



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 23, 2024

Day 43

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Deputy Premier
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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)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
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(UC)
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(UC)
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Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
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Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
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McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a number of visitors to introduce to the Assembly. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you a number of special visitors from Romania who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. They're in Edmonton to attend the Canadian Hydrogen Convention. I enjoyed meeting them earlier, where we had the opportunity to discuss the long-standing energy relationship between Romania and Canada as well as a renewed desire and commitment to expand that energy relationship with the province of Alberta. The Secretary of State for the Ministry of Energy, Pavel-Casian Nițulescu, has joined us in the gallery along with his chief of staff, Artur Stratan. Geoff Rowe, the CEO of Akashic Technologies Canada, and William Potts, the international business development of Akashic, has also joined us. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my great pleasure to introduce to Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta a Member of the Legislative Council of Western Australia who is visiting the Legislature today. The Hon. Shelley Payne is a Member for the Agricultural Region, which covers a large part of southwestern Australia. I know that the hon. Member for Peace River is proud of the expanse of the size of his riding, but if you want to talk about big ridings, I encourage you to speak to Shelley as they have some big ones there in Western Australia. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you five classes of grade 6 students from H.W. Pickup junior high school in my home constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you a gentleman from the Camrose constituency, Tucker Jacobsen. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two strong members of the conservative community in Edmonton, Matin Koohkan, the president of the U of A campus

conservatives, and James Nielsen from the provincial co-ordinator. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, the chief government whip.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you the hydrogen delegation led by Dr. Cheng-Wei Yu, the director general of Energy Administration in Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs. This consists of 15 officials from various government sectors to research institutes across Taiwan. Its main mission here in Edmonton is to participate in the hydrogen conference and engage in dialogues with government officials and industrial counterparts in Alberta, to exchange views, and see where Canada is experienced. Can you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of many of the presidents of our members' constituency associations. In 20 seconds or less I am unable to name all of your names, but thank you for all of your hard work, your passion. You guys are truly the front lines and have spent numerous hours engaged with constituents when we must be in the Legislature. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I rise to introduce to you and through you my guest, Andrew Roberts, vice-president of Rexall; Sylvie Druteika, Rexall's pharmacy practice lead; along with Andrew Royce, founder and president of Voyce. Together they have done important work to reduce language barriers for newcomers at pharmacies across Alberta. I ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I'd like to introduce my CA president, Della Burkitt. She's a hard-working Conservative in our home riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our House here.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you David Bilyk, the constituency president for the United Conservatives of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. He has been a great supporter of mine and a hard worker, and he cares deeply about our community. David, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you my guest, my CA president, Ruven Rajoo. Ruven is a hard worker, and he makes me look good all the time. He's a very big supporter of our Conservative Party. Ruven, could you please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

Members' Statements

Neonatal Intensive Care Capacity

Dr. Metz: Place yourself in the shoes of parents of a newborn needing NICU care. You've likely just been through a challenging delivery. You're stressed. You're not even starting to recover from the delivery yourself. Your thoughts are only about your baby. Now

you're told that your premature baby's best chance of survival and living a normal life is if they get the intensive treatment that we can offer in Alberta's highly specialized NICUs. If you live in rural Alberta, that often means an airlift to Edmonton or Calgary. This is already challenging, but at least our NICUs are used to supporting Albertans from all over our province.

Now imagine that you're being told that we cannot provide the care of your baby's needs in Alberta. Your baby may be airlifted to another province or out of country. They may be there for weeks, even months. Which parent will accompany the baby? How will you care for your other children? How will you afford the additional cost of living in another province or another country? How will you get from Lethbridge to Winnipeg or from High Level to Vancouver? Are both parents now going to need to take leave from work? Maybe family members can help but maybe only for a while.

Think about when you really need to be together, not separated by the distance of a flight. Think about the loneliness. Think about the fact that this baby may not survive, so one parent may be alone in another place and the other unable to be with their child in their last moments.

Sending vulnerable children out of province is not a solution to the NICU nightmare. Minister, adequate funding for health care is needed. Do better.

Hydrogen Industry Development

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the world faces a dual challenge: meeting rapidly rising energy demands while also reducing emissions. Alberta, with our energy expertise, is the solution. Hydrogen can power countless sectors without sacrificing jobs or hurting the businesses that our communities rely on. Alberta is already Canada's hydrogen leader, and we produce and use more than anywhere else in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the global hydrogen market is set to boom, and we have the resources, the knowledge, and the infrastructure to be a major player. Now is our moment to champion hydrogen. This requires big investments and big thinking from industry, from government, from all of us. That's why we launched the hydrogen road map. It's why we made hydrogen a part of our emissions reduction plan, and it's why we created the clean Hydrogen Centre of Excellence. Today we invested \$57 million into the future of hydrogen in this province. This funding will accelerate Alberta-led innovation to create the hydrogen solutions the world needs. We're helping industry transform, retrofitting pipelines for hydrogen and designing new low-emission ways to heat homes and businesses. This is big-picture thinking that will change how the world is powered. All these projects are Alberta based, exploring, cutting edge.

1:40

This is good for not just the environment; it's about building a stronger, more prosperous Alberta. Imagine new industries fuelled by hydrogen, global markets powered by our technology, and skilled jobs in every corner of our province. Hydrogen isn't just part of our energy plan; it's a major piece of our future. We believe in technology, in our people, and in Alberta's continued role as an energy powerhouse. Together let's build on the legacy of the past while also embracing hydrogen technology. It will be critical to creating a prosperous and sustainable Alberta for the generations to come.

Government Policies

Ms Ganley: I want my daughter to have the same opportunities I did growing up here. I think that's what every parent wants. I don't know

exactly who she'll be. I know she's curious, creative, the sweetest soul you'll ever meet, and she's stubborn. I don't know where she gets it. I want her to have the opportunities regardless of who she grows up to be. That means building a world where all kids, all people have a chance to succeed.

Right now under the UCP that isn't the world we're building. Crisis in health care. Cost of living skyrocketing. Overcrowding in classrooms. So many of our neighbours are being left behind. Most young people don't think they'll ever own a home. For the first time in memory a generation may live shorter lives and be less well off than their parents. Threats to our air, to our water, to our world, to the very soul of our community: that's what the UCP are building. I want my daughter to have the same opportunities that I had, but we can't build them by running a playbook from the past. The world changes, and the same opportunities mean different solutions today.

The UCP spin a good yarn. They tell people that by giving more to their bosses, it will help them out, that they can seek the future in the past, that this is what a good economy looks like. But the UCP tale has a weakness: it isn't true. We can build a better world for our kids. We can fight back against that old narrative with a new and better one about how we can grow the economy by giving more to those who have less, about how every dollar invested in education saves six. The economy is about people. We fight the UCP narrative with truth. We fight back with real concrete ideas, and we fight back relentlessly. Our kids deserve nothing less. And there is nothing more tenacious than a mother fighting for her child.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Medical Interpretation Services

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to highlight the value and tenacity of those who choose to call Alberta home and the services which are making it increasingly easy to do so. My ancestors were part of this tenacious group. After leaving Ukraine, they settled in Alberta and, with nearly nothing to their names, carved their living from the dirt they settled on. In a new land with a new language they built lives for themselves and their children. I'm one of many Albertans who have a story like this. Men and women from elsewhere in Canada and further afield have brought with them the determination to face the immense challenges created by an unfamiliar place. With many people deciding to call this great province home, nearly a quarter of Albertans' mother language is neither English nor French. Our government's policies continue to make Alberta a destination that people from across the world want to call home.

For newcomers, much like my ancestors, who have had to grapple with unfamiliar language, I have something to share with you that will make your new lives here in Alberta easier. Today myself and the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon were hosted by Rexall pharmacy in Devon, showcasing the innovative multilingual health care services offered to newcomers in Alberta. Alongside representatives from groups working with more than 60,000 Ukrainian evacuees currently in Alberta, we observed a live showcase of the real-time interpretation services offered by the company Voyce. Voyce is a company dedicated to breaking down language barriers and enabling people to communicate when they need it most. Through Voyce's partnership with Rexall anyone can go into a Rexall pharmacy and, along with their pharmacist, access interpretation services in over 240 languages, including sign language, through a trained medical interpreter. Whether you speak Ukrainian, Cree, or Spanish, you can be confident that this innovation and co-operation in Alberta is making health services more accessible for all. As a member of a government which supports the innovation of industry, I'd like to applaud Rexall and the Voyce for

their partnership and for providing the right care in the right language at the right time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Affordable Housing

Member Tejada: Housing is a human right. It is not an ideology, it is not the creep of socialism, it does not trickle down, it is not generosity; it is the government's job to ensure that when Alberta is calling and someone makes their way here, they can find a place to call home. Every day I hear from folks who have come to Alberta with a promise of a great life. They just don't have anywhere to live. Calgary rents are at an all-time high, and in the worst cases people are sleeping in cars or trying shelters. Our government response: housing is coming later, much later; so many homes, the most homes ever, you'll see. In the short term folks need rent relief. Rents are skyrocketing, and people are being priced out of their homes. Families are facing instability, and seniors can no longer age in place.

Bill 205 presented an opportunity to provide some immediate relief, and this government voted it down. Now the UCP brings us Bill 18. They tell us they're fighting for our fair share, but what we're seeing is an ideological fight with Ottawa for doing what this government refuses to do, which is build affordable housing. Over the UCP's time municipalities have seen funding and social housing cut, with no money for maintenance of existing buildings until they are no longer safe.

We are in a housing crisis. It's time for this government to act like the adults in the room, collaborate with all levels of government, and treat this situation like the emergency it is. Lives depend on it.

Calgary Taxi Driver Concerns

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, in Calgary-North East I have the honour of representing many of the people responsible for keeping our city connected, including many of those who drive cabs or taxis. These people worked hard, especially during the pandemic, serving Albertans and Calgarians and working countless hours to deliver food, goods, services; took people to medical appointments; and so much more. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who serve in these critically important roles.

I have been reached out to by Calgary United Cabs, who expressed their frustrations about the monopoly of service providers at the airport. I request the minister to meet with Calgary United Cabs to address their concerns. We owe it to them to ensure that we make their lives easier and more affordable.

Sadly, these workers have been shown that they cannot trust the UCP, who will instead work to support their friends and donors and ignore the concerns of everyday Albertans.

This work is not easy, especially during the affordability crisis that this UCP government has created and made more difficult. The UCP changed insurance rules and then sat back and watched as premiums skyrocketed, increasing in some cases by \$3,000. The UCP imposed a \$430 million gas tax on Albertans.

These workers deserve better, but they are ignored by the UCP, who simply don't support them. I will never stop advocating for them like I will always stand up for northeast Calgary. The UCP has broken promises and ignored the needs of northeast Calgary and outright abandoned them following one of the largest natural disasters in Calgary history.

The message that I have for those in northeast Calgary is a simple one: I will never stop advocating for you. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Presumptive WCB Coverage for Wildland Firefighters

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, overnight and into this morning fire crews fought a massive fire in Edmonton, and at the same time and even as we speak, wildland firefighters are battling out-of-control blazes across the province. Both groups are fighting to protect property and human life, and both are inhaling ash, smoke, and chemicals, but for months the minister has stonewalled fairness for wildland firefighters. So to the Premier: will she today commit to offering the same presumptive cancer coverage to wildland firefighters that their urban and municipal colleagues already have?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we heard from the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade yesterday, who's also responsible for workers' compensation, there is always a process where we examine claims and then make a determination on whether it is work-related. The wildfire response and those who would be making such claims would go through that exact same process. We always analyze it on the basis of whether there is merit to the claim, and if there is, then we make the changes, which we've done in the past. We're still analyzing the data on that.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Premier would like to know the real facts. One group is fast-tracked because they get presumptive coverage; another group has to fight to get their claim acknowledged and often doesn't. Despite an early and likely record-setting wildfire season, when it comes to hiring wildland firefighters, this government is currently behind where we were this time last year. Part of recruitment for this dangerous job should be proper and fair compensation. So to the Premier: instead of ducking and dodging like her minister, will she commit to treating wildland firefighters the same as urban firefighters?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I answered the question in that we always have a process that our workers' compensation experts go through in examining all claims that come in, and from time to time they do make recommendations about how we should be expanding presumptive coverage. They will go through the same process for anyone making that claim, and we'll continue to receive their advice.

Ms Notley: The Premier owes it to these firefighters to learn the file and stop saying things which are not accurate. Some firefighters get presumptive coverage and get their claim easily accepted; wildland firefighters do not get that. They have to fight and fight and fight for their cancer to be covered. Will the Premier fix this unfairness and treat these heroes the way they deserve? And if not, why not?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite has been in this position before, so she knows there's a difference between structural firefighting and wildland firefighting. Part of the reason why it became so acute during the Fort McMurray fires is because the exposure level of the structural fires plus all of the toxins that they were exposed to exposed those firefighters to the level of toxins that would be equivalent, I believe, to 200 years' worth of exposure. That's what we have to look at, the level of intensity, which is why we're leaving it to the experts to give us advice. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

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

Ms Notley: Again, she doesn't get it, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 Data Task Force

Ms Notley: Now, first this government wasted \$2 million on the ramblings of Preston Manning that betrayed common sense and promoted a call for, quote, nonscientific narratives. Now we've learned they've handed well over another \$2 million to a discredited and failed UCP candidate to question the government's response to this pandemic. To the Premier: how can she justify, one, wasting more than \$2 million on this flight of fantasy and, two, paying her failed candidate, whose claims this very government described as false and dangerous?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might educate the member opposite of what the scientific method is, and I quote, it "involves careful observation" . . . [interjections]

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

Ms Smith: "The scientific method involves careful observation" . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. This is not how this works, where I rise, bring the House to order, sit back down, and the House immediately proceeds to not be in order. The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith:

Scientific method involves careful observation coupled with rigorous skepticism, because cognitive assumptions can distort the interpretation of the observation. Scientific inquiry includes creating a hypothesis through inductive reasoning, testing it [with] experiments and statistical analysis, and adjusting or discarding the hypothesis based on the results.

We're following good science.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, you know, the Premier may well be entitled to her own opinion, but she is not entitled to her own facts, and she's also not entitled to waste Albertans' money to pay friends and discredited failed candidates to make up those facts. In this time of disinformation people deserve nothing less than governments and leaders who are honest, support science, and defend – not invent – facts. To the Premier: is this her ultimate goal with Bill 18, to eliminate legitimate research and fund off-the-wall, unsubstantiated conspiracy theorists?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the scholars that I understand the task force ended up speaking with was Dr. Ari Joffe, who very early on in the pandemic wrote a report for the Stollery children's hospital about the potential consequences of lockdowns. That included learning loss for children, increased suicide, increased drug use, family breakdown, and all of the consequences associated with that. Maybe if his studies had been more accepted and more widely reported on, we would have been able to mitigate some of those harms today. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Notley: That's not who's chairing this panel.

Allow me to save Albertans some money going forward, though, Mr. Speaker. Hydroxychloroquine does not cure COVID. Stage 4 cancer patients are not to blame for their disease. Smoking is not good for your health. And just in case this is next on the agenda, no one

else needs \$2 million to go in search of the edge of the earth. The world is not flat. On this, unlike members of the UCP government, I have no question.

Ms Smith: There was no question there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–City Centre.

Family Physician Compensation

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government spent years fighting doctors and driving them out of the province. The minister spins, but Albertans know that they're continuing to lose their family doctors, and new ones are hard to find, especially in rural areas. So what did this government do to support hundreds of hard-working rural physicians in desperate need of help? Nothing. They shut them out. Rural doctors who provide complex care across communities can't get help simply because they have less than 500 patients. Why doesn't this government think these local community doctors are worthy of their help and support?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we've been working very closely with the Alberta Medical Association to come up with a new funding model. What the member opposite is talking about is transition payments. Our data suggests that doctors with panels larger than 500 patients are actually providing more comprehensive care. The data actually supports this. We value all of the doctors that are providing comprehensive care, but we need to have more attachment across the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Westlock family physician Dr. Stephanie Frigon said today that being shut out of the transitional funding program is, quote, forcing me and about 400 of my colleagues to consider whether to maintain our practices, to focus on a different area of medicine, or leave Alberta all together. This as over 800,000 Albertans don't have a family doctor, which means they end up in the emergency room with health issues that could have been resolved with preventative care, particularly so in rural areas. To the minister. These doctors need help, too. Why are you shutting them out? Do you really think we can afford to lose a single one?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to tell the member opposite – I don't think he was listening last week – that we've actually added over 500 doctors from last year to this year, of which over 215 are family physicians. In fact, we're pulling out all the stops to stabilize and enhance primary care physicians, family physicians. We've added \$200 million to stabilize primary care over the next two years, \$57 million in panel management, \$40 million over two years to support primary care networks, \$12 million for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Two words, Mr. Speaker: tone deaf.

These 400 hard-working family physicians provide essential quality care for their patients. They deserve to see a government that has their backs, some basic respect to show that this is a place where they're welcomed and valued, not shouted at in their driveways, undermined in negotiations, or ignored when they give advice. Just days ago the Alberta Medical Association stated: "Alberta's retention and recruitment is behind. We compete daily to recruit physicians and keep current practices afloat. The Urgency is Still Real." How does this government expect to stay competitive in recruiting and retaining the rural doctors we need if they keep ignoring them and shutting them out?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is the one who's tone deaf because he doesn't listen when we actually give him answers.

2:00

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide supports. We add additional top-ups for doctors who are in rural communities. Dr. Parks, the Alberta Medical Association president, said on our new funding model:

This is an extraordinary milestone for family and rural generalist medicine. The model will support sustainable family and rural practices so that the physicians who work in them can deliver the comprehensive care that they are uniquely trained and . . .

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Official Opposition House Leader at 2 o'clock.

Municipal Governance and Finance

Mr. Kasawski: There is no length to which the UCP government won't go to bully municipalities. From ignoring them when it comes to getting their unpaid taxes to downloading costs, resulting in higher property taxes . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Kasawski: . . . and reduced services, to the gatekeeping Bill 18, it's clear this government has no respect for Alberta municipalities. However, nothing goes so far as the Premier threatening to audit a municipality because of an unsigned letter that cannot be verified. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs explain where this letter came from and how the Premier knew about it before it was sent?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the hon. the Government House Leader at 2:01.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree that the answer lies within the question. The letter was unsigned, so how could I possibly know where it came from? The fact is that we work with municipalities all the time. The letter has been forwarded to the city of Edmonton, and they will do what they think is in the best interest. That's how it ought to be. If I tried to answer every unsigned letter that arrived, I wouldn't be doing anything else. There's a pretty good answer, I think. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Kasawski: This government doesn't have the best track record when it comes to ethics. We need only look at the former Justice minister who called the police chief just because he had a ticket, the former MLA who was fined thousands of dollars for breaking election laws, or the Premier who was found to have broken Alberta's conflict-of-interest laws. But now this government, based on an anonymous letter that can't be verified, that the Municipal Affairs minister said wasn't helpful, immediately jumped into action, threatening audits. Can the minister explain what other anonymous, unverified things he will be investigating? Will we be mounting an expedition to verify that the Earth is flat next? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. McIver: I'm not sure that the folks across want to talk about ethics when their leader admitted that two members were involved in sexual misconduct and wouldn't say who they were. They had a

member that hacked the former Premier's health account, and they knew about it for I don't know how long and didn't say a thing, Mr. Speaker. There might be people in this world that should talk about ethics, but they don't sit across the aisle from here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kasawski: This government is failing municipalities, failing them on unpaid taxes, on abandoned well cleanup, gatekeeping them, and so much more. The Premier hadn't seen the letter, the Municipal Affairs minister hadn't seen the letter, and now his department is blocking its release to the public. It's clear that this whole episode is just another UCP distraction from their failures in health care and education. Will the Municipal Affairs minister table this letter that was cited by the Premier multiple times in the House today and then get back to work addressing his government's failures to support Albertans?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member should try to take yes for an answer. In my earlier answer I made it clear that the city of Edmonton has the letter. It's a city issue, and they will deal with it in, I'm sure, the most appropriate way that they can.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work closely with municipalities in every way we can. We just put in place the local government fiscal framework, which is a program that they specifically asked for. We've done more for municipalities than the other folks did in four years. We will continue to do that because we listen, unlike the folks across. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Sigurdson: This government did not follow up in a timely manner on inspections of assisted living facilities. Facilities where Albertans live had extensive issues, like odour problems, left unresolved for months, even after 12 inspections. Noncompliant facilities continuously failed to make sure these homes were clean. They also failed to implement proper care plans for residents. When we identified these problems, the government suggested things would change. Have those inspections been followed up on, and what assurances can Albertans have that things have improved?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a very detailed process that is gone through when there is an issue that's raised. Whenever those issues are raised, the inspections are done; then they are followed up on. On this particular issue I'm not sure, but I will definitely find out and get back to the member opposite.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this government eliminated mandatory minimum care hours from the continuing care regulations and given that even the Ontario Doug Ford Conservative government has a mandatory four hours of care per resident and given that this government has demonstrated it does not follow up in a timely manner to fix problems nor hire enough staff to give seniors the assistance they need, how can the minister justify that this in any way is acceptable to Alberta seniors?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite is inaccurate. Ontario is the only province that actually has legislated hours of care. All other provinces do not. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in fact aligning ourselves with all other provinces who do not have mandated hours of care. We had a huge engagement right across the whole province with continuing care providers as well as workers within the system as well as the community, and all indicated they wanted flexibility. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has another opportunity to ask a question. I encourage her to do it now.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this government has still not released public reporting on elder abuse that used to be in the annual report and given it's been four months since a news report where at least 100 cases of abuse were identified and given that we know the Premier's preferred policy for seniors is motel medicine, where patients get shipped down the highway instead of guaranteed a safe, accessible place to age with dignity, why has this government been so hostile to doing the right thing to protect seniors from abuse and neglect?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member opposite is trying . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: . . . to create fear within the community. Mr. Speaker, this is not the case. In fact, we have community . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: . . . homes that are continuing care homes that are regulated. They're licensed. We're actually providing more hours of care than we ever have before, from 1.9 hours to over 3.2 hours. We continue to make improvements on continuing care. The members opposite want to continue to conflate various issues, but here we are focused on making sure seniors get the care they need.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted by the Official Opposition deputy House leader and by the Government House Leader at 2:07.

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

Local Access Fees

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the price of the default electricity rate spiked last year, the city of Calgary's taxes and fees rose along with it. These spikes in taxes and fees increased the city's revenue by hundreds of millions and made it far more difficult for families to plan their household budgets. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: how much did Calgarians have to pay in 2023, and why did they pay so much more than Edmontonians?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2023 Calgarians paid \$240 on average in local access fees while the average person in Edmonton only paid \$75. This is due to the city of Calgary's formula being based on a variable rate, which let them profit off spikes in electricity prices last year. It was made clear to myself and my department that the city council chose this formula to maximize their profits. Not only that, but \$200 million of the province's

affordability relief for Calgarians went directly to city council from these fees.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that this government is committed to ensuring affordable utilities for Albertan families and businesses and given the disparity between Edmonton and Calgary's local access fee formula and further given that fees on household basics like electricity should be predictable and fair, to the same minister: how will Bill 19 act to reduce costs for Calgarians and improve affordability?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the great question from the member. Making utility bills more affordable for Albertans and small businesses is my top priority. Yesterday I tabled Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This legislation will lower and stabilize Calgarians' utility bills by prohibiting municipalities from using variable rates to calculate their local access fees. If passed, Bill 19 will protect Alberta ratepayers from sudden spikes in electricity prices and lower their bills.

2:10

Mr. Bouchard: Given that the city of Calgary delayed fixing this issue for years, with their latest efforts kicking the can down the road until 2027, and given that this delay was blamed on the Alberta Utilities Commission and also given that the Alberta Utilities Commission doesn't currently have oversight over municipally owned providers like Enmax, to the same minister: how will Bill 19 ensure that the best interests of Alberta's ratepayers are protected from volatile local access fees?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been very patient with the city of Calgary. City council knew about this issue for years but continued to willingly profit off the backs of Calgarians. They blame the AUC, but the AUC hasn't seen an application from Calgary since 2017, which was processed in under three months. Mayor Gondek and her city council have no one to blame but themselves. This is why Bill 19 will give the AUC stronger regulatory oversight to protect Alberta ratepayers with municipally owned providers, ensuring that all local access fees are fair and predictable.

Methane Emission Reduction

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, the anniversary of the UCP's so-called climate plan passed by. The UCP tooted their own horn, claiming they can achieve the aspirational goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 based on hope, unicorns, rainbows, and wishful thinking. This plan lacks targets and a budgeted implementation plan. It is as aspirational as the Premier's aspirational health care delivery. To the minister: what is the timeline for adopting the UCP's commitment to achieve a 75 to 80 per cent reduction in oil and gas methane by 2030?

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

Ms Schulz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I actually appreciate the very reasonable question for a change from the member opposite when it comes to our emission reduction and energy development plan. We are very proud of that plan, and why we're proud of that plan is because we didn't just pick and choose facts. We worked with industry to set reasonable targets that will

take us to 2050. Earlier this week, a couple of days ago, I had the opportunity to meet with PTAC, talk a little bit more about where our targets are going to land and how we're going to seek equivalency with the federal government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that there is a lack of transparency about the UCP's claims of reaching 45 per cent methane reduction, given that the government uses methane estimates not measurements and study after study shows that methane emissions are higher than official estimates, which imaginary baseline did the minister use? Precisely how did the UCP determine the baseline? Will the UCP be transparent and show their work instead of claiming 45 per cent methane reduction? Say yes or no.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, here's the thing. Alberta is not only seen as a leader when it comes to methane emissions reduction but also in how we measure and get to those baselines. We continue to do that work. We are leading that work across Canada and, of course, across jurisdictions. This is one of the things that we talked about a lot last fall at COP. More to come on that as we work with other jurisdictions to set that benchmark on how exactly we should all be setting those targets. Again, that shows that Alberta is a leader not only here in Canada but world-wide when it comes to methane emissions reduction.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that Alberta has the highest emissions in Canada, given that we are part of the solution in addressing climate change and we can be attracting investments if this government had a serious climate plan and did something about it, when will regulations be implemented to achieve the 2050 target and how will that target be supported with actual measurement and monitoring? Why is this government continuing to put our economy, our industries, and our workers at risk by not defining their plan to fully participate in the low-carbon economy?

Ms Schulz: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. We are very transparent about what our goals are and what it's going to take to get there. That's why I've been consulting with industry over the last number of months and why we are fighting so hard as a government. I know that is something that is foreign to the members opposite, but it is why we are fighting so hard for Albertans and for Ottawa to stay in their own lane. When we look at our methane emissions reductions, we were able to hit our target not only three years ahead of schedule but for \$600 million less than if we had followed the federal government's plans. We're going to continue to show action on this file.

Family Justice System

Mr. Sabir: Last week we learned that the UCP refused the federal government's offer to fund 17 unified family court judge positions in Alberta. With \$10.9 million annually off the table due to the province's reluctance to remodel its courts system while doing the bare minimum themselves, can the minister shed some light on the decision to turn down federal funding for the unified family court judges? Is it about provincial sovereignty? Is it about justice or just about flexing your weak political muscles?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We're very proud of the work that we're doing to improve the family justice system. In fact, just last week I made an announcement allocating \$8 million to our

family justice strategy, to making sure that we make improvements in our family law system that help Albertans access our courts in a timely and quick way. We've created a single point of entry. We have streamlined the processes for families in this province going through a very challenging time. We want Albertans to have every possible way of accessing their courts with their family law issues in a safe and in a structured manner.

Mr. Sabir: Given that unified family courts are a one-stop shop for the public and lawyers and far more accessible for people navigating the justice system and given that the benefits a unified family court system could bring include streamlined processes and specialized expertise during a time when it's no secret that families are struggling for court dates and waiting for their matters to be resolved in a timely fashion, will the minister apologize to the families he has let down and commit to doing better?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite needs to apologize for misleading Albertans.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: The fact of the matter is that I just mentioned our new initiatives, which are streamlining processes here in this province. We are creating a single point of entry. We are creating an opportunity for Albertans to access their courts using mediation services, family court counsellors, and a number of other processes to help make family law easier for all Albertans.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Official Opposition House Leader at 2:17.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP has been talking about how Ottawa doesn't listen to Albertans while Alberta's lawyers lament the missed opportunity for a unified family court system and given that the Alberta Court of Justice is struggling with an increasingly overwhelmed caseload, not to mention underfunding and understaffing because of this government's poor decisions, will the minister commit to consulting Albertans about the unified family courts and work with the federal government rather than sacrificing Alberta's critical legal needs for this Premier's petty . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member once again is only half correct. The federal government has suggested that they may send additional judges but only if we do what they say. This is both disingenuous and an assault on the legal system in this province. As usual, the feds have put politics . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning will come to order.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, as usual, the feds have put politics above safety. We won't apologize for defending Albertans. We're proud of the work that our courts are doing, we're proud of the work that our judges are doing, and we're achieving great successes in this province with the system that we have.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents do not like any activists, Alberta Teachers' Association union bosses, or any others

seeking to impose NDP ideologies on children without parental knowledge and permission. That is no good. We don't want that in Alberta. Parents are the principal educators of their children. Today Cardus released a report on school choice. That is very good. To the minister: why is school choice the right way?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I think, as the member mentioned, supporting school choice is the right way because it puts parents, not politicians, in the driver's seat. We firmly believe that parents must have the ultimate authority in deciding the best educational options for their children. That's part of the reason why in 2020 we passed the Choice in Education Act to enshrine that right in provincial legislation. As you can tell from the heckling from the other side of the aisle, those members clearly don't want parents in the driver's seat. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

2:20

Mr. Stephan: Given that ATA union bosses are not the boss, given that this NDP has no boss, given that the Jagmeet NDP mother ship is a puppet boss, given that Trudeau is no good – he is no boss, Mr. Speaker – to the minister: if none of the nothing Trudeau boss of the NDP mother ship puppet boss of this NDP no boss of the ATA union bosses are not the bosses, then who is the boss of children's education?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, of course, parents are the bosses when it comes to deciding the educational choices of their kids. We firmly believe that parents, as always, have the best interests of their children at heart, and creating an environment where there are different options available for parents helps to ensure that parents can make those important choices. Be they public, be they separate, be they francophone, independent, or charter, it is important that we support the diversity of programming so that parents can make the final decision.

Mr. Stephan: Given that a school system, be it home-school, public school, Catholic school, or charter school, is a means to an end and not an end in itself and given that school choice is a focus on the best possible education for a child's unique needs as determined by their parents, who know and love them best – that is very good – to the minister: why is more choice in education better than less choice in education?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the core of it the reason that more choice is better is because it creates more options for parents, students, and families. We know and recognize that students, parents, and families have diverse needs, and many of our independent, charter, francophone, and other providers provide unique programming. For example, there are independent schools that provide programming specifically for children with autism. There are charter providers who provide programming specifically for children who are gifted or who have learning disabilities. This diversity of programming makes our education system stronger.

Support for Postsecondary Students

Ms Hayter: My riding of Calgary-Edgemont is home to many university students. I truly enjoy my conversations with these young adults in my riding while door-knocking or at public gatherings. Recently I hosted the student union from the University of Calgary to have an update on life on campus. It was very disappointing. It was heartbreaking. As a parent it angered me to hear how this UCP government is treating our students. Can the Minister of Advanced

Education tell us when she last met with the U of C student union, and why didn't she consult with them prior to the budget being dropped?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say confidently that I've met with the student unions of various different postsecondaries across the province many, many times. I've met with the students at the University of Calgary. We've had many very meaningful conversations, particularly around affordability. Certainly, I take those conversations into mind when looking at other policy ideas that are going to be addressing affordability. I will end off by saying that I'm very proud of the engagement that I've done with students across the province, and I'll continue to do so.

Ms Hayter: Given that the student union just awarded the university's sexual and gender-based violence support office over \$147,000 to implement a sexual and gender-based violence prevention and education initiative and given that the SU supported this project with their quality money fund program, that is raised from student fees, because the sexual and gender-based violence is so prevalent and a serious concern on campus and given that the support office is deeply underresourced and requires provincial funding to truly meet the needs of the students on campus, why does the minister expect the students to fund this office instead of funding it herself?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Advanced Education did receive \$625,000 from the federal government for gender-based violence to make sure that we're putting preventive policies in place, and this funding has been disbursed to the postsecondary institutions. We are also working with student union organizations across the province to make sure that we're hearing about their concerns and investing where required. This work is ongoing. I'm proud to say that it is crossministerial work, and we're making sure that students are supported on campus.

Ms Hayter: Given that the 2023 advocacy survey reported that 63 per cent of respondents indicated some difficulty in accessing healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, indicating a significant barrier for food accessibility on campus, and given that the barriers to food access can negatively affect students' academic performance and given that the SU Campus Food Bank has reported handing out 793 hampers since September 1, which only feeds a person for seven days, what is the minister doing to ensure that students have food security so they can focus on their studies instead of their stomachs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, this government has made record funding to food banks across the province, and that also includes food banks at the universities as well. Again, I've had some very in-depth conversations with student union members to talk about what their needs are on campus. I'm also proud to say that many civil society organizations have come forward to often offer their assistance as well for food security issues on campus. In fact, there is a great organization at the University of Calgary that is working with students to make sure that they have more access to food and to address food security.

Rural Medical Education

Mr. Dyck: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a great time for Grande Prairie and Alberta. Just recently it was announced that the University of Alberta is working hand in hand with Northwestern Polytechnic to open a new medical training centre in my constituency. This is incredible news for Grande Prairie and rural Alberta as only 6.6 per cent of Alberta physicians work in rural areas. Could the Minister

of Health please outline how this new medical training centre will lower health care wait times and support the continued well-being of my constituents in Grande Prairie and surrounding area?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to all the supports we're providing to rural physicians, Budget 2024 invests \$164 million towards initiatives to attract, train, and retain physicians, especially in rural and underserved communities. The partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic is a key aspect of our commitment to support the recruitment of physicians to rural areas. The Grande Prairie regional training centre will include interprofessional teaching clinics for medical students as evidence shows that students who learn in rural areas are more likely to practise in those rural areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government is investing \$224.8 million in the 2024 budget in order to expand the training of physicians in rural Alberta municipalities and further given that medical students who are trained in rural municipalities are far more likely to stay once they graduate, could the Minister of Advanced Education please outline the number of future physicians we can expect to see graduate from these new medical training centres in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge over the next decade?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. It is such a great investment. Mr. Speaker, the investment we made in rural medical training will increase the number of undergraduate medical training seats, increase residency positions for newly graduated doctors, and increase residency positions for international medical graduates. Once the seat expansion is complete, more than 100 additional Alberta-trained physicians will be ready to practise annually, supporting a stronger health care system across our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Northwestern Polytechnic has acted as the premier destination for postsecondary students in my constituency and Grande Prairie's neighbouring communities and further given that the University of Alberta has stepped up to partner with Northwestern Polytechnic in order to bring this medical training centre to fruition for the good of my constituents and the entirety of northwestern Alberta and Alberta, could the Minister of Advanced Education please expand upon this incredible partnership and the benefits that the U of A and the NWP bring to this upcoming rural medical centre in Grande Prairie?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for another great question. Mr. Speaker, University of Alberta programming will be available at Northwestern Polytech through the new medical training centre in Grande Prairie. These partnerships will help address a rural physician shortage by bringing more students to train in rural areas. This will lead to more physicians choosing to stay and practise in rural areas. Learners will have the opportunity to train alongside other health professionals to gain hands-on experience in rural settings. This will help Albertans living in those areas receive equitable care close to home.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Haji: Over 24,000 households are currently on affordable housing wait-lists across the province. We are at the tipping point.

Demand has outpaced affordable housing stock, and much of Alberta's affordable housing is aging. With the rapidly increasing population and multiple affordability crises, Alberta is looking at a future where we could lose affordable housing stock faster than we can replace it. To the minister: what emergency measure is the government going to take to address the aging housing stock?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has already taken action when it comes to our aging housing stock. This year alone I'll invest \$125 million in capital maintenance and renewal on Alberta's stock, did about the same last year, which is about \$100 million more than the Official Opposition spent when they were in government. On top of that, we are investing \$9 billion with our partners in capital over the next seven years to create tens of thousands of more homes, and in the short term we're investing a quarter billion dollars in rent supplements to make sure that Albertans who are struggling to be able to afford their rent can be able to have a home going forward. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Haji: Given that Alberta has the lowest number of affordable housing units, significantly lower than the national average, and given that the UCP's 10-year plan will not even build a third of the affordable housing units that Alberta needs and that this government missed their own housing starts target for 2023 and given that the government fails to set annual targets, something we called for in Bill 205, which they voted down yesterday, can the minister explain to Albertans why this government is underbuilding and avoiding accountability by hiding the numbers?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're not hiding any numbers. We're pretty excited about the numbers that we're seeing here in Alberta. Right now we have almost 10,000 houses already started inside this calendar year. We are well on track to be able to meet all of the objectives that have been laid out by our department. We are seeing affordable housing stock increase by 40 per cent underneath this Premier and government. Unfortunately, underneath the NDP, who built nothing when they were in government, we saw waiting lists go up by 75 per cent. So we're pretty excited about the numbers. We're going to continue with our plan, and we're going to make sure that we move forward on the affordable housing crisis in our province.

Mr. Haji: Given that the department invested \$60 million less than they budgeted while Albertans struggle with housing affordability and given that Albertans are facing rent increases, some upwards up to 80 per cent, forcing household budgets to be at a breaking point and causing families to skip meals to make ends meet while students drop out of schools or live in their cars, will the minister admit that when presented with the opportunity to provide stability and relief to those struggling with the housing crisis, this government said loud and clear, "Let them keep struggling"?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Only the NDP would laugh at something like a quarter billion dollar investment by the taxpayers of this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. We've heard from the member a number of times during this exchange. Now it's the time for the minister.

Mr. Nixon: Only the NDP would laugh at a quarter billion dollar investment in rent supplements, Mr. Speaker, and say that that is nothing. This government is going to continue to move forward

with our policies that see record-breaking construction in purpose-built rentals being built in our province. They're going to make sure that Alberta can continue to have that advantage of affordable housing. We are the only place left in this country where that is taking place, and that's why we see a 55 per cent increase in construction while the rest of the country sees 16 per cent.

Bill 18

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, we've heard the rhetoric from the Minister of Advanced Education that Bill 18 is simply: we want to know what research is being conducted in Alberta. The minister states that Bill 18 is nothing more than ensuring Albertans are aware of the funds being provided from Ottawa for research in Alberta. This information is already in the public domain. Will the Minister of Advanced Education admit that this information is already publicly available and that there are other intentions for this bill?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, Mr. Speaker, this information is available, but it's scattered, and it's not concise. We don't have a concise data set. If it was easy to get at this information, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. When we look at the consolidated financial statements of some of the larger postsecondary institutions, the funding that's publicly available cannot be matched to those numbers. That's why it's important to sit down with the postsecondaries, have this conversation, and ask for this information to make sure that it does indeed align with provincial priorities.

Mr. Ellingson: We also heard yesterday from the Minister of Advanced Education, building on what we just heard, that we'd pivoted to the message now telling Albertans that we need this bill to ensure that Alberta is getting its fair share of research dollars. Given that the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are among the top five research institutions in this country, receiving more than \$500 million in federal funding annually, what is this minister's measure for our fair share? How does the government think that their gatekeeping and adding a political review to all of these grants will garner additional research funding for Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to take a preliminary look at the tricouncil data, and – surprise, surprise – Alberta is not getting its fair share. We are not competitive with B.C.; we are not competitive with Ontario; we are not competitive with Quebec. Why isn't the NDP worried about that? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The minister has 15 seconds to close if she chooses to do so.

Mrs. Sawhney: I think the NDP should be more concerned about that. We need to understand how we can be more competitive, get some more of those federal funds, and I think Bill 18 is going to help us do that.

Mr. Ellingson: We'll look past that the U of A gets more than UBC. Given that grants from the tricouncil research agencies are peer reviewed by experts in their fields, given that many research studies include researchers from multiple institutions crossing provincial and national boundaries, how exactly will the Minister of Advanced Education assure researchers that the government has the expertise in place to understand and review these projects quickly and that researchers from other institutions aren't assuming additional risk by partnering with Alberta-based researchers?

Mrs. Sawhney: We are going to provide this assurance by working very closely with the postsecondary institutions. We have a track

record of doing really, really good work, particularly on the international student file. Anybody can ask the postsecondary sector about that work. We're confident in our abilities both within the department and within the ministry. The idea is to make sure we get more dollars into Alberta, and we're going to make sure that we make that happen. That's going to happen through collaboration. It's going to happen . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. It's very difficult for me to hear the minister. It's reasonable for the Speaker to be able to do so.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm very pleased with the productive conversations we've had to date with the postsecondary institutions. They're onboard to make sure that we work together to develop the regulations. I know this is going to be a good thing. We are going to get more . . .

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The drug addiction crisis is one of the most persistent and pressing issues that I hear concerns about from my constituents. Whether they've personally experienced the horrors of addiction themselves or have witnessed the effects in friends, neighbours, or family members, virtually no Albertan has been unaffected by this problem. Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction please tell the Chamber what steps our government has taken to mitigate the tremendous damage caused by addiction in Alberta?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government believes that recovery is possible. That's not my opinion, and that's not a political statement; that is a fact. It's a medical fact, and it's one long overdue that every Albertan recognizes no matter what side of the aisle they sit on in this Chamber. So we in this government have removed a \$1,240 monthly fee that used to be in place for access to life-saving recovery. We on this side of the House have increased capacity over 10,000 new treatment spaces per annum, and we're increasing even more with the 11 recovery communities that we are building so that we can get recovery to every single Albertan, because every Albertan deserves that opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you kindly to the minister for the answer. Given that drug addiction of all kinds reaches every corner of Alberta and given that those trying to get help in rural Alberta don't live close to major medical facilities that urban Albertans may have access to, could the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction explain how he is working to direct those suffering with addictions in the Camrose constituency to drug addiction treatment and recovery programs?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to that member for her excellent work in advocating for our communities when it comes to those suffering from the disease of addiction. The truth is that this government has pioneered the virtual opioid dependency program, which is the world's first delivery of its kind for opioid agonist therapy, evidence-based medication and treatment for those who are suffering, for relief from withdrawal and for relief from any overdose possibility. We're also building 11 recovery communities, the majority of those in rural communities, five of them partnering with Indigenous because we

know partnering with Indigenous and the rural communities is where we're going to solve this problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that drug addiction and abuse is often a root cause for criminal behaviour and that many of my constituents believe it has amplified violent rural crime and given that emergency response times in rural Alberta can sometimes take hours if not days before they respond and further given that when faced with a threat to themselves and their families, rural Albertans could be forced to defend themselves, can the Minister of Justice clarify the safeguards in place for those Albertans who defend themselves against violent criminals?

2:40

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans and Canadians do feel less safe, partly because of the Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa. For far too long our justice system has been struggling due to Ottawa's catch-and-release system. Radio silence from His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, by the way, on Bill C-75, which directed our courts to take the least restrictive and intrusive methods in determining whether we release criminals on the streets. On this side of the House we've increased our budget by tens of millions of dollars in both Justice and Public Safety to make sure that Albertans are safe.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has a tabling.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of both the economic impact analysis from University of Calgary and the University of Alberta showing that collectively these two institutions: their research activities contribute over \$16 billion in economic impact for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Sorry; Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The hon. member.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling A Measurement-based Upstream Oil and Gas Methane Inventory for Alberta . . . Reveals Higher Emissions and Different Sources than Official Estimates here in Alberta, with the requisite copies as well.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and table five copies of ACORN Canada's Rent Control Now petition. They received hundreds of signatures on their petition in addition to the over 5,000 signatures that we received in support of Bill 205. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank ACORN for their incredible advocacy, and I'm sorry that the UCP did not support the bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2 o'clock I believe the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time, 2 o'clock, the Minister of Health said in response

to a question from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, "The member opposite is the one who's tone deaf." Now, I believe she was repeating language that could be heard earlier in the debate, but what makes this a point of order is that she's speaking specifically to an individual member and insulting and using abusive language of a nature likely to create disorder.

I would also suggest that this is not a matter of debate because the Member for Edmonton-City Centre is known to be an excellent singer and has never been tone deaf. That is a fact, Mr. Speaker; I will not debate these things. But I also think the language was unparliamentary, and the Minister of Health should apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I find it unusual that the member would call a point of order when the Member for Edmonton-City Centre used the exact same wording just before that in relation to the Minister of Health. But, regardless of that, it is a matter of debate. The term "tone deaf" is not offensive, nor is it abusive language. It is otherwise understood to mean: insensitive or lacking perception, particularly in matters of public sentiment, opinion, or taste. If the Minister of Health had said that the member was insensitive or lacking perception, there would be no issue about whether or not this is a point of order. This is a matter of debate, a matter of opinion, so should not be called a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. However, if there are other members who wish to add to the debate, now would be the time to do so.

At approximately 2 o'clock the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre said the following words: "Two words . . . tone deaf." Then approximately 35 seconds later the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, the Minister of Health, said the following: "Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is the one who's tone deaf because he doesn't listen when we actually give him answers."

Hon. members, one of the challenges that we have faced and continue to face inside the Assembly over the last number of weeks is members' desire to push the envelope as close as humanly possible when making comments about members that can be perceived as personal in nature. Certainly, the hon. Minister of Health directed the comments specifically to the hon. member and made an accusation that he is tone deaf.

I do agree that while the language is unhelpful, it probably doesn't rise to the level of a point of order as the Deputy Government House Leader has eloquently explained for the Assembly. But, again, I want to provide a caution to both members, who largely did the same thing although in significantly different language, that this type of race to tit-for-tat, if you will, rarely creates order, and I encourage members to heed such advice. This isn't a point of order. At this time I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, at 2:01 a point of order was called by the hon. the Government House Leader while the Member for Sherwood Park was speaking.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). During the member's question the Member for Sherwood Park stated the following: "There is no length to which the UCP government won't go to bully municipalities." He continues on with his question and says something along the lines of: "However, nothing goes so far as the Premier threatening to audit a municipality because of an unsigned letter that cannot be verified."

Mr. Speaker, there is no accuracy to these allegations. The UCP government has never bullied municipalities. That is wording that imputes, number one, false motives to other members, uses abusive and insulting language, and makes allegations against one or more members on this side of the House. The language is unparliamentary and inappropriate for this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you. This is absolutely a matter of debate, and I believe that the Government House Leader would have even known that as he called the point of order given that in *Hansard*, July 28, 2020 – now, normally, Mr. Speaker, I quote your rulings; in this case I am quoting the Government House Leader – he said, referring to a point of order at the time: “I recognize that if he was suggesting that the government is bullying, I can see how that might be permissible in this Chamber.”

Because we’ve had these discussions in this place, referring to government actions is a matter of debate, and in this case, particularly with the number of concerns we are hearing from municipalities on Bill 18 and the language we have been hearing from stakeholders, I believe this language is appropriate as we are talking about these things. In the comments at this point the Member for Sherwood Park did not make a personal attack but, rather, was talking about the behaviour of the government, in fact, did not name any individual, did talk about the Premier in general terms as well. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that even in previous point of order debates – fun fact: the Government House Leader lost that particular point of order debate – it acknowledges that referring to the government would not be a point of order. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule and do have the benefit of the Blues. However, if anyone has additional comments to make, now would be the time to make them.

2:50

Hon. members, as reported by the Deputy Government House Leader, with respect to the comments of the Member for Sherwood Park, “There is no length to which the UCP government won’t go to bully municipalities,” as highlighted, we have spent some time in the past discussing this type of language, particularly when referring to a large group of individuals on either side of the Assembly. What I will say, as I said last week, is that just because the Speaker has ruled that this may be in order doesn’t mean that members of the Assembly should start tomorrow or continue this aggressive language about one side or the other engaging in the act of bullying. As we saw today, it led to some level of disorder in the Assembly. It probably isn’t that helpful although it’s not a point of order because it wasn’t directed to anyone personally. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. I do encourage members to use the words they choose wisely.

Hon. members, at 2:06, 2:07 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order, which was immediately followed by the Official Opposition deputy House leader rising on a point of order.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) in relation to comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The member said something to the effect of: given that the Premier’s preferred model is motel medicine. A great deal of debate has happened in this House in relation to this. This is, once

again, language that undoubtedly will create disorder in this House. It is inaccurate. The Premier has never endorsed or spoken about motel medicine or any such terms, has never agreed with the assertions or allegations made by the NDP members in relation to the term that they’ve coined. It is inappropriate and unparliamentary language for this House, and this should be ruled a point of order.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. I believe this is the Government House Leader attempting to continue debate on this issue. The language that’s being used here, referring to the Premier, referring to government policy, and our interpretation of what was the motel medicine fiasco, that went on for weeks, is a debate in this House. I think that this is very similar to yesterday’s ruling in the language therein as well as the ruling that happened, again, five, six days previous, on the infamous day when we had 30 minutes of points of order. We were talking about the Premier. We were talking about policy. This is a matter of debate, and we will continue to raise issues like the lack of public reporting on elder abuse.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. As reported or largely having agreed to a statement of facts on what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said, I do agree. This seems to be a matter of debate. However, I want to provide again a caution to all members. When members potentially attach false motives to any particular situation or policy, it often creates disorder, so I want to provide a caution on that. In this case it is a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Shortly thereafter the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall rose on a point of order in the same exchange. I’m not sure if the Official Opposition House Leader wants to . . .

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the same exchange but at a different point. Just a few minutes later the Minister of Health, in response to the question – and I quote, I believe, accurately, but please correct me if I’m wrong because I do not have the benefit of the Blues – said, “The member opposite is trying to create fear.” Now, the Minister of Health is excellent at using parliamentary language that rides the line when it comes to points of order and the decorum in this place, but in this case the Minister of Health clearly, I heard, said, “The member opposite is trying to create fear.” Under 23(h), (i), and (j) this would be unparliamentary and unbecoming of the minister. I believe it should be withdrawn and apologized for.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order; far from it. This is a matter of debate. Even if the words were as alleged, “the member is creating fear” is not a term that’s unparliamentary. It’s not a term that is inappropriate. It’s a matter of debate. Certainly, alleging that somebody is misinforming or misadvising or creating unnecessary fear among those that are viewing the debate that happens here is likely an appropriate term and is a matter of debate. In short order we’re going to be unable to say a whole lot in this House if things as simple as that are deemed to be a point of order. I would ask you not to find this a point of order.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. I would just say to the hon. Deputy Government House

Leader that on a number of occasions implying that a member has provided misinformation has in fact been ruled a point of order. There are lots of examples of that on both sides of the Assembly that I'd be happy to provide.

In this particular case the hon. minister said: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member opposite is trying [point of order] to create fear within the community." You know, members, this is challenging because it's directed specifically at a member, and it then imputes false motives of that member. So I again want to provide this sort of overarching comment as we split hairs on: did we say members? Did we say member? This language is likely to cause disorder. It's not overly helpful. In this case I do believe that this is a point of order, and the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader can apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Amery: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at 2:17 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23 (h), (i), and (j), very similar language to the previous point of order. At 2:17 the Minister of Justice and Deputy Government House Leader, in speaking to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall – and I believe my quote is accurate – said, "The member opposite needs to apologize for misleading Albertans." We have a long-standing tradition of the House of not identifying specific members and certainly not using the words "lying," "misleading." Last week we were talking about spreading misinformation. I believe that this is a clear unparliamentary use of language and point of order, and given that it was the Deputy Government House Leader who was using this language, I hope that there will be an apology and withdrawal.

Mr. Amery: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.
We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 18 Provincial Priorities Act

[Adjourned debate April 17: Ms Smith]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has 56 minutes remaining should she choose to wish to do so.

Seeing not, I see the hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services has risen. The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise and discuss with the House a little bit about Bill 18. First off, let me start off by, through you to the hon. Premier, congratulating her on an excellent piece of legislation and thanking her on behalf of Albertans for having the courage to bring forward this type of legislation to be able to help ministers like myself with some of the challenges that we are facing when we interact with what is often a very hostile federal government.

I think I will outline over the next few moments some of the opportunities that have come already as a result of the hon. Premier's bill – and it hasn't even passed this Chamber – which I hope many

people will take encouragement from and many members of this Chamber will take encouragement from as they make some decisions on whether or not to support this groundbreaking piece of legislation in our province, something that has been discussed and hoped for at times but has never made it this far. I certainly hope that eventually it will earn the support of all members of this Chamber.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Lots of the debate around this piece of legislation is centred around housing and, in particular, some of the actions that the federal government has taken over the last several months, over the last year or so here in our province when it comes to housing. One of the things that we saw was that the federal government had a habit that they were falling into, which was to arrive in Alberta, give notice maybe the night before, even with the Prime Minister sometimes, and then come in and make an announcement for multibillion dollars' worth of housing aid, most of which would never end up in this province.

3:00

They would then move on to elsewhere in the country, where they were clearly spending a large amount of that housing money on places where they were targeting seats elsewhere in Canada for their upcoming election. There's no secret that the federal government has some real political challenges when it comes to this election. Some of that, of course, is from the affordability crisis that they made, and the results of that have been that they've really tried to focus that funding elsewhere.

That's been very problematic for the province and for all of our municipal partners who have all signed joint letters with myself, including our largest mayors, asking the federal government to make sure that they focused on things like per capita funding and to be able to make sure that, at least, Alberta's population was recognized when it came to housing investments at a federal level and, more importantly, the fact that we are the fastest growing province in Confederation was also recognized. But, unfortunately, we continue to see, really, at the end of the day, that about 2 per cent of all housing announcements were actually seeing funding flowing inside the province of Alberta. We're 12 per cent of the population. That is why you continue to see mayors of all political stripes in our province stand with me to call for per capita funding.

The other thing that we were seeing that was very troubling was that only particularly the mayor of Edmonton, who is a former federal cabinet minister, who's done a great job of utilizing his connections in Ottawa to be able to get resources for a city – we definitely want to see both Edmonton and Calgary invested in, but we can't just see Edmonton and Calgary invested in by the federal government. The federal government has only invested in about six cities in our province, forgetting about many of the other areas. I know the Official Opposition struggles to understand some of that area outside of where they can win seats, both in Calgary and Edmonton, and to understand what's taking place in rural Alberta, but rural Alberta continues to have the same challenges. In fact, Madam Speaker, we were able to get some of that federal investment into your own constituency but only after a real long, drawn-out battle to get Airdrie to be recognized for its portion of Calgary and Calgary's growth.

What happened over time was that if you were a municipal mayor that could get a phone call returned by a federal cabinet minister, you seemed to be able to get some of that money – well, not enough of it, because they weren't funding per capita, but you were able to get some of it, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary – and the rest of our communities were often forgotten during that process. That's a challenge because constitutionally – and I know there have been a lot of debates in this House about the Constitution, about the need to make sure that we enforce the Constitution. I believe that's

important, Madam Speaker. Constitutionally municipalities are a product of the provincial government, and the federal government coming into our jurisdiction, not spending enough, not spending appropriately per capita, and only picking and choosing winners and losers without the ability to understand the full context of what's taking place in the province was creating some challenges.

Now, I do want to be clear that Alberta is already doing a tremendous amount when it comes to housing. The federal government doesn't dispute that, frankly. When it comes to affordable housing, for example, we continue to invest unprecedented amounts. You've probably heard me say before, Madam Speaker, that we're spending almost \$9 billion over the next seven years or so with our partners to create tens of thousands of more affordable units. We got a quarter billion dollars being invested in rent supplements, which are making, again, tens of thousands of more affordable rent spaces for Albertans who are struggling with rent. Then we also continue to focus on unprecedented investments in attainable housing and market housing, something that the federal government and us both agree on, which is the need to increase supply, which is why the feds aren't calling for rent control either, because they know that that will slow down supply, and the only way forward on those challenges is to do that.

You're seeing some numbers in Alberta right now; for example, to date in 2024 over 10,000 new housing starts in our province, which last year at this time would have been about 6,000, and we're just getting started for the year. Last month saw another increase of 55 per cent from the year previous. In fact, I think we're probably on track possibly to even double our housing construction capacity inside the province, Madam Speaker. Also, most excitingly, because we really need a lot more investment in purpose-built rentals, we've seen more purpose-built rentals built over the last couple of years than the last 15 years before that combined. So that does show that the effort that the government is doing, that is being called for by both the federal and the provincial governments, around red tape reduction, municipal zoning issues, municipal permit issues to be able to make sure we can get built what we need to to house Albertans and to make sure that housing can remain affordable is working.

The challenge, though, becomes that there's a tremendous amount of work that still has to be done, and when the federal government is working, picking and choosing just a couple of cities and not investing in the province, it slows down our progress. We will still accomplish it with or without the federal government, but we can certainly accomplish it faster if the federal government works with the province to strategically handle that.

Now, you've also seen under this government, Madam Speaker – I know you appreciate it – a tremendous amount of work to fight back on several other issues. You saw Bill C-69, for example. I was excited when I was in Environment to lead that charge. I was very excited to watch the fact that we won that at the Supreme Court, reaffirming our constitutional rights and the birthrights of every Albertan to be able to develop their own resources.

Unfortunately, we saw the previous government, the NDP government when they were in charge, being willing to accept the federal government stomping all over our constitutional rights and were able to accept the scraps at the table of Confederation, which we reject. We will fight for Albertans' money, we will fight for Albertans' rights, and we did that with Bill C-69. The other one was the plastic ban, which the federal government unconstitutionally brought in. The Supreme Court has now ruled that it was unconstitutional. It had a drastic impact on our oil and gas industry, and we fought that to the highest levels.

What we're doing with Bill 18 is the same concept. We are asserting our constitutional right, and we are making clear what our jurisdiction is. We are going to make sure that we are, one, fighting

for per capita appropriate funding for this province in Confederation but, most importantly, that we continue to be the government that is able to distribute the financing that comes through the federal government to our municipal partners to be able to make sure that, one, we can make sure that our targeted funding can work with that federal funding to compound the impact of that funding. As you probably know, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of stranded projects that have our funding already approved, have municipal funding already approved, but no word from the federal government on how that works. If we're able to focus and bring that all together, we should be able to approve those projects faster.

Then the other one is that we want to be able to make sure that we get the same deals as both Quebec and B.C. Interestingly enough, Quebec has legislation similar to Bill 18, has had it for decades, and they were the first province to get a province-wide housing deal, a multibillion-dollar deal that has resulted in significant houses being built inside the province of Quebec. Why? Because the federal minister has to call up the provincial minister in Quebec and say: let's get down to work, and let's get a deal made.

They didn't have to do that in our province, and over time they had gotten used to probably being able to get away with stomping on our constitutional rights and getting into a space where they didn't belong, but now our government is saying: no, we won't accept that. We want the same deal, certainly, as we're seeing in places like Quebec and B.C., and we have to go and look and say: well, why are they getting that deal? When we talked to Quebec politicians to understand how it was working inside their jurisdiction, they referred to their legislation as the tool that they use to be able to make sure that their province is able to get a fair deal, which is the bill now that the Premier is going to bring forward.

Now, what is most exciting, I think, about that, though, Madam Speaker, is that the bill is – we're debating, I believe, second reading today, so the bill is not even through the Legislature yet, and the federal government, through Minister Fraser, who's the current federal housing minister, has already had multiple bilateral meetings with me since this bill has been introduced and made very clear that they hear us loud and clear. They accept the fact that we are going to assert our constitutional right with this legislation and that they have come to the table – and they've come to the table in writing already – to be able to make a multibillion-dollar housing deal with the province that is going to result in more people being housed. That's what happens when you assert your constitutional rights.

Now, the opposition would make it sound like this is something horrible that is taking place. I would submit to you that standing up for Albertans' rights underneath our Constitution in Confederation is never horrible. It's a good thing that we would stand up for those rights and remind the federal government of what their role is and, as a result of the fact, that we're now in a spot where you're going to see the federal government at the table being able to negotiate a housing deal very similar to what we see taking place both in B.C. and Quebec. I'm actually very confident that we're likely going to be able to get to a place where we're going to see that deal be done. I hope so. There are a couple of things around some of the strings that the federal government is still trying to attach to a deal that we're working our way through, but I'm confident that I think we can get through it, which is another reason why this is important, because we are in a better spot as a provincial government to fight through some of those issues with the federal government.

For example, right now the federal government has been saying to municipalities that they must adopt certain green building codes that would ultimately raise the cost of construction inside those

communities significantly and make it harder to build homes, but it's very tough for a municipality to fight back against the federal government when it comes to that. With that much money on the table, it puts them in a really tough spot whereas if we're negotiating on behalf of the entire province, we're able to accomplish so much more quickly. We have better resources to do it, and we're in a better spot, frankly, to be able to stand up to the federal government to get a better deal for those municipalities going forward.

3:10

I have to tell you that I've spoken to lots of mayors, including the mayors of the two largest cities. The mayors of the two largest cities recognize the challenges that the federal government has created. In fact, they have come forward and both publicly spoken about the need for the federal government to stop flying into town and not working with the province and then ultimately trying to make separate deals and pitting municipality against municipality and instead get to work with the province on a long-term, sustainable plan that could work for both governments and all the 300-plus municipalities that are in our province.

Well, the good news, Madam Speaker, is that the bill is doing just that. I never thought that it would work this quickly. I'm actually very excited about it. I want to thank Mr. Fraser for recognizing that Alberta wanted to go this direction and respecting that we had a legal right to go this direction and instead of resisting that, accepting, just like Quebec, the situation and sitting down at the table to try to figure out a process forward that will work for all Albertans and will ultimately benefit Canadians.

I think, Madam Speaker, that you're going to see a lot of other provinces copy Alberta shortly because this is a better way to do it. I think that in the long run it's going to result in significantly more houses being built in this case. But later on it may be something else. It could be roads, it could be other infrastructure projects, or also it could be a place where we in Alberta want to go in a very different policy direction than the federal government on certain issues.

Certainly, when it comes to the fight against addictions, I'm suspecting that we're going to see some of that. We in this province have a right to be able to govern ourselves without the federal government stomping all over our jurisdiction, and this law will hopefully eventually help ministers.

I do want to really also just quickly address red tape. Often one of the things that we're hearing from the Official Opposition is that we'll somehow create more red tape. Our housing authorities will tell you that nothing could be further from the truth. Underneath the old system what happens is that a housing authority or municipality trying to build a project would have to come and apply to my department, apply to the federal department, apply to CMHC in some cases if they're going with a finance route, and also go through whatever their municipal council process will be for the funding that is involved. That's four processes. What that has resulted in is a bunch of projects that have funding maybe from the province, maybe from the municipality, but not from the federal government or maybe from the federal government and from the municipality but not from the province because those processes are not taking place.

With this process they have in Quebec, which we are going to try to adopt here, that will make it all happen in one shot. When you come and you apply to the provincial government, the federal government will have standards for their money to be invested inside affordable housing. Those will be met; there will be a deal that is made. But once you come and apply for that project once, you're applying to all levels of government that are involved. What

that will do is make sure that we're funding projects that can actually get built, that we're not waiting years to be able to hear from another level of government to be able to create those houses. In the end, what that does is make more doors, Madam Speaker.

It certainly goes through the process faster, which is why you particularly see rural municipalities very interested in this conversation when it comes to housing, because it's really expensive for them to go and design housing projects, hire consultants to go through a process to be able to figure out what works for their community, and then go through a lengthy application process with the federal government and then a lengthy application process with the provincial government and then not even know if your project is going to be approved. Now, if we get to the deal that we're hoping to get to, if you get approved by the province, all those other components will come in place. We'll be able to build more doors.

Again, I just want to thank the Premier, Madam Speaker, through you to her, for what I think is an exceptional piece of legislation. When she first told me about this, I was more excited about this legislation than any other bill I've seen in the many years that I've been in this Chamber because I think this will do more than any other legislation that is passed by members of this House to protect our constitutional rights as a province but, more importantly, to be able to make sure resources from both levels of government are quickly brought to bear to be able to deal with challenges like housing.

Again, I want to stress that there could be other challenges in the future. Right now that is the biggest challenge that we're dealing with and certainly where the most news is and noise is for rightful reasons. Long term, by passing this piece of legislation, this puts us in a spot which will make it easier to communicate with the federal government and end up with better results for Albertans, which is what we should all want.

Madam Speaker, I'll leave you and the members of the House with that thought, that we are in second reading and have not been able to get the federal government to come to the table to do a serious negotiation when it comes to housing right up until when the Premier finally put this bill into the Legislature. That alone should give us the confidence to go forward, to have the courage, again, to stand up for Albertans.

We do not have to do what the federal government tells us to do. We don't. We are a different government, and the Constitution matters. I know we don't talk about that, I think, enough in Canadian politics, but that was the agreement to put all of our provinces together. But what we do want to do is work with the federal government in partnership, and when we put together parameters on how that relationship will work, it will be significantly more positive in the long term. I think that housing is about to be the proof of the Premier's bill. So, Madam Speaker, through you to my colleagues in the Chamber, please support this important piece of legislation. Let's get it passed as fast as possible because the faster we pass it, the more we're going to be able to deliver for Albertans.

The only reason why you would vote against it is because one of your bosses may be in Ottawa, in the case of the NDP, who have that joint party structure there, where they have to listen to Mr. Singh, who's holding up a coalition government federally. There would be no other reason to vote against this because this benefits Albertans. The majority of Albertans want us to protect their constitutional rights, and we need to make sure that we're delivering our share of the money.

Let's close also with that, Madam Speaker: this is our money. When the federal government comes to town with our money – we pay taxes; we pay more than any other jurisdiction here in Alberta – and when they come to our jurisdiction, it's important that they

work to be able to make sure that investment goes all across the province, not just to select mayors who may or may not have current cabinet ministers' phone numbers. Again, I hope everybody votes for this legislation. I suspect it will pass; we'll see. I'm very much looking forward to passing it because it's going to make it a lot easier to deliver for the great people of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in stark opposition to Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act. Madam Speaker, the level of political overreach that this UCP government continues to exhibit knows no bounds. Bill 18 would require the provincial government to approve all federal funding to provincial entities. The Premier has said that of approximately 14,000 existing agreements between the federal government and Albertan provincial entities, about 800 were flagged as problematic. Of these 800 she noted that there are at least 64 federal agreements with the city of Calgary, 44 with the city of Edmonton, and five to eight with other municipalities.

This will affect a myriad of municipal initiatives including net-zero housing, net-zero electricity, and safe supply. Yet again, we see this UCP government exhibiting a top-down approach to municipalities and rural communities in Alberta. When Bill 18 was announced, Alberta Municipalities issued a statement saying:

We cannot help but notice that the provincial government has pivoted from its original rationale. Initially, it said the legislation was intended to ensure Alberta receives its fair share of federal funding. Now, its justification is that the legislation will ensure federal funding aligns with provincial priorities.

Yet again, the provincial government did not consult or communicate with our association on legislative changes that, if introduced, would profoundly affect the way municipalities work.

Had it consulted . . . [with Alberta] municipalities, we could have suggested ways to improve and streamline agreements between municipalities and the federal government to ensure Alberta gets its fair share of federal funding in a way that respects the priorities of Albertans. The provincial government's communication around Bill 18 has been unclear, leading to confusion among affected entities about whether they should still apply for federal funding that is being offered . . .

Albertans are tired and frustrated with all the inter-jurisdictional squabbling between the provincial and federal governments at a time when communities are facing numerous serious issues – things like inadequate local infrastructure funding, a shortage of affordable housing, sharp increases to cost of living, and a health-care crisis.

Since Bill 18 was announced, municipalities, rural communities, and postsecondary institutions have all come out to say what a terrible idea this legislation is. Some of the most condemning feedback has come from academics and researchers, who will be directly impacted by Bill 18. Alberta's postsecondary institutions have renowned reputations, bringing innovative world-changing ideas to life and creating new economic, environmental, and social benefits for the good of all Albertans and people around the world. These discoveries are made possible with grants and funding from federal government and research partners, and here we have the Premier overstepping the authority and well-being of dozens of organizations and experts by pursuing this radical policy.

3:20

There hasn't been a single new article or social media post from an expert stakeholder who would be impacted by this bill that has come out in support of Bill 18. That should be something that raises

serious alarm bells with the Premier and the members opposite. Throughout my time today and in days to come I'm going to allow the experts to speak through me because this government won't give them an opportunity to and didn't consult with them prior to bringing this bill forward. If the minister and Premier refuse to engage with postsecondary institutions, researchers, academics, and students before making such rash decisions, then I will make sure that they hear exactly why Bill 18 is so problematic.

Whenever we're in this Chamber, we need to acknowledge that we aren't the experts in everything, and the members opposite are no exception. They should be listening and engaging with experts before tabling legislation that has the potential to lead to dire consequences for all Albertans. If this UCP government won't open the door and have open dialogue, then my colleagues and I will ensure that they hear every piece of valid criticism on this bill.

This bill is an outright assault on postsecondary education. It represents the overt politicization of research of postsecondaries across Alberta. Inevitably, it will slow down grant funding and force it to go to other researchers outside of this province. As Daniel O'Donnell, a professor at the University of Lethbridge and the president of the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, said, quote, it forces us to not compete on an equal playing field with every other academic, every other researcher, every other scientist. End quote.

The Premier has said that the legislation is needed to keep the federal government's ideologies out of Alberta municipalities and academics. The Premier recently stated that she had, quote, been given enough indication that the federal government uses its power through researchers to only fund certain types of opinions. End quote. Not only is this statement factually untrue; it undermines and devalues the academic integrity of researchers and institutions across this province. It is an incredibly dangerous thing to say in a time of misinformation.

Andrea Dekeseredy, a U of A PhD student in the Department of Sociology, said that the past few years have been very frustrating for graduate students, and she and her research partner wanted to see if the Premier's assertion that the liberal arts are receiving disproportionately more federal grants was in any way factual. So they pulled the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funding data from the past 10 years. Nationally the data shows that this funding overwhelmingly favours disciplines that conduct more individualistic research, and it is psychology research that it dominates. Disciplines that look at more structural issues or that would be considered more, quote, progressive, end quote, are actually sidelined. Even more interesting is that when you break down the numbers by dollar amount, business management receives more funding than traditional social science disciplines like sociology and criminology. Andrea stated that, quote, if the argument for including postsecondary institutions in Bill 18 is that federal funding is being unequally awarded to progressive disciplines, our preliminary data shows that it is not the case. End quote.

Bill 18 has the potential to impact grant funding flowing through tri-agencies, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council as well as the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the new frontiers in research fund. Through these sources faculty and graduate students obtain funding to conduct research in diverse fields that contribute to an array of sectors: health, science, engineering, social sciences and humanities, innovation and insight. Universities across the country sign an agreement with tri-agencies every five years on how to administer the funding. Alberta has two of the country's top universities, and they get the lion's share of this funding.

In each province we pay federal taxes that come to us in many ways, one of which is research funding. This money goes directly

back into the provincial economy. It funds graduate students' and technicians' salaries as well as the purchase of equipment for research. Our institutions get this funding based on merit. They are top universities because they have competed for the country's best faculty members who pull in these federal dollars, and the competition is fierce. Every university wants to increase their share of federal tax dollars. While tri-agencies receive funding from the federal government, the funding is not – I'll repeat: is not – administered by the federal government. In actuality national and international subject matter experts decide how to allocate research dollars after reviewing applications from researchers across the country.

Grants given by the federal government are awarded by arm's-length agencies through a competitive peer review process, and only those deemed the strongest application receive funding. The Premier knows this. She knows that this is a highly rigorous, nonpartisan, peer-reviewed process by which research grants are obtained. It appears that the Premier and her cabinet are once again doing this to showboat, to do all they can to battle with Ottawa, to placate against acceding to the demands of her minority extremist base, and all to the detriment of our internationally renowned postsecondary institutions and municipalities and all Albertans.

Numerous research projects could be at risk of losing access to grants and awards which thousands of research assistants and students rely on to support themselves and their research. It can also limit opportunities for teaching and training. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has stated that Bill 18 "is an unprecedented attack on scientific independence [and] research integrity." They said that this legislation will "violate widely accepted principles of academic freedom that grant university and college academics the freedom to carry out teaching and research without censorship or political interference."

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that Albertans and all Canadians are best served by university and college research that is assessed on its scientific merit and not on political ideology. I would like to make it abundantly clear that the federal government does not direct research. It does not choose the grants that will be funded and which ones will not be funded, contrary to what members opposite may try to suggest. Year after year this UCP government has cut funding for over five years for postsecondary, health care, education, municipal government budgets. They are stifling our province. And now they're sticking their noses, without any evidence whatsoever, into the only option left for funding when they refuse to provide it to Albertans. It's unconscionable. It's playing games with the people's livelihood and with the future of our province.

Bill 18 opens the door to political censorship that has no place in a democratic society such as ours. Instead of focusing on efforts of any sort of policy discussion around the numerous systemic issues Albertans are facing, our provincial political discourse has instead been consumed by superficial infighting, performative policies, and an insidious apathy towards the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. At a time when housing, health care, and education crises continue to reach new peaks, we expect this government to act in the interests of the health of our communities instead of the interests of their egos. It is important to remember that it's members of our communities, those who are most vulnerable, who bear the consequences.

This bill will harm our municipalities, our postsecondary institutions, and so many other public agencies that rely on federal funding because all this government continues to do is slash and burn budgets at the cost of Albertans.

3:30

I cannot in good conscience support Bill 18 as it stands, and I would encourage the members opposite to actually sit down with those who are affected by this bill, to take the time to listen and consult with Albertans before bringing forth such devastating legislation, to listen to and hear what Albertans are saying when they come out with such adamant concerns over Bill 18 and how it will affect them and their ability to serve Albertans.

Our job in here is to put Albertans first and to serve their needs and to listen to them and adapt and change when needed. Then maybe – just maybe – if our government decides to listen, to consult, to show that they're willing to pivot and care for the needs of Albertans, they'll realize that Bill 18 is a big mistake. With all of that, Madam Speaker, I will not support Bill 18.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to address the House on a matter of great significance to the future of our province: Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act, 2024. This legislation tabled by the Premier represents a crucial step in asserting Alberta's autonomy and ensuring that decisions regarding our province's priorities remain firmly within our jurisdiction.

Bill 18 seeks to mandate that provincial entities obtain prior approval from Alberta's government before entering into, amending, extending, or renewing agreements with the federal government. This requirement is not born out of a desire for bureaucracy nor out of any intent to leave federal dollars on the table but, rather, out of a fundamental commitment to safeguarding Alberta's interests and ensuring agreements between provincial entities and the federal government support our provincial priorities.

The importance of this legislation cannot be overstated. It is a response to a troubling trend of federal overreach where decisions made in Ottawa do not always reflect the needs and aspirations of Albertans. By requiring prior approval for intergovernmental agreements, we are taking proactive steps to assert our jurisdiction. While data on federal grants is available to varying degrees and through various sources – and I've mentioned this many times in this House – our government does not have a comprehensive and timely data set, which is why it's important to gather this information. That is why Advanced Education will work with postsecondary institutions and gather that information also to design a sector-specific approach that works best for Alberta.

To address any concerns and ensure a smooth implementation process, we are committed to engaging with postsecondary institutions in a comprehensive and transparent manner, and that has already started. Through these discussions we will seek input on the development of supporting regulations, ensuring the interests of all Albertans are taken into account. It is important to note that this legislation is not about obstructing co-operation or impeding progress. I can't state that strongly enough. On the contrary, it is about fostering a collaborative relationship between Alberta and the federal government, one that respects the principles of federalism and recognizes the distinct needs of our province.

As we have learned more about the 2024 federal budget – and this is very important – we see even more examples of the need for this legislation. Preliminary assessment of the 2024 federal budget indicates that the federal government may reduce or change transfer funding in areas that support labour market development. This is an example of a federal decision that could negatively impact Alberta's priorities.

While I am encouraged to see increased funding in the 2024 federal budget for Indigenous postsecondary education, I do want to ensure that First Nations colleges in Alberta receive their fair share of federal funding. My recent visits to Blue Quills and Maskwacis Cultural College demonstrated the incredible work these institutions do for their communities. It is in all of our interests to see the federal government commit a fair share of funding to First Nation colleges in Alberta.

I understand that there may be questions and concerns about the impact of Bill 18, particularly within the postsecondary education sector. We are committed to addressing these concerns and ensuring that the interests of our universities and colleges are fully taken into account. Public postsecondary institutions play a vital role in driving innovation, research, and economic growth.

I'm pleased to share that last week I participated in a round-table discussion with presidents and representatives from postsecondary institutes across Alberta, and I received tremendous feedback from them. Our discussion was highly productive, with participants sharing thoughtful perspectives on Bill 18 and how it can strengthen postsecondary education and how we can fight for our fair share. We also discussed how we can leverage support from the federal government for the priorities of Albertans and to, again, ensure that we do receive our fair share of federal funding.

Madam Speaker, Alberta is already facing challenges ensuring that federal funding aligns with provincial priorities. We know this. We know that this is a fact. In particular, the recently introduced federal budget fails to provide top-up funding for the labour market transfer agreement, or the LMTA. The LMTA funds labour market development agreement programs and workforce development agreement programs, including foundational learning assistance, which is a very important program in my ministry. With current federal budget projections Advanced Education is facing a 20 per cent reduction in LMTA funding. This would constitute a loss of \$33 million for a program supporting opportunities for Albertans. At a time when governments are investing in workforce development, this is such a puzzling and short-sighted move. For apprenticeship and industry training the federal failure to provide this top-up funding could result in a decrease of \$16 million. That is significant for this program.

Madam Speaker, Albertans in foundational learning programs working to improve their English, attain a high school diploma, or gain in-demand skills are a provincial priority. Albertans entering apprenticeship and industry training, seeking to gain some of the most in-demand skills in our entire economy, are a provincial priority. These are critical programs that help Albertans begin rewarding, life-changing careers.

More foundational learners means more Albertans with job-ready skills. More skilled apprentices means more Albertans who can build the housing, the infrastructure that our rapidly growing province needs and demands. We invite the federal government to join us in supporting foundational learners and apprentices and to join us in supporting the priorities of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, in Alberta we have world-class postsecondary institutions that have garnered international recognition, and we're very proud of them. In fact, just last month the Minister of Technology and Innovation and I announced NATO's decision to name the University of Alberta and SAIT as test centres for DIANA, the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic. This paves the way for both institutions to explore research opportunities and technologies that have civilian and military uses. The decision to expand DIANA test centres to Alberta further solidifies our global reputation as an innovation powerhouse.

It is imperative that any agreements entered into with the federal government reflect the needs and aspirations of our universities,

colleges, and our province, of course. This legislation is not retroactive, meaning that existing agreements will not require provincial approval unless they are amended or come up for renewal. This approach provides stability and continuity for ongoing projects while allowing for greater alignment as we move forward. Additionally, the development of supporting regulations will be informed by comprehensive stakeholder engagement. That is my firm commitment to anybody, through you, Madam Speaker, who may be listening to this today.

This will include discussions with postsecondary institutions to address any specific concerns and ensure a smooth transition process. Again, we have a proven track record in terms of working with the postsecondaries on their priorities, particularly on the international student file, to ensure that we move quickly and seamlessly and with a very nimble approach.

Alberta's postsecondary sector is integral to our province's success, and Bill 18 underscores our commitment to supporting its continued growth and excellence. By working collaboratively with our universities and colleges, we can ensure that federal funding serves the best interests of Albertans while contributing to a thriving knowledge economy.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, Bill 18 represents a crucial opportunity for Alberta to assert its autonomy and ensure that decisions regarding our province's future are made by those who know it best, the people of Alberta. I urge all members of this House to support this important piece of legislation as we work together to secure a bright and prosperous future for our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

3:40

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act. This bill has the potential to negatively impact all Albertans. The implications will be felt in advanced education; education; health; infrastructure; housing; jobs, economy, and trade; technology and innovation; mental health and addiction; municipal affairs; transportation and economic corridors; agriculture and forestry; culture and status of women; seniors; energy; public safety; emergency preparedness.

Madam Speaker, I'll begin my comments on how this bill could potentially immediately impact our economy. On top of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act, passed by our Premier when our Premier took office, this bill adds to what investors do not want, uncertainty. Bill 18 strikes at research and supports to researchers and students working for tech and innovation companies. With venture capital in Alberta waning last year, now is not the time for technology companies to be giving pause to their investments here in Alberta. One of the greatest strengths of our province has been our ability to generate research, translate research into innovations, and commercialize those innovations into new products and companies. We have done that across sectors, from energy to agriculture, forestry, health, and life sciences.

We have heard the rhetoric from this government about Alberta getting its fair share in research funding. Madam Speaker, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are among the top five research institutions in Canada. These institutions have sponsored research budgets on par with larger institutions such as the University of British Columbia and McGill. What exactly would the Minister of Advanced Education consider to be our fair share? How does the minister expect that the Premier's office reviewing every research grant would result in Alberta's postsecondaries receiving more research funding from the federal government?

We've heard the rhetoric that the government feels this bill is necessary so Albertans know what research dollars are being received by our research institutions and the kind of research that is being done. Madam Speaker, as we know, this information is already in the public domain and is searchable. If the Minister of Advanced Education wanted to know this information, she could simply google it. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada all have online searchable databases. We have heard from the Premier the real reason for this bill: to ensure our postsecondary institutions are conducting the research the Premier wants them to conduct, to ensure our postsecondary researchers reinforce the Premier's narrative.

Madam Speaker, pursuing this presents a real risk to Alberta's economy. Collectively, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, two institutions alone out of 26, attract over \$500 million in federal tricouncil research funding each year. Together these two institutions alone generate an annual economic impact of \$36 billion. Earlier today I tabled economic impact studies showing that sponsored research is critical in enhancing Alberta's productivity and economic growth over time. These studies show that the research budgets for the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary generate \$16.4 billion in annual economic impact. That's billion with a "b."

Madam Speaker, I took a moment to look at some of the research being conducted with federal dollars to see what the Premier and the government would be reviewing in approving these dollars for use by Alberta-based researchers. As an example, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research collaborated with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, funding a project entitled development and clinical efficacies and an innovative quantitative intraoperative C-arm system. This research will look into additional uses of the C-arm system used in surgeries in order to improve patient care, potentially reducing the need for multiple X-rays being conducted prior to an operation. I'd like to remind the Minister of Advanced Education that I found this study as an example by researching and looking through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research searchable database.

With Bill 18 I wonder: who in the government will be reviewing this research application? Who in the government will be qualified to review this grant application, that has already been peer reviewed and approved by experts in the field? I wonder: does the minister have someone on staff with expertise in the intraoperative C-arm system?

Member Kayande: Would the member accept an intervention?

Mr. Ellingson: Yes.

Member Kayande: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I have the privilege of having been an NSERC summer research associate at the University of Alberta many, many, many years ago. It was, like, an incredibly amazing and formative experience in my life. I was working with professors who'd worked on doing oil sands research that eventually led to the miracle that is steam-assisted gravity drainage and the amazing impact on the economy. From a personal perspective I also learned that I was most definitely not set up to work in a university for the rest of my life. You know, if I had been a better summer research associate, I would probably not be standing here in front of you today in this House as I would have become a PhD and probably not be very good at that.

Mr. McIver: Never got around to asking a question.

Member Kayande: Yeah. Sorry. But my question is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Time is up. Sorry.

Mr. Ellingson: I hope that maybe the question was getting at, like, the value of being a summer student through NSERC grants. I think we have ample evidence of the benefits to both students and companies, how students are gaining valuable research, applying what they have learned in their academic setting into a business setting and understanding, you know, that what they have brought from their academic setting might improve the productivity of the company. It might advance the research that's being conducted at that company. It might result in new ways of doing the work. It might result in new products being generated. The student, then, is launching their career. Maybe you could have even become a start-up after that summer intern experience. That company might have realized incredible gains in moving forward because of your summer student experience.

You know, it's interesting. I'll segue that into something else that I wanted to talk about. I'll try and remember to delete it later. But one of the federal programs that potentially would now be reviewed with Bill 18 is the Mitacs program, where the federal government provides funding for companies to hire researchers, for students who are in academic programs to be funded to work within companies to advance the research and discoveries that are happening within those companies. This gives, of course, students much-needed revenue to continue their studies and survive in a world where cost of living is out of control. But, more importantly, it gives them, again, that real-world application of the academic experiences that they're bringing with them. You know, heaven forbid that through Bill 18 this is program funding that would be at risk, whether or not it would be approved with the passing of Bill 18.

3:50

I'd like to go back to the example before the intervention. The project that I was talking about is a collaboration of researchers from the University of Calgary and the University of British Columbia. How can we be sure that other institutions won't decline collaborative research projects with Alberta, knowing that they might invest considerable time and effort writing a research grant only to have the government of Alberta deny funding to the Alberta-based researchers? This project also works with the private sector, the manufacturers of the C-arm system, to learn about modifications to the system and new applications for the system, potentially generating new market opportunities. Of course, at the time of submitting the grant they don't know what those new opportunities might be, what lies ahead of us. But perhaps with Bill 18 the government of Alberta does, and only those ideas with the greatest market potential will be approved.

Madam Speaker, these research grants and other federal dollars support Innovate Calgary, W21C, SAIT applied research and innovation services, and similar programs across all 26 of Alberta's postsecondary institutions, all of them conducting and supporting pure and applied research that might result in innovations and commercialization opportunities for Alberta companies, Alberta companies like Orpyx, a Calgary-based company that constructs shoe insoles to gather data for diabetic clients, helping them diagnose peripheral neuropathy and detecting foot ulcers that lead to 85 per cent of amputations for diabetic clients.

Madam Speaker, when research studies are crafted, the researchers don't yet know the answers. We don't yet know the opportunities that lie ahead of us. How can this government presume to say they know those answers and that they are so equipped to say which research projects should be approved for funding and should proceed?

Madam Speaker, the potential damage from Bill 18 goes further. The federal government also funds work-integrated learning programs for postsecondary institutions. I happen to know this one intimately because when I was working at Calgary Economic Development, we were successful in receiving a grant from the federal government to work with postsecondary institutions to advance work-integrated learning across the entire Calgary region, not just the city of Calgary.

Work-integrated learning program funding supports placements that further the professional development of students. This funding supports businesses in hiring students, potentially enhancing the productivity of their workplaces. When I was at Calgary Economic Development and we were talking about this work-integrated learning program, we talked a lot about where students are getting their work experience. We talked a lot about how large corporations do have, like, institutional practices in place and partnerships with departments at universities and other postsecondaries to recruit summer students. They had an active recruiting process for students, seeking out the best and brightest for their companies.

But when we look at small and medium enterprises, they didn't necessarily have the institutional mechanisms in place. Funding through this work-integrated learning project worked with small and medium enterprises to support them in creating those institutional infrastructures so that they, too, could participate in seeking out the best and brightest from the postsecondary students in our province.

It also worked within the postsecondary institutions, understanding that it's not just students from engineering or business or perhaps health applications that have something to contribute to the business environment, but in fact students who are coming from the social sciences also have valuable insights to provide to businesses. Without that work-integrated learning program with the additional supports for students to be hired by those companies, we're losing out on so many opportunities. The federal government is supporting apprenticeship placements for students at our polytechnics and at our colleges. All of this the government of Alberta is willing to put at risk to advance their fight with Ottawa.

The University of Calgary proudly announces year after year that they're home to more start-ups than any other university in Canada. Research leads to the innovation, the commercialization, and the creation of these start-up companies. Intervening in that process, potentially putting up blockages to the University of Calgary receiving those research grants, could directly result in fewer start-ups from the University of Calgary and our other institutions, limiting the opportunities for technology and innovation here in Alberta.

The Minister of Technology and Innovation proudly announces that Alberta is a leading clean tech hub in North America. It's true. We are a leading clean tech hub in North America. But, again, because research at our institutions leads to the advancements in clean technologies for those start-ups to be created and for our ecosystem to grow . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act. I have had the opportunity for a few days now to listen to the debate back and forth. It's interesting. As the NDP opposition has shown their opposition to this bill, they've often talked about how this would have caused concern and problems for postsecondary

institutions. Quite extensively they've talked about that and other things as well.

But I wanted to just maybe address that issue right now. I want to start out, Madam Speaker, by talking about the preamble in this bill. It says, "Whereas the Government of Canada has entered into agreements with provincial entities that relate to areas of provincial jurisdiction without the involvement of the Government of Alberta." Now, one of the questions that has to be asked is: has that happened? There is ample evidence to show that that has happened.

My concern is that the people of Alberta have been saying for many years now that enough is enough. We have disproportionately funded the federal government to the tune of about \$20 billion a year, that leaves this province and goes to other jurisdictions through the federal government to buy votes in eastern Canada. This is the reality of what's been going on, and Albertans have put up with it for long enough. Some estimates show that there's about \$640 billion that has left this province – \$640 billion – Madam Speaker. What could we have done with \$640 billion? How many schools could we have built? How many hospitals could we have built? How many roads could we have built? What kind of infrastructure could we have developed out? How many new start-up companies could have benefited through Invest Alberta and Alberta Innovates, two great programs we have here in Alberta?

I believe that with this bill, Madam Speaker, Albertans are telling the federal government to allocate Alberta's per capita share of federal tax dollars for housing, roads, and infrastructure, and if this continues to be denied, we will be launching a constitutional challenge on that matter in which the federal government is unconstitutionally abusing the federal spending power for purely political purposes.

It's interesting. As I listened to the NDP speak, I was thinking of a saying that says: what cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly. I find it interesting that the NDP are the champions for our federal government. I was thinking: well, why aren't they champions for Albertans? Why are they not championing Albertans' cause here? I guess the reason that is is because the NDP federally, which is their boss, have come the closest they will ever come in this country to forming government as the partner to Justin Trudeau's Liberal government.

Now, what are they partnering on, Madam Speaker? What they're partnering on is taking money from Alberta without giving us our due in terms of the per capita that we deserve.

Now, how does that affect us? Well, first of all, Madam Speaker, as you know, I represent a riding in southern Alberta. In my riding, in Taber, there is a company by the name of Lantic Sugar. We probably know them as Rogers Sugar. Now, Rogers Sugar is the only factory in Canada that produces sugar through sugar beets.

4:00

Every year on April Fool's Day, which they find ironic, they give me a call and they say: "How much are we going to be charged today from the federal government? How much more are we going to be taxed on a product on which we can't decide what the price is going to be, because we are price takers, not price makers, when it comes to sugar?" It's an international product. That price is determined internationally. Every year I get a call: what's the number going to be this year?

As you know, it went up to \$85 a tonne. It's going to go to \$170 a tonne. I have them saying to me: "How can we compete against cane sugar that comes into this province? How can we keep this great Canadian institution going with this kind of punitive carbon tax that continues to hammer us?" As you know, Madam Speaker, there's no carbon tax to the south. China does not have a carbon tax. India does not have a carbon tax. Brazil doesn't have a carbon tax.

All of our competitors in the BRIC nations do not have a carbon tax. How does that help Alberta and Alberta jobs? It doesn't.

Now, there's another saying that I think is also pertinent to this debate, and that is the golden rule, which is: he who has the gold makes the rules. I know that's not the golden rule that maybe you and I remember, but that is probably the most true situation here. We send a disproportionate amount of our taxes out through income tax, corporate tax, carbon tax, and numerous other taxes that leave to the federal government. CPP is another one that goes to the federal government. Then how much do we get back?

Now, if you take a look at the Constitution, Madam Speaker, the Constitution is quite clear. Provincial and federal jurisdiction is clearly articulated, enumerated in the Constitution. The federal government takes the money, and then all the stuff that we have to do – health care, which is 50 per cent of our budget; education; postsecondary education – is provincial jurisdiction. When we have all of those things happening where we have to pay for these things and the federal government doesn't transfer the money back that we need, how are we supposed to be able to provide those important things that the NDP continue to talk about us providing for, which is postsecondary education? We can't.

I want to finish with an important point, and that is: why would we trust the federal government and the NDP coalition? In the last budget they added \$40 billion in terms of deficit onto the already hundreds of billions in terms of the debt that they have, that they've saddled Albertans and Canadians with. We wouldn't want to trust them. But you know what they say? Hindsight is 20/20 vision, Madam Speaker.

Did you know that in the 1950s Detroit was actually the richest city in America and by some accounts the richest city in the world? In Detroit they say that 2 out of every 3 vehicles that were created were created right there in Detroit. They had the world by the tail. Actually, as of December 3, 2013, Detroit declared bankruptcy. It went from the top to the bottom. How did that happen? In fact, it was an \$18.5 billion debt that they were going to renege on. Now, I can tell you how that happened. It happened because of bad policy, because of no vision, because they got away from what really makes societies great: strong economies; good, strong families; making sure that you have good work and employment through entrepreneurial work. They got away from that winning formula, and that's the reason why in 2013 they had an \$18.5 billion debt that they couldn't service. Our federal government is doing the exact same thing to us.

I have to ask the question: why would we not have a Provincial Priorities Act, that shows that we've done very well in this province? Other than the four years that we had the NDP in, we've done very well. We had no debt, Madam Speaker, and the NDP added \$80 billion of debt. The federal government continues to add to the debt. Why would we go with a failed policy, a failed strategy versus our own strategy? I think our strategy through Bill 18, which is the Provincial Priorities Act, is the right thing for our children, for our grandchildren, and for all Albertans. That's why I will be supporting this, and I hope that all members in this House will support it as well.

With that, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 11

Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I seek speakers to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak in regard to Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Let's get something cleared up just right off the top. Contrary to what members opposite have suggested, I do not want to defund the police, nor will even the deepest dive on the Internet suggest that I do. I think that very likely most, if not all, of the members on this side would produce the same.

Law enforcement provides an absolutely essential service in our communities, and I am immensely thankful for the challenging and complex work that they do. I have both police officers with the CPD and RCMP officers in my close circle of family friends, and I know that their work is not easy. Like so many people on the front lines, they simply want to go to work every day with the adequate and appropriate resources they need to do a good day's work and then go home safely at the end of their shift.

Even so, I will not be supporting Bill 11, and I'm pleased to provide the reasons here today. Let's start with the electronic monitoring element of the bill. As I've already mentioned, our top priority should be resourcing the hard-working men and women providing policing services in Alberta appropriately, and certainly electronic monitoring can help in that process. In that case, I'm all for it.

[Mr. Wiebe in the chair]

Electronic monitoring has been something this government has been promising to do for some time. It was a commitment in the 2019 campaign platform, so four and a half years later we finally see this taking place. Better late than never, Mr. Chair. But this delay really must have added a great level of stress and anxiety and real risk to victims, who, I hope, can now breathe a little bit easier once it actually is put into place.

We know that cases of domestic violence and assault have a significant component of intimidation and stalking behaviour, where proximity or the threat of mere proximity between a perpetrator and a victim can perpetuate the victimization and abuse. It's high time we take a much closer and more thorough analysis of the ways in which violence can continue in our communities and that a more thorough response be provided in turn. I hope that electronic monitoring can be a part of the solution, and for that reason it's not the component that I take umbrage with today.

What I do take issue with, though, is the second and larger part of Bill 11, which ostensibly facilitates the creation of an Alberta police force. This is something the UCP explicitly said that they would not pursue. Just like their obsession with an Alberta pension plan, this government insists on spending taxpayer dollars to pursue pet projects that nobody wants, Mr. Chair. Goodness, not that long ago it was not even clear that it's what the UCP wanted.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

Neither the mandate letter to the Minister of Justice nor to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services gave direction to create a provincial police force. In budget '24-25 there were no financial resources assigned for this endeavour, yet here we are staring down Bill 11, Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act.

4:10

The flip-flopping on this issue has been going on for years, creating uncertainty and disruption for those working in enforcement and acting

as a distraction while the real needs of various law enforcement entities in big cities and rural hamlets and everything in between remain underresourced. That's what people have been asking for, Madam Chair: appropriate resources to fund what already is in place, not to create something brand new. It's been very clear that a provincial police force is not what people are asking for.

But don't take my word for it. In April 2022 the Rural Municipalities of Alberta issued a statement: "The RMA Formally Opposes the Creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service." The statement points to the potential for the existing RCMP to work with local communities "to expand local input on policing priorities." It points to the failure by the government of Alberta "to demonstrate why [a provincial police force] is necessary to achieve improved policing outcomes and how it will do so."

It reminds me of the conversation that I had with a constituent just this weekend, Madam Chair, about the kind of knee-jerk, panicked reactions that corporations and organizations tend to have. That reaction is just to restructure: "Things aren't going great, so we'll restructure. What could go wrong?" But rarely does that restructure benefit the people working within the organization, and furthermore rarely does the restructuring actually address the underlying issues that created this panic in the first place. That is precisely what is happening.

I mean, it kind of tracks. Let's look at the other ways that this government has decided to restructure rather than actually addressing the systemic issues. Much like this government's \$85 million, two-year health care reorganization, Bill 11 suggests that we embark on a costly time- and resource-intensive restructure that does not address the systemic deficiencies within the system, nor does it, frankly, address the systemic deficiencies within the government to hear Albertans on the issues that genuinely matter to them.

This government has a serious action bias, Madam Chair. Now, sometimes we need an action bias. For example, there are several evacuations happening in Alberta as we speak and debate this issue in Chambers as a result of wildfires. In this case, action bias is good. We need to take action now to keep communities safe and protected from the wildfire season, that has already begun and that is going to rage right through the summer. But this government tends to take a ready, fire, aim approach, often informed by nothing more than ideology and shoddy rationale to support it. That can be extremely expensive, like, say, \$80 million for off-brand Tylenol that nobody can use, or it can cause unnecessary disruption in the provision and delivery of services to Albertans like policing and law enforcement.

But, again, don't take my word for it. A *Calgary Herald* article from April 2023 reports that "a majority of Albertans disagree with the idea of creating a provincial police force to replace the RCMP," sharing poll results that "in all, 58 per cent of respondents say they disagree with replacing the RCMP in communities currently policed by the federal officers, compared to only 21 per cent who support the idea." And in case the members opposite want to claim that that's just a bunch of woke NDP urbanites who don't understand rural communities, the same article reports that "among those living outside of the Calgary and Edmonton metro areas – the respondents most likely to live in communities currently served by the RCMP – only one-in-five support the idea." So, taken as a whole, the province does not support this move. When we look exclusively at those areas outside of Calgary and Edmonton, well, they also don't support this move.

I think it's worth noting the date of the article for this *Calgary Herald* piece, Madam Chair. April 4, 2023, was just seven weeks before the general election. Polling showed clearly that this was a meaningfully unpopular idea, so Albertans didn't hear about it on the doors from UCP candidates, and it was not a campaign commitment. Yet here we are about a year later, and the UCP is

once again pursuing something that they were not given a mandate to do.

One more example, Madam Chair. Just last week a CBC article highlighted the good work taking place by the Fort McMurray 468 First Nation to provide for the safety of its members in the context of drug use and drug trafficking. The article highlighted the collaboration under way with the local RCMP detachment to support these efforts. Now, based on the feedback of those interviewed, this arrangement holds good, positive potential to address the community's concerns around safety, drug activity, and violence.

This is exactly the kind of local policing that could be taking place if the stakeholders involved were actually resourced and permitted to do so; rather, this government chooses to pursue an endeavour that nobody else has really asked for, which I think highlights a really an important part that this Bill 11, the – I've forgotten the name now; it's a bit of a mouthful – Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act does not take into consideration, and that is the importance of trust in policing relationships, especially when it comes to areas outside of urban centres.

For many communities, whether they be Indigenous, newcomer, racialized, or marginalized, building trusting relationships takes time, especially – especially – with law enforcement. In some cases it takes a lot of time. It is to the detriment of communities, large and small, urban and rural, that government underestimates the cost of rebuilding those relationships. Those relationships as they currently stand are with the RCMP, which I think is partly why Albertans have spoken out so strongly against the creation of an Alberta police force. There are relationships, certainly, that could use some improvement. You know, no thing is perfect in this particular set of conversations, but goodness knows that it takes time and it takes resourcing, and trust is a fundamental piece of the equation.

I'd like to reference the invaluable comments actually made by my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday on this very issue that I think bear repeating. As an Indigenous person standing in these Chambers, he shared the following:

The Police Act has had provisions within its current iteration since 2020 to enable the province to assist First Nations and Métis settlements to develop police services within their territories, further stating,

we're also missing the other crucial piece of the puzzle, which has always been enforcement. To date the RCMP and, certainly, provincial fish and wildlife officers and sheriffs have not occupied the field of enforcement, and neither have Crown prosecutors on anything on-reserve.

There is great potential for the relationships that can be forged with the existing stakeholder groups as they currently stand. An Alberta police force is not going to be the kind of magic wand that can be waved over some of these communities and expect for everything else to just get better, like we should just trust that that should be the case. Rather, we should actually look at the proven records, we should look at the current behaviour, and we should look at the potential and good practice that's already being put in place so that we can ensure that every single Albertan is feeling safe in their communities and that issues are being addressed as promptly as we deserve.

In closing, Madam Chair, unfortunately, an Alberta police force, that Bill 11 facilitates, eclipses the potential positive impacts of the electronic monitoring ankle bracelets. Albertans have spoken out. They have made it clear they have said no to this legislation. They have said no to removing the RCMP. They have said yes to safety, to equity in justice and enforcement, to timely responses to property crime, to violence, to public disturbances. I cannot support this fair

deal pet project of Bill 11 since it does not assure the adequate resourcing of policing entities that Albertans have rightly asked for.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Onward.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. But before we go there, I want to start by acknowledging the wonderful work police officers do in Alberta. I want to thank them for their service, for their dedication, for their sacrifice, for putting their lives on the line to do their jobs.

While I do not have family members who work in the police service, my brother trained with the British Royal Navy in the United Kingdom. He was then sent to work in the Red Sea to combat terrorism, piracy, trafficking of all types, and to help combat the unrest along the waters of the Red Sea. He told us many stories, Madam Chair. I listened to the hard stories, the bad stories, the ugly stories, and the beautiful stories. The work that goes into keeping us safe is very hard; Bill 11, however, is not about any of the above. Let's call it what it is: it's about creating an Alberta police force that the government wants to do.

4:20

We are not sure why the UCP is doing this. Who did they talk to? In fact, why did the government not consult with the sheriffs and the National Police Federation? Did the UCP talk to municipalities? Municipalities have made it loud and clear: they do not want an Alberta police force. You see, Madam Chair, the UCP cut funding for municipalities, which meant less resources for public safety and for social support. Rural Alberta needs to feel safe and included, and when the government cuts funding, we can see why folks in rural communities might feel less safe.

Madam Chair, this Alberta police force idea came from the Fair Deal Panel, so I actually revisited this report. I was very interested in, "Who did the panel engage with? Who did they talk to?" especially as the UCP keeps telling us that it is rural Alberta that needs more police. Appendix E of the Fair Deal Panel shows the respondents. Let's look at the demographics of the survey, shall we? The total sample is 34,081 people. According to the government of Alberta's website as of January 1, 2024, Alberta's population was 4,800,768 people. Then, as we look closer, the respondents from Edmonton and the surrounding region are 27 per cent. From Calgary and surrounding region: that's 39 per cent. Then there's 17 per cent who filled the survey and did not disclose where they came from. So, to be clear, the survey sample is tiny, without clear survey best practices to make such a costly decision on taxpayer money.

Most importantly, the majority of the respondents for this Fair Deal Panel survey come from urban areas, and a big number did not even disclose their location. That's a total of 88 per cent. Yet the UCP is telling us that rural communities are saying they need more policing. Madam Chair, the minister of community services rose in the House and talked about urban privilege in decision-making. This type of government decision-making based on questionable small data sets from urban areas to inform decisions for rural communities is the embodiment of urban privilege. The hypocrisy of this government continues, and it's not escaping anyone.

All the UCP could have done is actually talk to people, ask and consult, and they will know what rural communities want. Why did the government not consult with the sheriffs and the National Police Federation? Why did the UCP not consult with rural communities? Rural Alberta does not want an Alberta police force. An online survey in February, sponsored by the University of Lethbridge – it's the Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy – along with the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, RMA, shows a distinct

lack of support for the creation of a provincial police force among rural Albertans. Surprise, surprise: the majority of respondents from rural Alberta disagreed with the idea of Alberta having its own police service. This is a recent survey. The majority of respondents reported having a high level of trust in the RCMP and felt that police funding should be maintained. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the police are doing a good or an excellent job.

I have a quote from the president of the rural municipalities association, RMA, Paul McLaughlin.

At the end of the day, our priority is safe rural communities. The RMA and its members support the work of the RCMP to address rural crime and don't see any need for a fundamental change to how policing is delivered. The results of this survey show that individual rural Albertans share a similar view.

Madam Chair, this poll confirms what we've been hearing from Albertans across the province: they do not want an Alberta provincial police force. Yet this Premier and the UCP continue to ignore Albertans and push ahead with a new police force. Why is the UCP imposing their own urban privilege and wanting to form a police force for rural communities? Who is this for? Curious.

Not only that; this is a very expensive adventure, Madam Chair. The UCP government commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers, who said that the cost of transitioning from the RCMP would be at least \$366 million, and the province would lose the \$170 million in funding it receives from the federal government.

Alberta will also lose the support that the RCMP receives. I actually reviewed the PWC report, the one the government commissioned. It confirms that the RCMP is supported by key administrative functions, including finance, human resources, corporate services, and administrative services, and the RCMP has established these functional areas as shared services with shared teams, business processes, and IT systems. The government-commissioned report also confirms that there are specific shared functions with human resources that have divisional human resources functions dedicated to the RCMP in Alberta. Other shared services that have dedicated services within Alberta include informatics and real property management. So how does the UCP plan to compensate for all these services and pay for the shared services that benefit our province?

Now, we assume that the government-commissioned report includes valid estimates for the transition costs to establish the Alberta police force. These estimates include, over six years, \$241 million in operating costs and \$125 million in capital. Together this is a net cost of \$366 million. On an annual basis this equates to \$366 million per year over six years. We also assume that we will lose Ottawa's share of policing costs at \$170 million annually. So over a six-year period the supplemental operating costs are \$1.02 billion. To recap, because that's a lot of numbers, and simply put, over the six-year period to fully establish an Alberta provincial police force, it will cost taxpayers \$1.386 billion – that's a "b"; billions – and on an annual basis it will cost \$231 million.

Actually, my question, Madam Chair: where are the fiscal conservatives? They are nowhere to be found in this UCP caucus. Why is this even happening? This is fiscal mismanagement. I cannot believe how this UCP government is okay with wasting all this money. In fact, it seems a question that many people have, including Innisfail RCMP Staff Sergeant Ian Ihme, who was caught off guard with the minister's announcement and said, quote: "I am not really sure why the government is doing this. It seems like they are laying the framework for a new police agency, but then in the same breath they're also saying it's not to replace current police agencies. I just don't know how that works. I don't understand how multiple layers of police bureaucracy helps anything. My gut feeling, I guess, is that this is just them making steps of preparations for a provincial police service." End quote.

4:30

Madam Chair, this is UCP chaos. No prior consultations and no engagement with stakeholders, again, as they did with their ill-conceived moratorium on renewables without consulting the business community or renewable companies or generators. No, this government did not consult on an economic impact analysis in rural communities before banning a thriving industry from developing multibillion-dollar renewable energy projects in our province.

And it's not just renewables, Madam Chair. We have seen their inadequate public consultation with the so-called Alberta pension plan. Even the board of the Canada pension plan had to step in and say that Alberta's consultation with its citizens on quitting the Canada pension plan is not a straightforward fact-finding exercise but, rather, a biased manipulation of public opinion.

We're witnessing a concerning pattern here from this UCP government. The UCP comes up with costly ideas that add layers of bureaucracy and redundancy in our province. It is the red tape government, and I'm not sure where the so-called red tape ministry is. It needs to start doing its job and stop this constant red tape.

I cannot support Bill 11. This is another wild, costly, and unnecessary proposal happening without consultations with stakeholders and impacted communities. There are widespread calls for fundamental changes in the way we think about and implement community safety. We absolutely need policing in our community while also implementing a wide range of community safety solutions. It's certainly not creating another police force. I will not be voting for Bill 11.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I was hoping that we would be able to adjourn debate in Committee of the Whole on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12 Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I seek speakers to the bill. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move an amendment to Bill 12, the Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024.

The Chair: Perfect. Just wait until I have a copy, and I will provide further instructions.

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

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

Mr. Lundy: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. As you may know, last week the Premier and Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction sat down with the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society. One of the things discussed was the order in which entrance fees are returned once the legislation is in effect. Leaseholders raised concerns that multiple queues may be created where operators may potentially return entrance fees on new lease terminations earlier than those already in the existing queue.

Therefore, I wish to move the following amendment where the bill is amended as follows. Section 3 is amended (a) in the proposed

section 41.2 by adding "and (4)" after "section 41.4(3)", (b) in the proposed section 41.4 by adding the following after subsection (3):

- (4) Nothing in this section affects any provisions in a
 - (a) life lease,
 - (b) lease terminated before the coming into force of this Part that is substantially similar to a life lease, or
 - (c) lease subsisting on the coming into force of this Part that is substantially similar to a life lease,

respecting the order in which entrance fees are to be returned.

It is important to clarify, Madam Chair, that the proposed amendments are not intended to interfere with any contractual provisions regarding the order in which entrance fees are returned. This confirms this legislation is not intended to prioritize the return of entrance fees for new contract terminations over the return of entrance fees for those already in the queue. Entrance fees for new terminations are to be returned within 180 days. However, this requirement does not change the order of fee return as per the terms of the applicable contractual documents.

Specifically, I propose adding section 41.4 to address order of entrance fee return with a consequential amendment to section 41.2. Again, this new subsection would clarify that nothing within this section affects any provision related to repayment order within a life lease or substantially similar contract entered into before the coming into force of Bill 12. Including this amendment would further clarify that the act is not intended to interfere with the order of return of entrance fees but strives to ensure the expedient return of entrance fees to those affected.

I welcome your consideration of my proposed amendment. With that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Real Property Governance Act

The Chair: Are there members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I rise today in opposition to Bill 13, Real Property Governance Act. Now, I don't know about you, but before I go grocery shopping, it's important to know what's in my kitchen. Do I need milk, bread? What's the status of our vegetables and fruit? You know, can those sad squash make it another week? These are questions I'm sure we all ask ourselves, and it makes sense because before we gather inventory, adding to it or removing it, it's really important to know what you have.

How does this relate to Bill 13? Well, on first look this bill brings up some reasonable considerations. Just like grocery shopping, it makes sense that Albertans should have a list of public resources, allowing for inventory changes as appropriate. Now, this is where things get a little sneaky. Bill 13 goes further and then dictates that the Minister of Infrastructure would have the final say on whether Alberta buys, say, more squash or sells it to their friends, and that's a problem, Madam Chair.

This UCP government has a terrible record of making promises to Albertans and then pushing them off, sometimes indefinitely, with little explanation or consideration to what those broken promises mean to the lives of Albertans. Albertans simply don't trust the UCP government to put their priorities ahead of their own, so why should Albertans trust this government with critical publicly owned items?

Well, paraphrasing the MacKinnon report, which, of course, was the birthplace of this sneaky bill, a bill such as Bill 13 would provide an opportunity to the government to sell off surplus as an

offset to other costs. No mention of what would be considered in making this decision about what exactly is surplus. In other words, even if Albertans said they wanted to keep the squash, use its seeds, and grow their own food, for instance, or for, say, a school's nutrition program, which is also highly needed but for a debate another day, with this bill the government could simply sell the squash off without any buy-in or real consideration of what Albertans, who had the squash to begin with, want.

4:40

Now, Bill 13 isn't the first time Albertans have heard musing from this government about how they would love to have control. Yes. Control. They want to have control of what they deem surplus property, bypassing the current owners and doing as they please. An example: of course, currently inside the school boards the responsibility of whether properties are surplus or will be used is in their hands. In other words, a school board, with best insight into understanding the needs of their student population, anticipated growth, and needs of the schools, is best equipped to make the immediate decisions and do long-term planning that is in the best interest of their organization and the people it serves. The school board is empowered to make these decisions as they are the experts for their school. They know what is needed, making them the perfect group to make these incredibly important decisions, especially given the situation inside our education system right now: classroom overcrowding, increasing complexity of needs, and so on. Again, something to be debated another day.

But it gets better. Sticking to the school board example, this bill takes away power from the school boards over the very property required to perform their duties in supporting Albertan children. This bill allows the government, specifically the Infrastructure minister, to decide whether or not the school board gets rid of or acquires something else. Now, of course, this would make a little bit more sense if it, say, went to the Minister of Education, who presumably has current understanding of the portfolio and therefore the needs of our school system. But – alas – in Bill 13 it goes to the Infrastructure minister.

So is that not just adding in another group to inform, i.e. more red tape, more hoops to jump through? Certainly, for school boards, as they try to plan without actually knowing what property they will have at the end of the day, let alone the funds, should there be any, from selling off any of this surplus. If the Minister of Infrastructure sells off school property, will our education system get a cut of the funds acquired, or will this be yet another cut to our education system? Further, this bill goes even further, where the government will no longer transfer ownership to hospitals, schools, et cetera – i.e., the group operating them – meaning that the group who is using the property will have to jump through more hoops, more red tape for decision-making for the property and, at the end of the day, no real say in what happens to it.

This bill follows a pattern we've seen in this 31st Legislature. We have a UCP government who continues to put forward bills such as this one, where the only winner is the government themselves, and Albertans are shafted. The UCP government war with Ottawa appears to continue to prioritize their needs over the needs of Albertans, which is rich given that this UCP government likes to yell and scream about federal government overreach, and here they are doing the same thing, interfering with municipal jurisdiction and school board autonomy. This bill punts away the freedom of Albertans and lands it right into the laps of the UCP government. Again, interesting given this UCP government is all about freedom and choice. Maybe that's only for some Albertans.

Let's be real, Madam Chair. No one is an expert in all things, and this UCP government has certainly demonstrated holes in their understanding, which a rational person would then rectify by

seeking out expert opinion. Unfortunately, there seems to be a debate on exactly who the experts are. Albertans are tired of this UCP government poking at everyone else's jobs. Maybe if they stopped punting the experienced experts, they could focus on their job of providing and supporting Albertans because the needs are large, and Albertans need a government focused on making Albertan lives better, not shifting power to themselves.

A story, Madam Chair, from Calgary-Acadia, where there was a school located in the beautiful community of Kingsland. This school was closed to students in 2007. It was used as an admin location until about 2020. This school was located on municipal school reserved land, so once the school closed entirely, the city took back ownership and then later determined that the building was no longer safe and has since demolished it. Now, this is a story of co-operation because the municipality was directly connected to the community, worked with the local community association to plan and brainstorm next steps because this community wanted to leverage this closure and make the best of it. The site might be used to bring vibrancy and an increased sense of community. This site might be an outdoor garden space, play space, or even a disc Frisbee course.

If Bill 13 should move forward, vibrant, engaged communities across the province will be stunted, blocked, and will have to jump through unnecessary hoops and struggle through additional red tape. This bill does not make sense for Albertans. I encourage all members to vote against it.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Madam Chair, thank you. I rise today to speak against Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. It is important that publicly owned lands and buildings are managed in a transparent manner. However, Albertans have lost faith in this government and do not trust this government to appropriately manage land and buildings that are currently managed by school boards.

Local school boards have the decision-making ability to manage lands and buildings in their jurisdiction. Local school boards spend a great deal of time and energy generating capital plans to understand and evaluate the life stages of all of their schools: student enrolment growth, demand for new programming, needs across the entire system of their school board. Local school boards utilize these capital plans in determining the future use of land and buildings, promoting an infrastructure list to the province for schools that need refurbishment, repurposing, or new schools that need to be constructed in those areas.

Bill 13 will require school boards to categorize land and buildings as underutilized or surplus. This is particularly concerning for the residents of Calgary-Foothills. The lands that are allocated for future school construction are of grave concern for the residents of Calgary-Foothills. In the communities of Sherwood, Kincora, Nolan Hill, and Sage Hill there is currently one Catholic school, in Sherwood. Madam Chair, there are lands allocated in each of these communities designated for school construction, lands allocated to both the Calgary Catholic school district and the Calgary board of education, lands that the residents of Calgary-Foothills expect to be for schools.

Madam Chair, when they purchased their homes, they were told that these lands would be used for schools and that they could expect a school to be built in their neighbourhood. The residents of Calgary-Foothills are frustrated that those lands remain empty and are not being used for school construction. In fact, I have had many conversations with constituents, conversations on their doorsteps where they literally pointed down the street to an empty field and

expressed their exasperation that there was no school on that land, parents who had children standing beside them when they were saying this: when I bought this home, this child was not yet born, and I thought that there would be a school on that land. That child is now eight years old.

They are frustrated that their children are being bused, along with 8,000 other children from Calgary-Foothills, to schools all across the northern half of Calgary, kids in primary and elementary school who are being bused from the very northern edge of Calgary to Montgomery and Bowness.

The story will be repeating itself in the new community of Glacier Ridge, the newest community in Calgary-Foothills. When I became a candidate prior to the election, there were no doors to knock in Glacier Ridge. Today there are hundreds of homes in this community, and I expect that all of the parents who were living there were shown land in the community that was designated for a school and reassured their children would have a local neighbourhood school.

Madam Chair, returning to Bill 13, will these lands be strong-armed into being listed as surplus? The most recent, 2025 to 2028, capital plan from the Calgary board of education lists four new schools for the Simons Valley communities, but the most recent budget from the government of Alberta doesn't include a single school in construction, design, or planning for any of these communities in Calgary-Foothills. Not one school. There's ample evidence that a school receiving funding for planning could take several more years to move through the system of then being designated design funding and then construction funding and then finally seeing a shovel in the ground and a school actually appear in their neighbourhood.

4:50

There was in last year's budget a new school construction allocation for a Catholic school in Nolan Hill. Now here we are 14 months later; there's still no shovel in the ground in Nolan Hill. We know that it takes some time to move through the process, get a shovel in the ground, build, and open a school. The most recent budget includes only one school for new construction in Calgary. Knowing that there is considerable land allocated to the Calgary board of education for schools in Sherwood, Kinross, Nolan Hill, Sage Hill, and now Glacier Ridge, knowing that there's not a single school even in the planning phase for these areas, how can we trust that the Calgary board of education won't be asked to list these lands as surplus? How can the residents of Calgary-Foothills know that those lands will remain in the jurisdiction of the Calgary board of education and one day hope to see a school in their neighbourhood?

There are multiple pressures for alternative uses for these lands. What is to stop those currently under the jurisdiction of school boards from being handed over to the Minister of Infrastructure to be allocated for other uses? In the language of this bill we have no guarantee that this won't happen. The government will talk about how future regulations will come to provide more clarification, but how can the people of Alberta trust any engagements that this government will undertake when the government has so clearly ignored the call from their citizens for more schools in their neighbourhood? There is equally ample evidence that suggests we cannot trust this government to ensure these lands will in the future be used for schools.

In 2014 Conservative insiders mused about using P3s to develop on school surplus property. Before winning the UCP leadership, Jason Kenney mused about selling Crown land for debt repayment. As my colleague just suggested earlier, if these lands are put in the hands of the Minister of Infrastructure and sold, will any of that revenue be transferred back to the school boards for their use in enhancing what they are designed to do and provide education to

children? We've heard suggestions that the land would no longer be settled by agencies currently in place to make those decisions; rather, the government will retain ownership and make long-term use and lease or sale decisions for these lands.

Albertans have very valid questions about the transparency and processes of this government. This bill does nothing to provide additional assurances to the public that the government will be any more transparent. In fact, it does the opposite. What concerns does this government have with school boards retaining decision-making control over those lands and their buildings? What concerns does this government have with municipalities retaining the control over these lands and buildings? What concerns does this government have, as we just heard the Member for Calgary-Acadia talk about, with municipalities and school boards coming together in a collaborative manner and using these lands in a way that benefits the citizens that they work with every single day?

Madam Chair, this bill does not improve the lives of Albertans. Albertans want schools to be built on these lands. Albertans want the government of Alberta to pay attention to the need for school infrastructure. Rather than a bill that would take these lands out of the jurisdiction of school boards and transfer them to the Minister of Infrastructure, they would rather see the government focused on building schools for their children in their neighbourhood.

Madam Chair, I cannot support Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, and I urge all members of this Chamber to vote no on this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Any others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Chair. Albertans deserve a government that listens to them, that cares about them, and that works on their behalf. It's not only Albertans; it's the job of any government in any jurisdiction in the world to work on behalf of the people they represent. It's important that any government should be accountable, should be transparent, and should be honest about their actions.

I represent the riding of Calgary-North East, and I meet my constituents on a regular basis. I just held a town hall before this session started and met various parents, met various constituents at that town hall. They shared their deep concerns, whether it was regarding building new schools, whether it was regarding high insurance costs, whether it was regarding the high utility bills, whether it was regarding the mismanagement of Alberta Health Services or the need of more hospitals in the riding, in the quadrant that I represent. Unfortunately, none of these were reflected in the budget, and none of these were the priorities for this government, and they continue to not be the priorities for this government, Madam Chair. They have not done anything to address these concerns, to address these issues.

CPP was another big issue. The Canada pension plan is still a very popular idea amongst Albertans. Albertans do not want to leave the Canada pension plan. They do not want any Alberta pension plan that this government has been proposing, and they have been openly against it. We have held in-person town halls, where thousands of Albertans showed up in person, and we asked them a simple question: if they wanted to be part of the Canada pension plan or leave and form an Alberta pension plan, as this government talks about. They clearly said that they want the Canada pension plan, yet this government continues to push their own agenda without listening to Albertans.

I heard the members opposite the other day who were saying that building more infrastructure, like building more schools, will create more deficit, and they wanted to control the spending. Madam Chair, this is the core difference between us and the members on

the other side. Building more schools, hiring more teachers, hiring more educational assistants, supporting the most vulnerable students in the classrooms, and providing more support to the front-line workers in our education system: that is not spending; that is investing in education, and investing \$1 in education will save \$6. The other side of the aisle believes that building more schools is just spending more money. It is not. We do not believe in that.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We believe that if the kids have schools closer to their homes, if there are more teachers, if there are more support staff in the schools, that will make life easier for parents. They will save on gas, and on top of that they will save the money of the gas tax that this government has imposed on them. They will study closer to their homes, they will make friends, and that will be helpful for them.

Mr. Chair, it also shows how out of touch this UCP government is from the actual realities of Albertans. I have never met a parent in the community who said to me that we should not build a school because we will go into deficit. In fact, they say the opposite. They say that we pay the fair share of taxes, we do the work that needs to be done, yet we don't see the schools in our communities.

5:00

I a hundred per cent agree with what my friend the Member for Calgary-Foothills has just mentioned before me, that there are school sites in our communities which have got signs saying: future school here. Those signs have been sitting on those grounds for years. People bought those homes there because they believed that new schools were coming there.

Before this UCP government there were only two stages of building a school; one was design funding, and then the next was the construction funding. This government introduced more stages to delay those projects. Now there is preplanning funding, and then there is planning funding, and then there is design funding, and then there is construction funding. Like, even the UCP cannot define what planning, preplanning, and all these stages are.

It is very important for any government to listen to what people need and then act on those needs. It's also funny when the UCP talks about fiscal management. They gave \$4.5 billion to wealthy corporations in 2019 and lost 55,000 jobs. They gave \$1.5 billion to a pipeline company to build a pipeline that leads to nowhere and \$20 billion on the R-star program. This government can't even buy Tylenol for kids in Alberta. How can Albertans trust them about managing the properties that local municipalities and school boards own?

It is important that publicly owned buildings and lands are managed in a transparent manner, Mr. Chair. The Premier and the UCP have proven that Albertans cannot trust them with public resources, whether it is the public education system or whether it is the public health care system. We have seen this government giving favours to their wealthy insiders and friends. I was elected in this May election; since then this is my second session, and all I have seen from this government is bringing forward the bills that benefit their insiders. The first bill they brought in was about removing the cap on the benefits that their wealthy insiders get on public boards. This government is not good at managing the public purse.

Bill 13 is not something that Albertans asked this UCP government to do. They did not run on this bill. They did not tell school boards that they are going to put forward this bill. They have not consulted with those local boards and other local municipalities that they are going to come forward with this bill. If they have not discussed, if they have not had any kind of consultations with people, with other stakeholders, how can Albertans trust what their intentions are with this bill?

This bill may lead to the UCP selling school properties to their friends and insiders, and that is not acceptable, Mr. Chair. The funds will not go back into the school district to improve K to 12 education. The UCP has proven that we cannot trust them with our public buildings and lands. Not only public buildings and lands; we can't even trust them with our public parks. We have seen what they were planning to do with the public parks. When Albertans pushed back, when Albertans didn't like their idea, they had to change their mind.

Every single time this happens, Mr. Chair. They come up with an idea without talking to Albertans, without discussing with the stakeholders, without doing any kind of research, and then they have to take a step back, and then they have to cancel their ideas. Like, why do they waste money? Why do they waste time? Why do they waste their own time and everybody else's time just to talk about ideas that don't even make sense? This is not the kind of government that Albertans want, and this is not the kind of government that Albertans voted for.

Bill 13 also centralizes the system for collecting and reporting real property owned or leased by departments or consolidated entities, including school boards and postsecondary institutions. This government is very interested in consolidating power and hiding things, but they accuse the federal government of doing the same thing. How is that fair to Albertans?

They want more power, and they accuse the federal government of doing the exact same thing. Again, I'm not defending any federal government here. I'm not defending another level of government here. What I'm trying to say is that if somebody is accusing someone of doing something, the person should not be doing that same thing.

Mr. Chair, this is not the first time. Even in 2012 Conservative insiders Rob Glenn* and Tom Olsen, the current energy war room director, which is another waste of money, mused about using P3s to develop surplus school property. This idea is also mentioned in the MacKinnon panel report, recommendation 16.

Mr. Chair, it is time that this UCP government should start talking to people. It is time that this government should start discussing with people, with Albertans, before coming up with any kind of laws or any kind of bills in this House. That will save time, that will save resources, and that will help the government as well.

Unfortunately, this is not what we are seeing. I'm hearing from many constituents that they're worried about insurance costs. They're worried about their utility bills. They're worried about how to put food on the table. The housing crisis is another big issue that Albertans are facing today, and what we are focused on is Bill 13, taking more powers from school boards and giving powers to the Infrastructure minister so that he can sell the properties and he can sell the public schools to his wealthy insider friends. How is this helpful, Mr. Chair? This is not what Albertans deserve, and this is not what Albertans want.

It is my humble request to all the members of this Chamber to listen to the voices of their constituents, to meet with them, to show them this bill, and then vote against it, because it does not help any constituent of mine. Similarly, it doesn't help any constituent of any of the elected MLAs sitting in this Assembly. I request every member of the Chamber to vote against this bill, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am rising to speak in opposition to Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. I will say

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

that, you know, there are a few of us here who have been in our cities – I personally have lived in Calgary almost all my life. One of the things that hits me the hardest about this bill is thinking about its impact on schools and school boards. I know that I've mentioned this previously in the House. In my time in Calgary, as an elementary school student through to my high school years, I attended 10 schools from kindergarten to grade 12 and have lived in many, many parts of Calgary, many of them concentrated in my now riding of Calgary-Klein.

One thing that I've noticed is that through the years our public schools really become our hubs for community. One of the things that I was able to benefit from, though we were a family of very meagre means, was that through some of our public schools those schools were also used for community programming, in which I was very lucky to take part. What really worries me about this bill is the government actually taking the power away from school boards to be able to decide what happens to those schools. In some cases we're talking about community programming whereas if you're discussing a public building, you're more likely to have some of that community programming available to the community through the years.

I think specifically about a few cases where we had a public school crying for support from our government, crying for funding, help with the transportation needed to be able to get students there. One of those schools was St. Angela, which is now in the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View and is no longer a public school. It was in the Catholic school division. I went there for a couple of years in my time in public school and elementary, and though I didn't continue going there, I lived in Bridgeland. We knew that this was a community hub. There was the presence of programs for folks with disabilities in that school. There were after school programs available. There were, you know, several social events that were made possible through that school being a community school and being a public school. It is no longer a public school. That was one of the schools that got turned into a charter school later. I'm sure they've got some great programming there.

5:10

My concern is that I'm seeing a UCP bill – where normally I would applaud the collection of data, what I'm seeing is a collection of data to compile a list for fire sale of our public institutions, our public buildings, our infrastructure. I am seeing a concerted effort from this government to denounce the abuse of provincial jurisdiction as it happily tramples on our public spaces, our infrastructure, and creates a collection to dispose of while at the same time taking away choices from our school boards in being able to make some of those decisions. St. Angela was one example, and that's schools.

We've also already seen this in previous iterations of Conservative governments around health care. Again, being a long-time resident of Calgary, there are actually several examples of public hospitals that were sold and then basically rerouted into private enterprise.

One of the saddest examples that I can think of – and I think there are probably a few fellow Calgarians here who will remember – is the Grace women's health hospital. That was a hospital that specialized in women's issues, specialized in childbirth, maternity. It was, like, a wonderful, small, local hospital. It was on a public roadway. It was very easily accessible. It was central and was doing a lot of work that we needed to be doing in women's health, which is another area that I think we could do a lot more work in. The Grace women's health centre was sold and is now used for private surgeries and other private clinics. There's still a presence of some of the women's health aspects there, but it's not the hub that it used to be. Basically, it was also discarded.

One of the things that really concerns me about this bill is that we're looking at a list of how to dispose of our public properties. They are public, and like I said, they are anchors in our community.

Another example that I can think of – although it didn't get sold, it certainly got disposed of – was the Calgary General hospital.

When I think about my time in Calgary and I think about all of our public institutions, the importance of those public spaces, be they hospitals or schools or parks, as someone mentioned earlier, these all have a place in our community. And rather than our government actually taking the stated needs of Albertans, the calls for housing, the calls for investments in housing, investments in maintenance of these schools, of a lot of the housing infrastructure that we have currently – that's another concern I have, that this could actually, then, bleed into our housing stock as well. You know, if we allow things to go unmaintained and we end up losing those spaces, if we sell them off so that someone else can benefit, my concern, frankly, is that this government will be most concerned about their own friends and insiders benefiting. We've seen that before. We've seen it with the examples of some of the places that I've already given. We need transparency in how our publicly owned buildings are managed. We also need a government that's forward thinking and doing actual planning for how to use these buildings and not just swooping in and listing them off for fire sale later.

We've actually already had proof that Albertans can't trust this government with their public resources. We see it every day. We see it in our health care system. We see it with some of the situations we've seen where patients are then transferred outside of the health care system to motel medicine. We're seeing a lot of places where public institutions, public services cross over into the private domain, and I just fear that this government has no respect for those public services or the public institutions.

We talk so much and we hear so much from the other side about abuse of jurisdiction. Now we're, you know, seeing that they're going to happily override local decision-making when it comes to school properties. We're very afraid that in selling school properties, these, again, will go to friends and insiders instead of going to our public education system, instead of providing better supports, and instead of strengthening our public education system, which we know is bursting at the seams and is suffering.

We know that our education professionals are under an incredible weight to provide, you know, great services, a great public education to our students with a government that's just not supporting their education system. We know that in 2014 there were two advisers to the Progressive Conservative government at the time that were musing about changing laws to allow developers to bypass school boards when it comes to surplus property.

My question is: what protections are in place? When we're talking about Bill 13, about the actual benefit that people will receive back not only in public funds, you know, in being able to have money because you've sold a property – I want to see what the benefits are to those individual communities. Like in the example of the General hospital leaving a gaping hole, how many years did it take for the community to be able to start to restructure and to see some life where the General hospital used to sit? What is the benefit of having schools if we don't have that community participation in community programs, if they're no longer a hub and they become exclusive spaces?

For all of those reasons mentioned, I am going to be voting against Bill 13, and I encourage my fellow members to do the same.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen to join in.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to express my position to oppose Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. It's important that publicly owned buildings and lands are managed in a transparent manner. It is an ingredient of the public's trust in government decision-making. In the absence of transparency and clear accountability, the public trust in government erodes. This is something that this government has been struggling with, not being willing to demonstrate transparency in many aspects of their governance in decision-making, their governance in processes of legislating on various important policy files, and that includes real property governance management.

5:20

Bill 13 will give the Minister of Infrastructure the ability to override local decision-making when it comes to surplus school properties. It's important that we be reminded that these are elected officials, that Albertans elect to make the decision in terms of their capital planning, property management for their respective school authorities and school divisions. This includes school surpluses.

School boards have historically worked with municipalities, with communities, and they have always developed mechanisms to manage the school properties in their respective jurisdictions in a way that is transparent, in a way that is agile, in a way that is responsive, in a way that it is accommodated in the school board's or the school authority's frameworks of capital management. Bill 13 will impact local school boards' ability in capital planning and management. It is the school board's responsibility when it comes to asset management, and Bill 13 will have an impact on this. Bill 13 will take away the agility that local school boards have to respond to various needs within their communities.

Mr. Chair, Bill 13 may lead to the UCP selling school properties in a way that may not be transparent. It will risk the ability of the government to sell to their respective friends and insiders. What is more important is that the funding generated from the sales is not guaranteed to go back to improving our schools, to improving the education system, to building more schools, to building infrastructure that will help the respective communities where those properties were located.

In my previous role in the charitable sector I worked with local school boards and neighbourhoods to plan in terms of repurposing school properties. I want to use one example. In Edmonton's McCauley neighbourhood the Edmonton Intercultural Centre came into existence. This was in December 2014. I was heavily involved in the planning and the engagement in the McCauley neighbourhood as the school was a surplus school. Located in the heart of the McCauley community, the Edmonton Intercultural Centre today is home for 12 nonprofit organizations. More than a thousand Edmontonians show up, whether attending for a learning opportunity or whether it is for other community services that they benefit from. Those 12 organizations have a common mandate, which is uplifting and improving the lives of Albertans.

This decision, the repurposing of that school to become such a hub, was not because of government interference and government decisions. This bill will have an implication on such local decision-making processes where local communities identify the potential need, working with school boards to figure out what is the best way to utilize such an infrastructure for the betterment of their respective neighbourhoods.

The vision from 2014, when I was involved in that school surplus repurposing, was for the Intercultural Centre to transform the McCauley neighbourhood through learning, through community work, through recreation, through arts, that capitalize on the rich diversity of the McCauley community and the city of Edmonton in general. As I said before, about a thousand clients show up on a

monthly basis today. A significant number of employees go there to work today with 12 different organizations.

Bill 13 gives the Minister of Infrastructure the authority to impact that so that local communities do not have that ability to provide such an innovative approach. Interestingly, Mr. Chair, this bill is a demonstration of one of many government priorities that were not an election commitment. Let's use some examples: the Canada pension plan, an Alberta police force, political parties in municipal government, restructuring of the health care system by creating more senior management in the department. The list goes on and on.

My colleague was just talking about the procurement of children's Tylenol, where we have to look into this government's competency when it comes to procurement. We all know this story of children's Tylenol, but let's look at other government initiatives of procurement and this government's capability in asset management.

In September 2022 this government launched an affordable housing asset management framework to address recommendations that came from the Affordable Housing Review Panel's final report. I happened to be part of the people who were interviewing in the process of that. The framework outlined the process and decision-making criteria for a 10-year review of all government-owned affordable housing real estate assets. It was explained that the intent was optimizing the value of affordable housing assets owned by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. It was explained that there will be transparency and clarity on how assets will be managed to achieve goals set by the government's plan.

The framework that was developed in terms of how this asset will be managed included transfer of some of the assets. Well, the government of Alberta was supposed to transfer the ownership of local housing to a local housing provider or a municipality to operate affordable housing. The condition of this housing was not in good shape, so the government wanted to transfer to these providers and municipalities. The commitment was that the current tenants do not lose tenure. Do you want to know, Mr. Chair, the results? This government was not able to transfer any. Well, they are coming now to surplus schools.

Okay. What was the second pillar of that? The second pillar was, Mr. Chair, that the government was to sell properties. According to the government's records this government was not able to sell any except two properties. So it is kind of difficult to understand the ability that this government will be able to take on properties and lands that include surplus schools and how they will be able to manage such an asset. According to this government, going back to the affordable housing, to our government-owned assets, the UCP government was focused on selling these vacant properties, but they were not able to. All those demonstrations, Mr. Chair, that the government is proposing a new way of doing and having the same results of inability to deliver what it was supposed to deliver.

5:30

With that in mind, I will encourage members of both sides in the Assembly to vote down Bill 13. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. Just to speak to this bill, of course, my opposition, along with all my colleagues, is steadfast for a number of reasons. I mean, Bill 13 isn't that long. It's about six pages. I had the opportunity to read it over several times, both after the first reading and in advance of my getting up today. The purposes on page 2, there are a number of purposes, and they seem to make sense on balance, but I can tell you that they don't make

sense with regard to what else is going on that this government has brought forward.

I guess the simplest way to say it is that I wouldn't go here, in terms of this bill, until the number of other things that this government has put into place or not done as a result of various bills or their activities are sorted out, until the chaos that this government has brought forward in – just look at any number of areas that they're currently working in, for instance health care. There is great dissatisfaction from Albertans with regard to the state of our health care, from the people who are employed to do that work to the citizens who are waiting unconscionably long periods of time for the various procedures that they need created. The government is once again charging ahead in an area of consolidating the processes, centralizing the processes and systems for real property and the disposal of those real properties or leasing to others, without looking at the burden that's been placed on Albertans through the actions of this government.

For instance – I mentioned the area of health care – there's also the area of education. We know the number of colleagues who have stood up and talked about the lack of school sites, built schools in their communities as having some real negative effects on the families in those communities. I don't hear this government saying that they're fixing that. As my colleague just talked about, I hear them saying, you know: we've got money in the budget to plan, money in the budget to get plans drawn up, and we're good. Well, that's not, as my colleague said, a school.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

Similarly, in the area of postsecondary education Bill 18, for instance, has caused widespread displeasure amongst academics and people in postsecondary education who believe that their independence as researchers, as people who go after grants will be negatively affected by the actions of this government.

That's what I mean by saying that this government is once again charging ahead and changing things that, you know, the people in those entities, I think the government calls them – let me just take a look here. “Consolidated entity” [may mean] . . . entity listed as a government organization in the government's consolidated financial . . .” We know what a department is, but those consolidated entities and agencies haven't indicated that there's an issue that needs to get fixed, Madam Chair.

I know the government says that it came out of the MacKinnon panel report, recommendation 16, but I just did a search earlier today of the MacKinnon panel report and the criticisms that different entities, different groups, like the RMA for instance, have with regard to I think it's recommendation 13, that they believe that the MacKinnon panel doesn't accurately reflect the way things are in their municipalities around the province. They refute the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel report on their recommendation area affecting them. I don't think you have to dig too far to find others who are looking at the MacKinnon panel report and saying: you know, it doesn't really deal with the situation as we know it. This one is based on number 16, as it's clearly identified, looking at government's inventory of land assets, broader public sector, create a definitive policy, et cetera, et cetera.

But my primary belief is that this government has created too many problems across too many sectors of this province and that they should focus on fixing and cleaning those up before they go further into creating another kind of mass upheaval with regard to a centralized system.

Centralizing this would be no small effort. I mean, what are the potential staffing changes and requirements in the Ministry of Infrastructure to deal with this new system? Was that talked about in

Budget 2024? I didn't see that in Budget 2024, and I think anything that looks at a new way of doing things should have the resources to actually make that happen.

Will the minister's staff who are receiving this information from all corners of our province, not only from school boards and postsecondary institutions but other areas, that there is real property that is in the current responsibility of a different entity – if that comes back to the province, you know, do they have the local knowledge and expertise to be able to say, “This would be a good use for that property” or “That would be a good use for that property”? How are they going to gain it if they're centralized? If they're here in Edmonton, how are they going to know about something in a far corner of Calgary that is coming back to them? Are they going to look at local land-use plans and planning documents to kind of get a sense of that, or will they be looking for the highest bidder and let it get sorted out at either the civic level or the community level? Those are some questions that I kind of had as a result of going through some of the massive changes that are proposed in Bill 13.

Then if you go on in Bill 13, with regard to 7(6), it talks about the property it applies to and property it doesn't apply to. I'll just look at those quickly. It doesn't apply to “land used for grazing leases or access to grazing leases under the Public Lands Act.” From my knowledge of that area, I mean, there is a lot of land under public lease for grazing in this province. It's been that way for a long time, and it's been undervalued from a revenue perspective, is my understanding. These are long-standing agreements, and they're really good for the person who holds a grazing lease. The person who holds the grazing lease also holds the ability to allow access on to that property for oil and gas uses. The government of Alberta is not privy to any of those monies at this time. So the real property in this case is eliminating that land used for those purposes. I know that this government and previous governments have looked at those issues in the past.

5:40

Land donated to government is (b): “government entities under the Post-secondary Learning Act.” It excludes that, and that seems like a really good idea, or else why would anybody look at donating lands to universities and other kinds of postsecondaries if they know that the government potentially will take that land and do with it what it wants? I don't think that's in the interests of good stewardship of donated land.

Subsection (c) is really confusing. Maybe when the minister gets up, they can talk about what (c) is all about: “land provided for affordable accommodation under the Alberta Housing Act with respect to single family accommodation with a caveated interest within the meaning of the Land Titles Act.” I would like to hear what that means and why that land is excluded. Perhaps the minister has some greater ability to shed light on that.

Subsection (d) is land designated as contaminated. I can understand why the government doesn't want land coming back to it that is real property that's contaminated. You want polluters to deal with the land that they've polluted. The polluter-pay principle is something that the government, all governments, used to adhere to. Since the new government has been in place, there are discussions about I think it's called the R-star program, where the government will take on polluted lands and deal with those itself. That's not in the interest of the taxpayer, I can tell you; maybe in the interest of that polluted land, but then the company gets to walk away from the land. Anyway, in this case that land designated as contaminated: not coming back. It's excluded from real property being considered by the government of Alberta.

And then (e) is “any other land identified by the Minister in the regulations.” We don't really know what that's going to be because

the regulation is not before us. That follows through down to ministerial regulations, 10: “the Minister may make regulations respecting land identified for the purpose of section 7(6)(e)” and respecting other matters. There’s, like, a garage door that’s wide open that you could drive lots of different trucks through. I don’t know if the minister has provided that comfort to any of us on this side about what those regulations will look like, but they’re not in this bill, and they won’t be in this bill. They’ll be subject to further debate. Not debate here, because that’s what the minister gets to do: he gets to make regulations, and then cabinet gets to approve them, and then the Lieutenant Governor signs off on them. We don’t really know what that’s all about.

Madam Chair, that kind of speaks to my main points, that there’s too much chaos going on to undertake even more chaos and that there are unanswered questions with regard to staffing requirements. I don’t think you can keep the same number of staff and change things so drastically. I don’t think the people within the ministry have the same level of understanding and knowledge as those related entities that are out there, whether they be school boards or others. I think as a province we’re getting short shrift with regard to the best uses for those lands. I think the people who currently have them under their purview and control have greater insights into those uses.

With those various points made, Madam Chair, I’ll take my opportunity to sit down and give over to somebody else who can address this issue. Perhaps the minister has some ability to clarify some of these issues in the future.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 13, Real Property Governance Act. I just want to also echo what my colleagues on this side of the House have said. I certainly stand in opposition to this bill. There are some significant concerns regarding it. I’m just looking at some of the government’s literature that they’ve put out regarding the bill, and they say that this Real Property Governance Act ensures that property sales across government are handled in a uniform manner and that government is given the option to hold on to property that is of strategic value. The legislation would introduce a centralized approach which would create more efficiencies across government and maximize asset value to Albertans.

I guess what those words really say is that the government is going to take control over a very extensive list of different consolidated entities which we have across the province. In the annual report it lists all those consolidated entities. One example, a significant example of that, is the University of Alberta. The University of Alberta is in the riding of Edmonton-Riverview, which I have the honour to represent.

This bill makes a significant impact on the University of Alberta because they are considered a consolidated entity. Therefore, you know, the government can make decisions regarding the property that they own. To me, that’s a huge red flag. I’m very concerned about that. I mean, it would be good if we could say that we could really trust and understand what the government is doing and be confident in the outcome that’s going to be supporting Albertans and going to be supporting perhaps, specifically here, the University of Alberta.

Unfortunately, I don’t have that confidence as a member of the opposition and having sat in this Chamber in opposition since 2019 because we’ve seen other examples of overreach. I would say that Bill 13 is another example of government overreach. I mean, we have another example right before the House right now, Bill 18, which we are also debating, which, again, is another significant issue for the University of Alberta because it seems like the UCP

doesn’t really understand what academic freedom is. That is a huge overreach, which is very similar to this Bill 13, taking away the rights of an institution to make decisions about the property that it owns and manages and needs to make decisions not just today but oftentimes for the long term.

Just for all the members in the Chamber, you know, academic freedom, which Bill 18 really attacks, is so fundamental to professors and institutions. And just the definition: it makes intellectual discourse, critique, and comment possible. All academic staff must have the right to fulfill this function without reprisal, repression by the institution, the state, or any other source. Of course, that includes the province of Alberta.

As I said, I question the ability of Albertans, myself included, to really be confident that we can trust this government, and that is one example of a bill before us right now that does make me very wary because it seems like the government is putting themselves in a situation that they shouldn’t be, that they are vetting grants from the federal government for academic work.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Williams: I rise again, unfortunately, on Standing Order 23(b), “speaks to matters other than the question under discussion.” Bill 18 is a terrific bill, and this Chamber cannot wait to debate it when that is before the House. Until then, in this Committee of the Whole we would love to hear more from members opposite surrounding Bill 13.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I’ve been listening to my hon. colleague, and, yes, while she’s been speaking about some commonalities in the themes of some of the legislation, she has absolutely been referencing and speaking to Bill 13 and its specific impacts to Alberta. So I don’t think that there’s a point of order here, but I leave it to your wise judgment.

The Chair: Why, thank you. I think we should take this opportunity to remind all members that we are on Bill 13. I know the hon. member was just getting to that point, which she will have the opportunity to do now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, I was speaking about Bill 13 and just not really having much confidence in the current government’s ability to really have the best interests of Albertans at heart. That’s been demonstrated by other bills before the House right now, and certainly in the previous administration under the Kenney government that, too, was a huge issue.

I just want to talk more about the University of Alberta, which is a consolidated entity of the government, and how this will negatively impact the University of Alberta. Of course, the university has much property. They have, you know, the university farm, which is a large area that is an urban farm, really. It’s not often when you live in the city that you have a farm in your riding, but I get to say that. Certainly, you know, the ALES department of the University of Alberta: many hands-on activities occur there to support students to learn all about

farming. That's a significant piece of property as well as the south campus, also the north campus. I mean, the University of Alberta owns a lot of property.

The university has really been devastated since 2019 under this UCP government by significant cuts. Over \$200 million in cuts have been levied on the University of Alberta since the UCP were elected in 2019. This is, like, a significant, overwhelming, huge issue for the University of Alberta, and now with this bill it seems to be tying their hands even more.

Not only has the UCP defunded them, really, over \$200 million; they are now saying to them, even though they've had to mitigate this situation with this drastic cut in funding by looking to sell, perhaps develop, intensify some parts of the university farm, which is in their plan, so that they can have some revenue because this government has really targeted the University of Alberta, and it's been very difficult for them to manage what they need to when they have a huge institution. Then this bill, Bill 18, just once again is another attack on the university, because they have taken great pains to develop their plans about the property they own, and now the UCP is saying that they can just go in and decide what is done.

In the bill on page 3 it says

Application of Act

3 This Act applies to

- (a) every department, and
- (b) every consolidated entity.

Then in section 4 it says:

Paramourncy

4 The provisions of this Act and the regulations under this Act prevail to the extent of any inconsistency or conflict with one or

more provisions of any other enactment except the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

This is paramourncy, so this . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but according to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report without the question put.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 11, Bill 12, and Bill 13. I wish to table copies of the amendment considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official record of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Yes, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn the House until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca