to protecting the most vulnerable Albertans. In situations where parents or guardians fail their duties through abuse or neglect, Alberta's child protection law stands as a defence for our children. The Family Law Act and Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act provide the scaffolding upon which our commitment and support to family rests. These acts not only outline the rights and responsibility of parents and guardians but also provide avenues for interventions in case children are at risk. Under the Family Law Act the rights and obligations of parents and guardians are clearly set out, emphasizing the paramount importance of nurturing a child's physical, psychological, and emotional development. Similarly, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act provides authority for child services to intervene when children are in need of protection or support.

Mr. Speaker, protecting the rights of our family unit and protecting the young and vulnerable Albertans from neglect and abuse is of the utmost importance, and Motion 510 urges members of this House to recognize the importance of this. I can't see how anyone can disagree with Motion 510. Our government is committed to protecting the rights of children and has been taking steps to do so.

Mr. Speaker, we live in an increasingly divisive world, and many of the people I know are worried about the future. I've spoken with many of my constituents about their fears and anxieties, about raising their families during these difficult times, including my own children. I believe that Motion 510 is an important step to safeguard our family unit, and, in turn, by doing so we will strengthen our societies for the better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is next.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 510. I'm not clear from the member's comments as to whether or not he's supporting the amendment that was put forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Acadia, but it

sounds like there is lots of good reason there to support the amendment. I just want to be clear that I think the motion as it's worded – we do support, absolutely, the family unit. I'm a mother myself. Many of us in this Chamber, of course, are parents, and we absolutely understand the value and importance of family. I also want to say that I'm very pleased that I'm lucky to have many other people supportive in my life who act as – you know, we say that it takes a village to raise a child, and I certainly have experienced that, both with my extended family but friends, community. I even have a group of friends. We call ourselves “the village” because we are all taking care of each others' kids and raising them together.

But, of course, we also acknowledge that there are family units that go beyond just that nuclear family unit that we often hear of, of two parents and however many kids they have, because that's actually very much the cultural beliefs of many, many Albertans. For example, I know my colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Henday earlier today tabled an article from a Cree writer who talked about the value of relationships within the Cree culture and how often what some might call extended members of family are actually considered part of the family unit. In that article – and I believe the author was Chelsea Vowel, and it was tabled for this House. I want to quote from that article because it actually resonates deeply with me as well as part of, you know, my Indian culture. We often have many extended family members with different names who are all considered part of our family, that raise the children.

This quote from this article says:

Cultural lesson...I was taught to think of my mother's sisters as my mothers. Not my birth mothers, but as women who definitely held that maternal role in my life. There was a closer bond to them than there were to my mother's brothers. If you need to relate it to English, just think of it as ‘the women in your life who are related to you in a way that gives them a maternal role’. Those women are my mother's sisters and my father's brother's wives.

That's just an example from Cree culture where there is a role for other family members outside of, you know, what we typically consider parents as playing a role. Again, I relate to that as well. We heard reference to, of course, many multigenerational families where you see the grandparents and the parents and the children all living together in the home. Very common in many cultures, and everybody's considered a part of that.

The amendment that's put forward by the Member for Calgary-Acadia is simply recognizing, in the first place, that a family unit can be broader. It can include all those people. Again, just going back to the language of the motion, it's simply saying that we “recognize the importance of the family unit,” which includes these other key people and family members, “in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society.” I think we can all agree with that. We do see that there's a great network of people who are helping us raise our kids.

The second part of the amendment, Mr. Speaker, simply just adds what's currently in the motion in section (b), which – what's stated currently in section (b) of the motion is really a statement of the law as it exists. It mentions, of course, “the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development, education, health care, and well-being of their children.” That is absolutely true. That is the law. Parents and guardians have those rights. That is absolutely established. It's also established, of course, by law the importance of the best interests of the child.

The amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Acadia is to simply add into this motion that which is already stated in law, which is that all of these rights of parents and guardians are, of course, always subject to the best interests of the child.

We see that, Mr. Speaker, in a number of pieces of provincial legislation. For example, within section 18 of the Family Law Act

it says, “the court shall take into consideration only the best interests of the child.” When it looks at what the factors are that would go into, “What are the best interests of the child?” the legislation talks about that we must

- (a) ensure the greatest possible protection of the child’s physical, psychological and emotional safety, and
- (b) consider all the child’s needs and circumstances, including
 - (i) the child’s physical, psychological and emotional needs, including . . . [their] need for stability, taking into consideration the child’s age and stage of development.

5:30

Again, the law recognizes that parents and guardians have rights, but it is subject to the best interests of the child. The amendment that’s being put forward here is simply to recognize that. We do know that, of course, there are times when that is going to take precedence, when the child’s best interests should and must take precedence, because preserving their physical and psychological well-being is a top priority for all of us. We’re all in here because we care about making sure that kids are the safest and healthiest and as well loved as possible.

I also want to mention that in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which the members mentioned, again, in the guiding principles of that act, it says:

This Act must be interpreted and administered in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) the best interests, safety and well-being of children are paramount.

Again, this legislation is clearly saying that that is the case, that the best interests of children are absolutely paramount.

Then, of course, Mr. Speaker, you’d be well aware that Canada is a signatory to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which also says in article 3, “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

Mr. Speaker, the amendment that’s put forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Acadia is simply to restate what’s already in the law. We all agree that parents play a critical role and have rights under legislation to make those decisions, but we also know that the law states very clearly that it is subject to the best interests of the child. I think we can accept that that is something we’re all in agreement with. I think this motion recognizes that there may be cases of child abuse or neglect, but really the more specific definition that we should be concerned about is the best interests of the child because it’s not just about abuse and neglect. We know that the best interests of the child are broader, and that is the state of the law in Alberta.

I want to indicate that I’m really hopeful that the members from the government caucus will support this amendment. It’s simply stating what we all know to be true and to recognize that families come in different shapes and sizes, but we all benefit when our children have the supports of community, of families, of people who have our children in their hearts to make decisions for them but also to actually just care for them. That’s really what it is about.

I’m glad that I have a network of people in my life, and I think every child should have a network of adults who care about them and who are looking out for them. I will also say that as a parent I’ve been very privileged many, many times to have experts who are in child development or teachers or doctors who know things that help me be a better parent. I’m very lucky to have those people in our lives, and my children are lucky to have those people in their lives. I want them to know, too, that they don’t have to rely just on me and my husband to care for them, that there’s actually a whole

village of people who care about them. I think that we all benefit when that happens.

I think we can agree that we can recognize the diversity of experiences of families here in Alberta, the diversity of cultures, of traditions, of customs and say that we’re proud of this and this makes it a better world for our kids. I think we can also acknowledge that in every exercise of every right there comes a responsibility, and for us in Alberta, in Canada that responsibility is to always put the best interests of the child first and foremost.

I really encourage, Mr. Speaker, the members to see this as a friendly amendment to the motion to simply acknowledge that diversity of experience of children but also to put the best interests of the child right into the motion, as I think we all agree with. I sincerely hope the members will support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the amendment the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m honoured to stand and speak in favour of Motion 510 and against the amendment. I love and appreciate our MLAs from Grande Prairie, both the MLA for Grande Prairie, who introduced this motion, and the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, who I consider a mentor and a friend. They are awesome MLAs, and this is an awesome motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize

- (a) the importance of the family unit in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society, and
- (b) the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development, education, health care, and well-being of their children.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I will speak against the amendment is that we do not want to dilute the primary responsibility that parents have for their children. Parents know their children best. They love them, and they are in the best position to determine what is in the best interest of their children.

I am proud to stand in support of this motion. Why? Because it is truth. How important is the family unit in building a resilient, vibrant, and healthy society? Mr. Speaker, the truth is that a disintegration of the family will produce a disintegration of society. It is as simple as that. The family is more important than a state government. State government is a means to an end to support families. The family unit is the foundational unit of government.

I love families. I know many of the great members on both sides love families. Mr. Speaker, I have a reverence for families. The family is ordained of God. Each and every man and woman is a beloved son and daughter of God, and as such each has a divine nature and destiny. Families are not a mere social construct. It is not merely efficient and effective. It is of divine design.

Mr. Speaker, one of the foundational principles of the United Conservative Party states that we “affirm the family as the building block of society and the means by which citizens pass on their values and beliefs and ensure that families are protected from intrusion by government,” which brings us to the second aspect of this motion. It is important that government does not cause harm by interfering with or seeking to displace the sacred relationship of parent and child.

Parents have a sacred responsibility to love and care for each other and their children. Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love, to provide for their needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to do good, and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers will be accountable for the discharge of these obligations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, no family is perfect because none of us are perfect. We do not define the sacred status of family because of our own shortcomings, but we try and do better. Success is often defined by not giving up and continuing in love. I know this to be true.

Happy families and marriages are better established and maintained on principles, including faith, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work. Government has a responsibility to promote measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society. It is in the public interest that they do so.

I expect all members of this Legislature will support this motion. We love our families, Mr. Speaker, but families are bigger than us. More important than our words are our actions. There must be integrity.

I will close with one example. Many families are concerned about an activist ATA and others seeking to impose preferred ideologies on children without parental knowledge and permission. That is not good, Mr. Speaker. The family is the fundamental unit of society. While no parent is perfect, the vast majority of parents love their children, know them best, and should be trusted.

Seeking to affirm and protect the sacred relationship of parent and child should not be framed in a hateful way. It is not right to seek to contend and divide. All are children of God and are of infinite worth. The sacred relationship of parent and child should be protected and affirmed. All can be valued in seeking fairness for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1 are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall on amendment A1.

Mr. Sabir: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I was going to speak to the main.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: We are on the main motion. Hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, would you still like to provide some comments?

Mr. Sabir: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this motion, which is there to recognize the importance of the family unit. I would say that the family unit, as every one of us understands it – earlier there were some remarks, but I think my family is everything for me. Wherever I am is because of my family. That family was very different from the concept of a nuclear family. It included extended family. I grew up in a multigenerational home, and I do still live here in a setting that would be considered a multigenerational home. Since this province is really diverse – many people of faith, people who don't have faith – they have their own understanding of the family unit, and we should certainly recognize the importance of that family unit for those individuals, for those Albertans.

Having those family units – strong family units, resilient family units, diverse family units – recognized and supported is important to build a resilient society. We fully support parents, guardians, grandparents, whoever stands in the place of parents, and their primary responsibility and right to provide the best they can in terms of education, in terms of upbringing and keeping in mind the best interest of the child so that a child has every opportunity to be successful, to reach their full potential. That certainly is the primary responsibility of family and of parents and those in extended family, to do that, unless there is neglect or there is abuse.

Before I move on to that part, I do want to say that in my faith traditions growing up, we were told to respect three people just like your parents. One is, I guess, the biological parent. The second one was the person who taught you something, a teacher. Like, the respect for a teacher was just the same as the parents because you learned something from that person. And the third one was the parent of the person who you are associated with in marriage; respect that person's parent just like yours. So the meaning of family is very different for different people.

There was just a drive-by attack on the ATA and teachers, which was completely uncalled for. If we are talking about family, if we are talking about extended family, I think in my faith traditions there is a huge respect for teachers, and I wouldn't, I guess, lightly talk anything ill of anyone who is in the teaching profession or who recognizes him or herself as a teacher.

Then there is that thing that when there is abuse and neglect, sure, the parents and guardians have primary responsibility, but at the end of the day it's the state's responsibility to protect the best interests of the child. In some cases the state steps in and assumes that role. It provides for children with a view to protecting their best interests. That's why we have a child intervention system. We have 3,000-plus children and youth in our system that the state is responsible for because there were cases of abuse and neglect. We have more than 7,000 agreements with families where the government monitors that parents are providing for the best interests of children and protecting their best interests.

In our province there are many other instances where the government has a role. For instance, there is huge bullying in our school system. I think the government has an obligation to protect children there as well. I think I can go on about instances of what state responsibility is, but we also have a provincial government that engages often in dog-whistle politics, that engages often in things that divide people, divide Albertans.

More recently they also came up with a policy that many parents, many families have raised concerns about. The motion reads that parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to make decisions about the well-being and health of children, but this government is not willing to extend the same right to parents who have kids who recognize as transgender. This government is willing to interfere in that relationship between the parent and that child. They are even willing to interfere in the relationship between that child, his or her parents, and their doctor. They have gone that far. If the government really is interested in recognizing the family unit and that unit's primary responsibility for health, they should extend it to all family units. They should extend it to all parents. They should not pick and choose. They should not deny it to some and extend it to others.

I guess the government has heard from many parents how concerned they are about their policy. A parent can choose which sports their kid can join, participate in, but here we have a government that is, again, interested in deciding that for parents, deciding that for kids without anyone asking them to do that.

So, yes, we do recognize the family unit as understood by diverse Alberta communities, and we should respect everyone's beliefs, how they define that family unit. The second thing is that when we talk about kids, their rights and the government's right to protect them from neglect and abuse, in so doing, we should also be very mindful that government policies are not contributing to that abuse, be that emotional abuse, psychological abuse of the children and of the family.

With that, I would take my seat and will be supporting this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate it. Thank you, everyone, for the debate here today on the motion. I greatly appreciate both sides of the House and their debate.

As I do close, I just want to pinpoint that our government does and always has recognized the importance of families as the very bedrock of our society. By continuing to affirm the rights of parents and guardians to make decisions in the best interests of their children, Motion 510 aligns with our mandate to protect parental choice and support strong families. We believe that families are not only the primary caregivers but also the givers of wisdom and love that shape the very character of our children and of our province here and in the future.

As a family man myself Motion 510 does speak to some very core and profound significance for me. It speaks to the core of who I am, speaks of the value I have of family, and it speaks of the future hope that I see for Alberta, for my children, for people's grandchildren, and

also for everyone here in the Chamber. I've witnessed first-hand the transformative power of the love, the sacrifice, and dedication within my own family, and I'm more than committed to ensure that every single Albertan has this opportunity to thrive within the family as well.

Thank you as well to my family, to my boys: Nash, Jayce, and Creed. I deeply love you guys. Thank you for your support in this as well. You inspire me and motivate me every single day, so thank you, guys.

I want to also just stand in support of Motion 510. I want to move to close debate, and let's carry on with the rest of our day.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned till 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 23, 2024.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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