



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, October 28, 2024

Day 60

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)
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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),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
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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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
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),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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(UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lethbridge-West

Party standings:

United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Lovely
Rowswell
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Wright, J.

Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

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Lunty
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Cyr
Dach
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 28, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King, 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.

Hon. members, I will ask you to remain standing, and those who are able, please remain standing as well. However, we have a number of statements to make, and if you need to have a seat in the gallery, please feel free to do so.

In Memoriam

The Speaker: Hon. members, we recognize a number of former colleagues who have passed away since the last time we met. Today we'd like to acknowledge them by name, as is our custom, and we will pay fuller tribute to them individually when their families can be with us.

Alan William Hyland served as a Member for Cypress from 1975 to 1982 and for Cypress-Redcliff from 1982 to 1993. Dr. Stanley Bernard Cassin served as a Member for Calgary-North West in the 21st Legislature from 1986 to 1989. Mr. Gordon Wells Shrake served as the Member for Calgary-Millican from 1982 to 1993. As I mentioned, members, we will pay a fuller tribute to those members when their families will be able to join us.

Mr. Gordon W. Shrake
February 4, 1937, to May 30, 2024

The Speaker: Today it's my honour to pay tribute to former member Gordon Wells Shrake, who was elected as a Progressive Conservative Member for Calgary-Millican in 1982, serving three consecutive terms until 1993. Born in Houston, Texas, Gordon began his working life as a businessman, owning a general contracting firm and working as a corporate financial officer. His early involvement in public service started at the University of Calgary in the late 1960s, where he served briefly on student council before turning to municipal politics. In 1971 he was elected to the city of Calgary council, where he served 11 years as alderman until 1982.

Described as tenacious and always trying to do something for the little guy, Mr. Shrake's dedication to the community was exemplified by his extensive work with community associations and organizations, including the Bow Waters Canoe Club, the Calgary Exhibition & Stampede, the Calgary general hospital board of directors. Among the honours he received was the Queen Elizabeth II golden jubilee medal in 2002. Mr. Shrake passed away on May 30, 2024, at the age of 87.

In a moment of silent prayer and reflection I ask that you reflect on each one as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

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

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Alex Janvier
February 28, 1935, to July 10, 2024

The Speaker: Finally, members, I would like to briefly commemorate the remarkable life of one of the most accomplished Albertans and Canadian artists. Mr. Alex Janvier passed away earlier this year on July 10, 2024, at the age of 89. A Dene from the Cold Lake First Nation, Mr. Janvier had been a professional artist for decades and was renowned for his unique abstract style, distinct curved lines, and bright colors. Alex Janvier left behind a tremendous legacy as an artist. He was responsible for a great number of stunning works that can also be seen here in the Chamber. Some of his greatest works of art are the *Morning Star*, the beautiful painting that adorns the walls of the Canadian Museum of History in the national capital, and, of course, here, *Sunrise and Sunset*. As we look up to the Chamber walls, we see *Sunrise and Sunset*. Let us remember the tremendous contributions that Alex Janvier made not just to Alberta, not just to his community but to our country.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to inform you that I've received correspondence from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on June 22, 2024, advising of her resigning her position as the Leader of the Official Opposition effective that date and requesting that, going forward, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods be recognized as the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my honour and pleasure to rise today and introduce members of Mr. Gordon Shrake's family attending today's tribute. We all know the special and difficult price that family members pay for those who serve in public service, and we all owe you a debt of gratitude. In the Speaker's gallery today we have Gordon's loving wife, Lee, and son Tom, daughter-in-law Tina, daughter Dianne Owchar, and grandchildren Alexandria and

Gordon Shrake. I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to introduce to members of the Assembly the individual who led us in the singing of our national anthem today. Tina Mah joins us from Red Deer, where she works as a supervisor for Tri-West Security. Tina Mah loves to sing and has been the official anthem singer for the Red Deer Vipers junior B team for years. Tina is joined in the Speaker's gallery by her wife, Tasha Mah. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you the grade 6 students and staff and chaperones from Lymburn elementary school.

I hope to see you soon to talk about your visit today in the Legislature.

I would ask you to please now rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce you to some grade 6 students from my École Secondaire Sainte Marguerite d'Youville. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, the chief government whip, has an introduction of a school group perhaps.

Mr. Getson: I don't know that I do.

The Speaker: He doesn't know that he does. No problem.

We'll come back to you should there be time.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a friend of mine, Nikita Drakokhrust. Originally from Ukraine, Nikita now works with Dow Chemical, one of the many companies deciding to invest in the Industrial Heartland in my constituency. Nikita, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce both to you and through you Byron Chan and Sara Winger from the Alberta Law Foundation. This foundation is ensuring all Albertans have access to justice through the funding for legal services, education, and advocacy. Please join me in welcoming them and acknowledging their contribution to our province.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members the leader of the Alberta NDP, Naheed Nenshi. After helping to build this to the largest political party in Canada, with over 85,000 members, Naheed was elected as the leader of the Alberta New Democrats with an impressive 86 per cent of the vote. We are proud and excited to have him usher our party into its next era. I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guest, Bob Marshall. Bob is the reeve of the county of Grande Prairie. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to welcome some distinguished guests from the Department of Transportation and Economic Corridors joining us in the gallery here today. I'd like to invite Bukkie Coker, Hafsa Gill, Cleo Ndhlovu, Leanne Wilson, Josh Mackintosh, Alan Thomas, MJ Kinahan, Gordon Brenner, Lei Ma, Gayle See, Harjot Rondhawa, Sherry Danyluk, Dershan Patel, Tyler Dai, Katarina Markic, Vijaypal Singh . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do indeed have a school group from God's country. The Wihnemne School, Paul First Nation, from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, if you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Helen Wowk, Camilla Ryan, and Kelly Dick, three outstanding women from Strathcona county. They are great volunteers. They all sit on my board for the local United Conservative riding association. I couldn't do what I do without these three strong women. Thank you for joining us. Please rise and receive the warm welcome to the Assembly.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Shawna Sundal, the executive director of the Irreplaceable Parent Project. I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome to this House.

Members' Statements

Deerfoot Trail Upgrades

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, Deerfoot Trail is more than just a highway. It's a vital lifeline for Calgarians, enabling thousands to commute, get kids to school, and connect with friends and family across the city. That's why these critical upgrades to the Deerfoot Trail were designed not just to improve road quality but to give Calgarians what they really need: safer, faster, and more reliable commutes.

The newly expanded connection between Beddington Trail and 11 Street NE is a huge step forward. By diverting significant commuter, industrial, and airport traffic between McKnight Boulevard and Beddington Trail, this project is addressing major congestion and safety issues. These changes mean less weaving and merging on northbound Deerfoot and a smoother and efficient route for everyone. The improvements also bring better access to residential and industrial areas so that people can spend less time on the road and more time doing the things that matter most. These upgrades bring real, measurable benefits.

With all the planned improvements to Deerfoot Trail the typical Calgarian driver can expect to shave about 15 per cent off their morning commute and 22 per cent off their evening drive back home. Those saved minutes add up, and we estimate they'll save Albertans collectively around 900,000 hours of drive time each year

while boosting the local economy by \$23 million annually. That's valuable time and money going directly back to Albertans.

Every day over 100,000 Albertans rely on Deerfoot Trail as the major north-south route and as an important trade corridor for moving goods across the province and why we are investing in these upgrades. This investment in Deerfoot Trail is about building a road network that can keep pace with Calgary's growth, helping us meet the needs of Calgarians today, tomorrow, and into the future.

Thank you.

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

Influenza Immunization

Member Batten: This flu season it's more important than ever that Albertans get the annual influenza vaccine. Our hospitals are already overcrowded. Just look at any emergency room bursting at the seams. Some hospitals are well beyond 100 per cent capacity, so every step we can take to prevent the hospitalization of a loved one because of flu or COVID is a good prevention step to take. I know this well, Mr. Speaker. I worked with some of the most precious, vulnerable children in this province.

Our province's neonatal units, these sweet, little, fragile immune systems: their little bodies need all the infection control we can muster. The staff that care for them do exactly that every day. I know every nurse and every care aide in this province, especially my colleagues in our hospital's neonatal centres, take infection prevention very seriously. That's why visitors are always encouraged to have their shots updated, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, it's worth calling out this government for abandoning their duty. They have a responsibility to get this very vital public message out there. They should get their vaccines. They should be working with our excellent health care professionals to get as many Albertans vaccinated as possible.

But that's not what's happening, is it? Instead of promoting safe, scientifically tested, and incredibly effective vaccines, this government would rather prioritize conspiracy theories. You'd think the Premier and the Health minister would promote safe and effective vaccination online. Instead, they're more likely to be found worrying about false theories about chemtrails. Mr. Speaker, for the record, there is no evidence that NORAD or anyone else is spreading chemical trails after jets, but there is endless evidence that supports vaccines. I used to develop them; I should know.

I also know the UCP government likes to pick fights, Mr. Speaker, but one fight our overworked, underwhelmed health care workers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Jasper Wildfire

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, today I want to speak about the incredible spirit of Albertans in the face of adversity during the Jasper wildfires. Seeing this destruction occur in Jasper, a place where families from across Alberta, Canada, and the world have made cherished memories, was heart wrenching.

In this challenging time we saw our province come together, united in support of Jasper. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our brave first responders and the collective action of our communities, all residents were evacuated safely, and many are now able to return home as we focus on recovery and rebuilding. To consider, on that horrific night in July, the bravery, fortitude, and selflessness of the first responders is overwhelming. These men and women, many of

whom were from the community, risked their lives and even allowed their own homes, their possessions, and their memories to be sacrificed as they focused on protecting the critical infrastructure of the community. Things like the hospital, the schools, and the water treatment facility were protected, without which residents would likely still not be returning home.

Just as we did during the Fort McMurray wildfires, Albertans demonstrated remarkable resilience. We rallied around those in need, opening our homes and hotels as places of refuge. This commitment is a remarkable testament to the spirit of Jasper that leaves an indelible mark on all that visit. On my first trip back to Jasper I stood on the hospital roof and gazed around at the untouched parts of the community and then to the damage the fires had done. It was a poignant reminder of what we have fought to protect and the spirit we are determined to rebuild.

Countless individuals stepped forward, giving their time and resources to support fellow Albertans. The outpouring of generosity has been inspiring. It reminds us that when faced with hardship, we can prevail by leaning on one another and standing together as a united front. Whatever may come our way, Albertans never waver. Our commitment to each other and to our communities remains steadfast. Let us embrace the spirit of unity and resilience. Together we can continue to uplift one another no matter the challenges we face.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to Oral Question Period, I would like to just outline an adjustment to the rotation that will apply for Oral Question Period and Members' Statements. The rotation reflects the current House leaders' agreement, agreed to on May 26, 2023, with the following exceptions. The Oral Question Period rotation question 9 on day 4, which is formerly the independent member's question, has now been allocated to the United Conservative Party caucus. Please note that that is day 3 of the OQP rotation.

In the Members' Statements rotation the member's statement assigned to the former independent member on Wednesdays of week 3 of the rotation has been allocated to the UCP caucus. As a result of this adjustment, the Members' Statement rotation is the same for all three weeks and therefore has been collapsed into one weekly cycle. Attached to the procedural memo, that I'm sure you all read with bated breath, that my office sent out to all members last Thursday were the Oral Question Period rotation chart and the projected sitting days calendar, which contains, among other things, the Members' Statement rotation.

I'd like to remind members that questions and responses in Oral Question Period should be no longer than 35 seconds and that preambles to supplementary questions are only allowed for the first four rounds of questioning each day, as indicated by the House leaders' agreement.

Oral Question Period

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

Family Physicians

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in October 2022 the Premier promised transformation of health care in just 90 days. Here we are two full years later, and sadly health care is only getting much worse under this UCP government. I know the Premier is distracted by chemtrails

and antivax conspiracies, but here in Alberta the reality is that nearly 1 million folks do not have a family doctor. To the Premier: instead of worrying about fact-free conspiracy theories, why isn't the government focused on health care, finding family doctors for the nearly 1 million folks who don't have one?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to the Leader of the Official Opposition for taking on her new role.

Mr. Speaker, we have been focusing on refocusing health care, and it's working. We've already begun to see that since May of 2022, when only 35 per cent of individuals were getting their hip and knee replacements within a clinically recommended period of time, that as of May 2024 it's up to 74.4 per cent. We are so pleased with the work that we're doing with our charter surgical centres to clear that backlog. We've also invested \$313 million across our hospital system, who do the same. It's working.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Medical Association disagrees. The AMA president says that it's impossible to recruit family doctors because doctors are thinking, "Well, I can come to Alberta where nobody can keep the doors open or I can move to a province where clearly they've put some effort in and value stabilizing these clinics." The latest data says that 58 per cent of physicians are currently considering leaving their practice. Instead of always picking fights, why can't this Premier sit down with doctors, sign the contract she verbally agreed to seven months ago?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to work with the new president of the Alberta Medical Association. The Health minister and I will be meeting with them in the next couple of days. The AMA knows that we are working towards having that signed and in place by the start of the next budget year, in April of 2025. There, of course, are some issues that we have to address, because they know and we know that the physicians' budget is increasing faster than inflation plus population growth. So we have to work with them to be able to find offsets so that we can make sure that we're protecting not only the incomes of these specialists but also the incomes of our primary care practitioners.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, let's look specifically at Alberta's fourth-largest city, Lethbridge, a place where as of today there is not a single family doctor accepting new general patients. Not one. The UCP has left the health care system in such a crisis that last month two local doctors announced that they are closing their clinics and packing up for B.C. Albertans everywhere have been clear about their priorities, and health care is at the top of the list. Why has the Premier neglected Lethbridge and failed to find a single family doctor to accept new patients in that city?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, there have been 1,157 net new doctors added since 2019, including in Lethbridge. Lethbridge had 69 family doctors; we're up to 121 family doctors. We're also expanding out so that nurse practitioners have an opportunity to practise in their full scope of medicine, and we have over 100 nurse practitioners who have expressed interest. On top of that, we've opened up new medical spaces so that we can train doctors in southern Alberta at Lethbridge University, so when they graduate, they'll be ready and available to serve patients.

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

Affordability Measures

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the cost of living, from the highest auto insurance rates in the country to utilities that have doubled, tripled, maybe quadrupled. The UCP has ignored and worsened the cash crunch facing Alberta households. On Friday the Government House Leader told struggling Albertans, quote: I think one of the best ways to deal with an affordability crisis is a job. End quote. So many Albertans are already working hard to put food on the table, some with two or even three jobs. Does the Premier share her House leader's view that everyone who is struggling should go get another job?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we know that when the NDP were in power, they destroyed a lot of jobs, so I can understand why they don't think that a well-paying job is a priority. We do, on this side, and we've seen over 100,000 new jobs created. As well, they are high-paying jobs because they're in the private sector. We have the highest workforce participation rate as well as the highest salaries. We also have a \$15-a-day child care program so that working families are able to save up to \$700 per month per child. We've got the lowest taxes in the country, no thanks to them. They increased corporate tax, personal tax, brought in a carbon tax nobody wanted and that they're still supporting. We have no sales tax, no payroll tax, no health premiums. We're going to be fighting that carbon tax tooth and nail as well.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants to talk about highs and lows. How about the highest unemployment in Canada west of the Maritimes? The unemployment rate has gone up by a third since this Premier took office. What hasn't gone up: the minimum wage. We are now the lowest minimum wage in Canada because the UCP have kept it frozen. Under their watch we are dealing with the lowest minimum wage, the highest inflation, and now workers can't find affordable homes and they struggle to pay for groceries. Why is this government disrespecting working Albertans during an affordability crisis and telling them to find another job?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the members opposite, their bosses in Ottawa, Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau, who have caused the inflation crisis by not only spending so much money that it drove up the cost of everything but also having a carbon tax which has driven up the cost of everything. Now the federal leader is questioning whether or not he should support a carbon tax, but I haven't heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say that she's going to follow suit, so we can only presume that she wants to keep in place a carbon tax which has increased the cost of everything. We're going to be fighting against that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the government's record is clear. Everything is more expensive under their watch, and now our food banks are seeing more and more two-income households come through their doors because the cost of groceries is out of reach. Albertan paycheques are not enough to pay the bills. Students work two jobs to pay tuition and rent. Parents put in overtime to pay for hockey and soccer and dance classes. While everything costs more, this UCP government tells people who are struggling to find another job. Why is it so hard for this Premier to acknowledge the reality that people are living through and to focus on the affordability crisis now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we have been focused on the affordability crisis. We brought the price of

electricity down from 32 cents a kilowatt hour to 2 cents a kilowatt hour. We're building out broadband; \$372 million to connect 201,000 homes. We brought through a 25 per cent seniors' discount. We've supported food banks. We have a school lunch program. We're subsidizing bus passes and transportation. We are supporting 14,000 people with a rental supplement. We have seen increases in wages and social services and across all of our programs with an escalator clause, and we eliminated the user fees that the members opposite charged on mental health and addiction.

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

Education Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the facts don't lie. Alberta has the lowest per-student education funding in Canada, which means this government values our children less than any other government in this country. It also means that the thousands of education assistants who support our kids in classrooms across this province are incredibly underpaid. Kids can't learn without EAs, Premier. Will the Premier admit that her choice to underfund our schools means that education staff are not being paid what they deserve?

2:00

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, our population is increasing rapidly, and that cascades into enrolment, and our government is stepping up to ensure that our school divisions have the resources that they need to accommodate this growth. As recently as July the Premier announced \$125 million in new operating funding for our school divisions to help them deal with the surge of student enrolment that we've been seeing. We'll continue to look at how funding meets the needs of our school boards. In addition, we're moving forward with one of the largest school construction projects in recent memory so we can make sure every student has the space they need.

Ms Pancholi: It's a lot of talk, Mr. Speaker, but EAs haven't seen a raise in over a decade. With salaries that average between \$27,000 and \$30,000 per year, they're making 33 per cent less than they need to meet the basic needs of living in Edmonton. I bet the Premier would protest, too, if she was forced to earn less than a living wage. Albertans care about making ends meet, but it seems the government couldn't care less. How does the Premier expect EAs to support students when they can't earn enough to support their own families?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we have provided new and increased funding, in fact record levels of funding, to our school divisions to help them manage the incredible surge of growth that they're seeing in student population and, of course, manage their other operations. I know that this incredible surge in student population is a problem that the NDP never had to experience because when they were in power, they drove people out of the province. They increased taxes, they told Albertans to go to B.C., and they were actively taking strategies to encourage people to leave the province. We, on the other hand, want Alberta to be a beacon of hope and opportunity and attract people from around the world. I'm incredibly proud and happy to see those efforts paying off, and we're going to make sure that our school divisions have the funding they need.

Ms Pancholi: Well, talking points don't pay the bills. Mr. Speaker, I spoke to a principal in Lethbridge who told me that his school is so starved for funding, they can barely cover the basic needs. He shared that there are multiple students with complex medical and learning needs in his school, but he doesn't have the funding to hire

the number of EAs that these kids deserve. Even if he did, he can't find EAs with the appropriate skills because of the incredibly low pay. Will the Premier stand up and acknowledge that education workers and all Alberta workers deserve fair bargaining and to make a decent living?

Mr. Nicolaides: In addition to the \$125 million of additional funding that we provided in July, we're also providing \$44 million this year alone through the classroom complexity grant. That funding goes specifically for school divisions to hire educational assistants or to increase hours that educational assistants provide, and that's all to help address the growing complexity that we see in our classrooms. Indeed, we are seeing more students with complex needs. Our government has recognized that, and in 2023 we created the classroom complexity grant to help hire more EAs and other staff.

Renewable Energy Development

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, eight months ago the Premier put in place a devastating moratorium on the development of new large wind and solar electricity projects. While it's been lifted, investment has yet to return to our province. Experts say that there's now been so little investment in Alberta, it feels like the moratorium is still in place, with one industry expert saying that, quote, it's just like wave after wave of uncertainty and challenge in the market. What's the Premier's plan to end this uncertainty and get Alberta back to being a national leader in renewables?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that Alberta is a national leader on renewable energy. In fact, I have in my hand here, Alberta has 1,670 megawatts of solar, the most of every single province in Canada, even more than Ontario, who has only 478 megawatts. Not only that; we have 5,340 megawatts of wind in Alberta. Again, Ontario: only 4,943. We have the most renewables projects not only built but under construction, and we have the most in the queue. We're very proud to lead Canada and all of North America on this file.

Member Hoyle: The moratorium affected 118 projects worth \$33 billion of investment, with an additional \$263 million per year of revenue from municipal taxes and land leases across 27 municipalities. What is worse is that the planning, development, and construction of these projects would generate an estimated 24,000 full-time job years, and that's been lost. To the Premier: what steps are this government taking to bring back this crucial investment that gives Albertans good-paying, stable jobs?

Mr. Neudorf: While I would love to have all these jobs and all of this electricity, who's going to use it? Right now Alberta can generate 22,000 megawatts of electricity, and our peak is only 12 and a half thousand. You know, what the opposition did is they drove out jobs, they drove out investment, they drove away all those people who could use that electricity. I'm proud to be part of a government that's bringing those jobs back and with them more investment and more load so they have something to build for. We're doing the right kind of build for the right kind of jobs for the future of Alberta and Canada.

Member Hoyle: Last year there were approximately 1,000 megawatts of new wind farm projects announced in Alberta, compared to just 50 megawatts this year. Companies that once saw Alberta as one of their

most lucrative markets are now looking at Quebec, B.C., and Saskatchewan as more open to renewables and easier to invest in. Why is the Premier not taking the responsibility of attracting investment to Alberta seriously?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as always, the NDP is a year behind and a dollar short. Not only do we have nearly 4,000 megawatts of renewables under construction in Alberta right now; we have a further 5,000 with approval being built in the next year, and we have a full 25,000 more that are in the queue. Again, we will build them when we have the load to use them. We are here serving Albertans with the best electricity system possible, leading not only Canada but North America as well.

Hospital Construction

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, picture it. It was Stampede of 2015, and after many Conservative governments made promises that they failed to follow through on, Alberta's first NDP government announced and then funded the Calgary cancer centre. Others said that they'd build it, but it was never in their budgets. They dithered, they delayed, but the NDP delivered. As a result, the Arthur J.E. Child cancer centre is seeing patients today. So will the minister agree that announcing, funding, and following through on the Calgary cancer centre by the then Premier and Health minister was the right thing to do for cancer patients?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I would agree that it is always important to look after cancer patients, and that's why we have invested heavily within our province on cancer care. We need to continue to make that investment because we are continuing to see that cancer is no longer a death sentence; now it's becoming treated as a chronic illness. We have greater capacity, we are seeing more people with cancer, and we're also seeing them live longer, and that is a good-news story.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Tom Baker was way over capacity and that patients were receiving cancer care in hallways or at any time of the night and given that the new cancer centre means patients can get the right care in the right place but we need to make sure that it's at the right time with the right provider and given that the new cancer centre is seven times the size of the old centre but the operating budget hasn't increased properly to staff it, will the minister promise this House and all Albertans that she'll fight for increased funding for cancer care in the upcoming budget so that we can all see the potential that it has?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a cancer survivor myself I will absolutely fight for cancer care across this province; that's not even a question. But I think we can all celebrate the fact that Alberta's government and, in fact, the people of Alberta have built this \$1.4 billion facility that has increased research space. It will find new treatments. It will provide better care, quality care, across this province. All Albertans should celebrate this good news because it belongs to the people of Alberta.

Ms Hoffman: Given that all Albertans deserve a government that will put their care first, ensuring that they get the right care in the right place at the right time, and given that the Conservative government spent five years pretending that they were going to build the south Edmonton hospital but this year took a one-eighty

and said that they're cancelling that project and given that this is déjà vu all over again but instead of cancer care in Calgary, this time it's a community and hospital in Edmonton, will the minister please stop playing games that the Conservative Calgary cancer centre failed Albertans on and finally commit to building the south Edmonton hospital that we all need? Yes or no, Minister?

2:10

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to be misinformed. On this side of the House we will continue to fight for cancer care. I'll bring to your attention that I recently announced a partnership between the government, Alberta Health Services, and 19 to Zero to expand the Alberta Cancer Foundation investment of \$1.5 million to support mobile lung health units right across this province to serve rural, remote areas. I know the members opposite don't really care about rural, remote, but we do on this side of the House. We're also increasing the number of oncologists that will be working in Alberta. We've gone from 31.75, but we're up an additional 22 . . .

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

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, while this last wildfire season has been challenging for Albertans, we've also witnessed Alberta's remarkable resilience and community spirit. I've seen this first-hand in my hometown of Slave Lake numerous times, especially after the devastating fire in 2011. In the face of tragedy the province united to support affected communities, with Albertans from all corners coming together to help displaced residents, to help combat the fires. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: could you share how our preparations over the past year have contributed to Alberta's response?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that great question. Through \$155 million in investment in wildfire readiness we added new front-line responders, air tankers, helicopters equipped with night-vision technology, and heavy equipment. At the peak of the wildfire season in July Alberta had 1,900 personnel, over 150 helicopters, and 23 air tankers ready to act. We've also implemented a unified command approach with municipalities across the province through Bill 21. This allowed us to limit wildfires effectively from about 700,000 hectares burned this year compared to 2.2 million hectares burned last year.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. Given that wildfires can start from various causes requiring specific preventative measures and given that significant investments were made to the province's wildfire prevention, preparedness, and response to ensure Alberta's government can help communities prepare for the 2025 wildfire season, to the same minister: what are some of the measures this government is taking to enhance wildland firefighting operations, and how will we empower our communities to remain vigilant and better equipped to respond to these tragedies?

Mr. Loewen: Our government invested an additional \$14 million for the community fireguard program to help 21 communities plan for fire prevention. Additionally, with our partners we've supported 75 FireSmart projects throughout the province for a total of \$7.1

million this year, and these are only some of the things we're doing. Unlike the members opposite, who time and time again failed to invest in any meaningful programs or prevention efforts during their time in office, our government continues working to make sure Alberta is not caught off guard by wildfire.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given our government's best efforts to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of wildfires, the inherent unpredictability of these natural disasters means risks still exist and given that I represent a riding with several communities that have already been affected already or are consistently threatened by fires since we're surrounded by so much forest and given that our transition into the colder months is crucial to understand the ongoing risks, to the same minister: how is the government monitoring these risks, and what measures are in place to prevent potential incidents during this time?

Mr. Loewen: Thanks again for the question. Wildfires can occur at any time of the year given the right conditions. Dead or dry vegetation is extremely flammable. Fires that aren't extinguished properly can smoulder underground for months during the winter and re-emerge as wildfires in the spring when conditions are right. That is why it is so important to continue following safe burning practices. Our government continues to monitor the situation. We are maintaining access to contracts for wildland firefighters, aircraft, and heavy equipment throughout the year to quickly react and suppress winter wildfire activity.

Provincial Police Agency

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Albertans, especially rural Albertans, are worried about public safety, but this government is focused on fighting with the RCMP. In late September the Premier stated that Alberta now has two provincial police forces, the RCMP and Alberta sheriffs, and municipalities could choose which they prefer. [interjection] However, a few weeks ago the minister of public safety stated that his new provincial policing agency created through Bill 11 wasn't intended to replace, undermine, or destabilize the RCMP but would instead work alongside law enforcement. Now, these claims are contradictory. The Premier said that they're in competition; the minister says that they're not. Can he clarify who got it wrong, him or the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. the . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:15.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I mean, thank you to the member for the question, but this is how out of touch the members opposite are here with their urban privilege when it comes to safety within rural Alberta. We have said time and time again that the new independent police agency will augment and support the RCMP. We are trying to augment and support the RCMP, the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and any police service within – because it is C-75, the bill that is supported by the members opposite, that has created the chaos within Alberta and, quite frankly, the rest of Canada.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that in March this government's budget made no mention of a provincial police force, the minister said there

were no funds set aside to establish one but given that there's no way to set up the additional administration, systems, substantial hiring that are going to be required without a significant injection of public money and given that this government claims it can't afford to invest in the things Albertans actually support – health care, education, workers, housing, and more – to the minister: how much is all of this going to cost? Where is the money going to come from? Does he intend to defund the RCMP, or is the Premier's mouth writing cheques his department can't cash?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I know it's tough for the NDP to go outside of the bubble of Edmonton, but if you looked at the sheriff automobiles, they are police cars. If you see their uniforms, those are police uniforms. If you see the utility belts that they have, those are use-of-force weapons. We have the infrastructure in place. It really is a matter of designation, and we are going to help the folks in rural Alberta. Despite what the NDP wants, we are going to continue to support rural Albertans because they have rights as well. Rural Albertans have a right to feel safe in this province, and that's what we're going to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the Premier claims this is necessary to ensure we have enough officers to police our communities but given that her claims about these current numbers of officers and the numbers of vacancies are significantly different from the numbers that are reported by the RCMP and given that the RCMP openly, transparently reports these numbers to municipalities and to this minister every month, can the minister confirm: just how many new sheriffs has he hired this year, and can he explain why the Premier is using statistics that are so different to justify an expensive police force that nobody in rural Alberta actually wants?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, of course these numbers fluctuate, but on any given day we are between 17 to 20 per cent short on our authorized strength numbers. Do you know what the number one concern of the Manitoba NDP was at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting? I'll tell you what it was. It was the shortage of RCMP officers. They are 30 per cent short in Manitoba. If you include British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, it's simple math. Right now the RCMP do not have enough people to police Canada. We are going to augment and support the RCMP to make sure people have safety in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Homeless Supports

Member Irwin: Four thousand six hundred ninety-seven: that is the estimated number of Edmontonians without homes. We've never seen numbers like this before, and they're trending upward at an alarming rate. When the minister was recently asked about these unprecedented numbers, he said that he thought they were, quote, relatively stable. These numbers aren't stable; they're incredibly damning, and they should be driving this government to act. So I must ask the Premier: what is so stable about nearly 5,000 Edmontonians without a home? Where is the UCP's plan?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are not seeing a significant increase in our largest city when it comes to homelessness. We still do have a large amount of homelessness in our largest city, which is why this government over the last year has put in record amounts of investment in things like emergency shelters, the most in the

history of the province, as well as record amounts when it comes to things like affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to do it because we believe in our approach, which is getting people off the streets to the help that they need to keep them warm, unlike the Official Opposition, who continues to advocate for a different approach which keeps people outside, freezing and not receiving the services that they need to be able to save their lives. Our government is going to continue to take action and not be lectured by the failure of the NDP.

Member Irwin: Given that last week the federal housing minister went public about the UCP failing to access federal funds to address homelessness and encampments in Alberta and it was only after the story broke and after many people called out the minister, including me, that he finally engaged with his federal counterpart and given that Albertans are tired of the constant fighting with Ottawa, especially when lives depend on it and when the stakes are this high, literally life and death, the UCP should be jumping at any funds. What took the minister so long to come to the table, and will he commit today to being more responsive in the future?

2:20

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we have been in ongoing talks with the federal government when it comes to encampments. Both the federal minister and I have spoken about where we're at, and I anticipate there will be announcements soon. I want to be clear that it's not the federal government just giving us money; Alberta would have to match that money. We're going to make sure it's the right deal for Albertans. You just saw the difference between the two parties right there. The hon. member says that she will jump at whatever Justin Trudeau offers them. That's how we've ended up with the biggest social services challenge anywhere in this province. That is the carbon tax that's devastating the economy, devastating single mothers who are trying to pay their bills, impacting homeless shelters. This government will always stand up for Albertans, not for the boss in Ottawa.

Member Irwin: Given that we're not hearing a shred of empathy from this minister and given that those unprecedented numbers of unhoused Albertans represent real humans – there are daughters, sons, fathers, mothers, cousins, grandparents, mushums, kokums – and they are deeply loved but this government has failed them as homelessness has gotten exponentially worse under the UCP, nearly tripling in Edmonton since 2019, and I'm so worried about this upcoming winter, and given that no one should want to see any more Albertans dying on our streets, to the minister: what is the plan to address this urgent crisis? Please be specific.

Mr. Nixon: Homeless numbers in Edmonton have not tripled. Let's be very, very clear about that, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hover around 1,700 to 1,800 people in the city of Edmonton. We have capacity to be able to handle that, an emergency capacity, because of the investment of the government. We were under 90 per cent capacity last night. We don't ever anticipate that we would be above 100, but we're ready to take action if that came forward. We continue to invest in the city of Edmonton alone over \$100 million a year to keep care of the homeless. What the NDP did when they were in power is they did nothing, because their plan was to keep them in encampments. Shame on them.

Animal Welfare

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville we love our companion animals. It

is common to see a cat or a dog sitting by the living room window, dutifully watching the front step. A classic family outing would be going to the farm and playing with the barn cats. It is important that all pets and companion animals are cared for, even those who have no owner to tend for them. Could the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation tell the House what supports the government of Alberta offers to the SPCA to help care for the abandoned pets and companion animals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation has risen.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I agree that it's crucial to care for all animals, whether it's the family cat in the house or cattle in the corral. In Alberta the Animal Protection Act sets out clear prohibitions against causing or permitting distress to animals and sets out requirements for animal care. Alberta's government funds the Alberta society for the protection of animals every year to enforce the act, which ensures family pets and livestock are protected. For 2024-25 we're giving the Alberta SPCA \$1.27 million to continue its work, and we've been proudly funding them since 1967.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given the commitment of Alberta's government to ensuring animal welfare in Alberta and given that abandoned animals stand at a higher risk of contracting dangerous infectious diseases and further given that if left unchecked, groups of feral cats or wild dogs can become dangerous to Albertans' health and safety, could the minister explain how these populations are humanely regulated and what steps are being taken to stop the spread of disease amongst these animals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree that it's crucial to ensure diseases don't spread from wild and feral animals to pets or livestock. We've seen how diseases like highly pathogenic avian influenza can spread from wild birds to poultry and the devastating impact that it has on our agricultural industry, which is why my ministry works on animal disease prevention and control activities, including emergency planning, premises ID, traceability programs, and disease surveillance. If anybody sees wild or feral animals that could cause an issue, I suggest they contact the Alberta SPCA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given the importance of protecting the well-being of animals here in Alberta and given that the welfare of pets and companion animals is the responsibility of their owners and further given that some people, unfortunately, neglect, abuse, or abandon pets or companion animals that they have the duty to care for, could the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation explain to the Chamber what penalties would be applied in the event a pet or companion animal is abused, neglected, or abandoned by its owner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member. As I mentioned, Alberta's Animal Protection Act protects the welfare of animals in this province. It states that animals must be protected from undue suffering and pain and authorizes enforcement

to protect them. People convicted of animal abuse or neglect under the act can be fined up to \$20,000. The Alberta SPCA is responsible for investigating situations outside of Edmonton and Calgary. I encourage all Albertans who are concerned about the treatment of livestock or pets to get in touch with their local humane societies or the SPCA.

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

United Conservative Party Annual General Meeting

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question concerns government business being conducted at a political party event. A private school principal wrote to parents and students and invited them to the upcoming UCP AGM. The Premier has apparently offered to meet with these guests about her plan to spend Alberta taxpayer money on building private schools. The whole thing will be paid for by a UCP insider with deep pockets. My question is to the Premier. What is the government policy when it comes to co-ordinating government business with a private school at the UCP AGM?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that question I didn't really hear anything with regard to actual government policy. I did hear the member opposite talking about the UCP AGM coming up, and it is a great opportunity for me to rise and congratulate the conservative movement for hosting the largest AGM in the history of the province with almost 6,000 registrants coming.

But enough about the strength of the conservative movement, Mr. Speaker. Right now our government is laser focused on what matters most to Albertans, and that is making sure that they have affordability, they're safe in their streets, and they're safe in their homes, and we're doing just that.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the trip is to support the Premier's plan for private school construction and given that an unknown UCP insider is paying for all of these costs for students as young as 14 and given that the letter says the trip has, "absolutely no cost to anyone who wishes to participate," and further, "transportation, all meals, and convention tickets, \$399... [will be] covered," to the Premier: what's the government's policy in keeping government business separate from party events in her leadership race?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy to see the member opposite so keen and interested about our upcoming AGM, as my colleague mentioned, one of the largest political events in Canada. I hope the member comes as well. I'm sure he'll learn a lot.

I just wanted to get up, Mr. Speaker, and talk about the school construction accelerator program that he's referring to because I'm incredibly proud of this project, and I know our government is. Through this project we aim to create over 200,000 spaces. We will expedite the construction of 90 new schools in some of our fastest growing communities and modernize spaces in other communities to make sure every student has world-class facilities.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act is clear that any costs of busing students to a party convention should be considered a contribution and given that Elections Alberta requires these costs to be accounted for and given that this trip is supposed to be about public policy but happens to take place on the same day the Premier needs more votes to win her party leadership, will the Premier commit to co-operating with any

investigation by Elections Alberta into this matter, and will she make all her correspondence with Elections Alberta public?

The Speaker: I might just provide a cautionary note to the hon. member. On his first two questions he very clearly asked a question about: what is the government policy? Although they did touch on party matters, I would encourage him to make sure that the questions continue to be about government policy. On the third I'm not convinced that it was.

The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am, too, pleased to see the enthusiasm that the hon. member has in our upcoming AGM. I'm encouraged by the excitement of members opposite in relation to that. Again, I'd like to extend the invitation to that member. It's warm and cozy over on this side. Certainly, one particular member of that NDP caucus needs a seat. We'd be happy to have you on our AGM. We're absolutely – and we always will comply with any investigation with respect to Elections Alberta and any other appropriate investigations, and we're happy to do so.

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

2:30 Supervised Drug Consumption Site in Red Deer

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. September 23 was a good day for Red Deer. We announced that the NDP drug site will get out of Red Deer. That is very good; nobody wants this drug site in Red Deer. Red Deer city council voted to get the Red Deer drug site out of Red Deer. To the minister: when will long-suffering families and businesses see the drug site get out of Red Deer?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working collaboratively with the city of Red Deer, following their motion that they passed to transition the drug consumption site into a recovery-oriented system of care. We're actively bringing millions of dollars of new recovery services into the city of Red Deer, including: recovery coaches, for half a million; the mobile RAAM unit, with treatment on demand, for \$1.3 million; the dynamic overdose response team, as we've seen pioneered at the drop-in centre in Calgary, for \$1.2 million of operations fund; and then increased detox capacity at \$460,000 operating. That does not include millions in capital to make it happen. We're listening to the community.

Mr. Stephan: Given the lived experience of the NDP drug sites is destruction and division – they are very, very bad, Mr. Speaker – given Red Deer city council was right to vote out the Red Deer NDP drug site, given it is right to love and support Albertans drowning in addiction to become free from addiction, and it is wrong to, in any manner, support and keep them in the filthy waters of addiction, to the minister: why is recovery the better way?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, from this government's and my perspective, we respect everybody who's in addiction and know that they need help and health care to help them with it. The Alberta recovery model offers a model of hope and of life, a culture that allows people to choose recovery over the tragedy that is addiction running its course. In Red Deer alone we've invested \$20 million in our first recovery community, which has been operational for over a year and saving hundreds of lives every year. We've funded the Red Deer Dream Centre, \$1.2 million for more community

treatment beds, and of course \$21 million into therapeutic living units in the Red Deer correction facility, that is helping those who struggle with addiction.

Mr. Stephan: Given NDP drug sites normalize and embolden law-breaking and crime, given drug sites destroy surrounding businesses and make law-abiding individuals and families less safe, given drug dealers like drug sites, given that if Alberta got rid of all NDP drug sites, there would be less crime in Alberta, to the minister: when will Alberta get rid of all NDP drug sites?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government is serious about an alternative to the policy that Canadians have seen for decades. It's called the Alberta recovery model going forward, and we don't believe that drug consumption sites on every street corner are going to address the addiction crisis. Instead, we're building 11 recovery communities, five of which are with First Nation Indigenous communities across this province. We have the world's most innovative program for delivering opioid agonist therapy, in the VODP, here in Alberta, treating over 10,000 at any given time. We've increased over 10,000 spaces since we came into government in 2019. We are continuing to move forward, listening to communities, and building the Alberta recovery model.

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

Federal Trade Policies

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. China has recently announced an antidumping investigation on Canadian canola exports. This represents another escalation in the current trade war between Canada and our second-biggest trading partner. Estimates are putting the effects of this move on the industry at over \$1 billion. With our province already facing a significant affordability crisis as it is, Alberta producers cannot be expected to shoulder this new financial burden. What is the minister doing to protect Alberta farmers from this painful economic shock?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everybody mark your calendars because it's a year and a half that I've been minister, and that's the opposition's first question to agriculture. Unfortunately, I do have to point out that the opposition continuing to prop up the Liberal Trudeau government is why we're in this situation. They continue to put tariffs in place that they knew would result in a retaliatory action against our agricultural industry. I would ask that the opposition stop supporting this Jagmeet Singh Liberal coalition, side with us, and push back to get the support farmers need.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't wait for every day to be ag day.

Given that in 2019 China banned canola seed imports from two major Canadian exporters over the Canadian detention of a Chinese corporate executive and given that by 2021 our exports fell from \$2.8 billion to \$1.8 billion and given that in September China announced an antidumping investigation on Canadian canola exports in response to the EV and steel tariffs implemented by Canada and given that once more it is estimated that this could cost our industry more than a billion dollars, how is the minister communicating to the federal government that our farmers can't keep writing the cheque for the feds? There you go, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, when we first heard of this, we met immediately with our stakeholders, Alberta Canola and our canola representatives across Canada. There is a deep concern. That's why I reached out to Minister MacAulay immediately to have a conversation about what supports they are going to work on to be able to aid our canola producers through these difficult times. We understand how challenging this can be. That's why this side of the House is going to be there for our farmers and ranchers. We're going to continue to support them, and I will continue to put pressure on the federal government to come up with an immediate resolution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that China has recently announced an antidumping investigation on Canadian canola exports and given that this isn't about the guilt of our farmers but rather about development in Canada's ongoing trade war with China and given, nevertheless, that they will have to prove their integrity at the hearing and given that these sham allegations will cost the defendants over a million dollars to fight, to the minister: why should our farmers be hung out to dry on this issue, and what is the minister doing to help them with the ridiculous costs of the lawsuits?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for the question, because I do believe those who are responsible for making the mistake should pay for it. That's why I do believe the federal government should step up and support our canola producers, our farmers and ranchers right here in Alberta to be able to push back against this antidumping investigation that has no merit or value. We also need to continue to support our farmers and ranchers to diversify our trading partners so we're not so heavily dependent on China as a trading partner. This government will support farmers and ranchers. I can assure you of that.

E Coli Outbreak in Calgary Daycares

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow Children and Family Services will appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions about the largest E coli outbreak in daycares in Canadian history. Our caucus wants accountability for the poisoning of over 400 children, but because the ministry was reorganized, the staff responsible won't be in attendance. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade. You inherited the staff that were working in children's services at the time of this disaster. Will you direct your officials to attend the meeting and be held accountable for this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure is rising.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Naturally, we're very concerned about that outbreak. We've done everything that we can. We're introducing legislation later this week, in fact, to provide further protections in daycare centres. One of the things that we're going to be able to do through this legislation is to shut down facilities that are not following the rules but also to be able to incorporate and instill fines whenever needed.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that what I heard was the minister refusing to accept accountability for this disaster and given that Albertans expect their government to own up to its mistakes, not run and hide from accountability, and the minister won't make his officials available tomorrow to answer questions at Public Accounts, can the

Premier assure this House that her members on the committee will support a motion to call Jobs, Economy and Trade to meet with us at its next scheduled meeting on November 5?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to providing safe, high-quality, and affordable child care that meets the needs of families across the province. Every day approximately 158,000 children are enrolled in licensed child care across the province. In fact, enrolment in licensed child care programs has increased by about 51,000, and that's 71 per cent, since 2021. We've successfully reduced out-of-pocket costs for parents to an average of \$15, and we're on track to do \$10 by 2026.

2:40

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister still refuses to accept accountability for what happened and given that more than 400 children got sick and almost 40 were hospitalized and that many of those still suffer from severe health consequences as a result of the UCP's failure to protect children in daycare, it's crucial that Albertans be given the opportunity to hold this government accountable. What does it take for Albertans to get some answers to these questions? Do we have to buy the minister skybox tickets to the next Oilers game?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our children are, of course, of primary concern, and when parents and guardians and caregivers go to work, they need to know that their children are in safe care. Alberta's government monitors licensed child care programs across the province and takes the appropriate actions to ensure compliance with the Early Learning and Child Care Act and its affiliated regulation. Alberta's government is increasing transparency and accountability across the system, and we strongly believe that keeping children safe is everyone's business.

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

School Construction Accelerator Program

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government, through the school construction accelerator program, is investing \$8.6 billion to deliver over 200,000 new and modernized student spaces across the province over the next seven years. These investments will support our communities for decades, particularly as Alberta experiences rapidly rising student enrolment growth. Can the Minister of Education please update the House on how these new investments will support students and communities, particularly in rural Alberta, to ensure high-quality education spaces for rural students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of priorities through the school construction accelerator program. Of course, one of those is to build schools in our rapidly growing communities. The other priority pillar of the project is to ensure that we are updating and modernizing spaces in some of our smaller and older communities, so rural Alberta will see some significant benefit from the projects that we aim to modernize. We aim to be able to create thousands of new, updated, and modernized spaces through the project, and I'm excited to be able to work towards fulfilling this ambitious plan so that we can make sure that every student has access to world-class facilities.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the modernization of existing schools is a key component of Alberta's strategy and given that Barrhead composite high school is part of this initiative, with funding allocated for design work to modernize the school to a capacity of 820 students, can the same minister provide an update for my constituents on the progress of the school project and how it fits into the government's broader commitment to ensuring Alberta's school infrastructure can meet the needs of current and future generations?

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Absolutely. The project in Barrhead is a perfect example of how the school accelerator project will work. This project in particular we've been able to move out of the design phase. It's been able to tick all the boxes. It's ready to go. We've been able to advance it in a year, which is not something the government has typically done, and we've been able to move it out of design into construction. We hope that a contractor and all of the other details will be in place by early 2025 and, hopefully, be in a position to be able to break ground that coming spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that both Mallaig's K to 12 school and Waskatenau's Holy Family Catholic school in my riding have been earmarked for replacement, with Mallaig's project being prioritized under the school construction accelerator program, can the minister provide updates on the progress of these school replacement projects and explain how the program initiative will help fast-track the Mallaig project, ensuring that both communities benefit from the modernized educational spaces that they need?

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, the project in Mallaig has been able to move out of the design stage as a consequence of the new school construction accelerator program. Again, one of the key elements of this plan is that we are able to move projects through those different stages mid-year, so that project is also moving out of design into construction. We hope that we'll be in a position to be able to break ground on that project in 2025 so that students and families can see the benefits and rewards of the new school.

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.

Members' Statements

(continued)

United Conservative Party Annual General Meeting

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: As we'll see in this session, the UCP government doesn't believe that 14-year-olds are capable of making their own decisions, with the help of their parents and doctors, about their own bodies. The UCP ironically thinks it's perfectly fine to have these same 14-year-olds cast a ballot for the leadership convention, never mind whether these children have memberships or not to the UCP. Apparently, in this social club rules don't matter, especially if the Premier's own leadership is on the line. Let's be clear. It is.

You see, this weekend the Premier's friends with deep pockets are paying \$400 per student of a private school, and their families, to be bused down on Saturday to Red Deer to vote for the Premier. The private school students and families have been promised it's an all-expenses-paid trip. No one has told them who is picking up the

tab and paying for this expensive donation to the UCP. But when there's a leadership race to be won, who cares if it's children's funding or not? Rather than investing in resources in classrooms, they are paying for buses to Red Deer to the leadership convention.

The Premier should know that an in-kind donation to a political party from a private school cannot happen without filing these expenses with Elections Alberta as a third-party contribution. But since when has the UCP ever followed the rules that apply to everyone? Not only are the Premier's deep-pocketed friends paying for all these new overnight delegates; they also have sway over the Premier, and they've managed to line up a secret meeting in the backrooms of her leadership review. This is unethical conduct. Time will tell if the Premier's hand-picked new Ethics Commissioner – you know, the one that used to work in her office and ran for a nomination with the UCP himself and lost. Will he be brave enough to dive into this whole mess? Likely not. Albertans will not be fooled.

Support for Families

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, it's a great honour to be back in this Chamber on the first day of the fall sitting and speak to one of the most inalienable truths, a reason I felt called to this office. Since the dawn of time, long before governments and progressives existed, the family was the core building block of society. Healthy families with parents who love and support their kids are what make our province great. But in recent years the family has been under increasing attacks by a misguided movement with radical ideologies that insist on undermining traditional family values and the role of parents. These people would like to tell us that parents cannot be trusted to love and care for their children more than anyone else in the world, and they denounce anyone who disagrees with their radical ideology as hateful and heartless.

But we and most Albertans recognize that governments do not replace families and do not grant parents their inherent rights. We will not support those who experiment with the lives and health of children and families. It is the task of government to provide an environment where families can prosper together in love and security. This is why during this fall legislative session we will defend and strengthen the rights of families to safety, security, and health. This is why we will do what it takes to stop the experimental ideology that strips parents of the right to know and care for every aspect of their children's lives. This is why we will stand up for the family as the fundamental building block of society, no matter who wants to break it down. The opposition is welcome to call us names and call us anti this or anti that, but in the UCP we are for Albertans, and that means we are for families. This is who we are and what we will stand for in a free and a prosperous Alberta.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:50

Racism Prevention

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, one of the immense joys of my position truly is connecting with community. Over the years I've had the opportunity to meet so many people, whether it's through the community league structure or the many ethnocultural groups that call Edmonton-Ellerslie home. In interacting with all these different people, you would think that they would have so many different issues and demands, but the reality is that their lived experiences have more in common than different. They have tremendous love for their family, friends, and community, and they desire the best for everybody.

I see so many leaders in our community doing amazing work, giving back not only to their own community but other communities as well. And this gives me hope for a better future for all of us. It is leaders like this that inspire others to follow in their footsteps, to mature and self-actualize and actually give back to their communities. In my humble opinion, it is these people that we should be supporting to move into positions of leadership and not those that strive to create divisions among us.

Unfortunately, racism and discrimination of others continues to be a plague in our society. I call on all of us to reflect upon our opinions and eradicate those ideas that continue to divide us. After all, we're one community, and although the economic reality is becoming more difficult, I can share with certainty that refugees and immigrants are not the root cause of the economic difficulty that many families are going through at this moment. Let us all continue to think critically about our lived experiences. Let us not give in to discrimination of any kind. I encourage all of us to reach out from our own communities into others and get to know one another to develop understanding of our shared values. We must come together to build for a better future for generations to come. Let us hold racism and discrimination in all of its forms at bay. We owe it to ourselves and the future of our children.

Statement by the Speaker

Royal Canadian Legion Poppy Campaign

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to the remainder of the daily Routine and Orders of the Day, I would like to note that the Speaker's office in conjunction with the Legion here in Edmonton has provided poppy boxes in both of your respective lounges. It's nice to see so many of you wearing them today.

I might note that the poppy boxes were not a gift from the Speaker's office or the legion, and I would expect that those boxes would return with a generous donation made to the legion on behalf of all members of the Assembly.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to follow through on its previous commitments by taking all necessary steps to implement the primary care comprehensive model for family physicians without further delay.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Bill 24

Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move first reading for Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Bill of Rights has safeguarded fundamental rights and freedoms in Alberta since 1972, but it has not been significantly updated since it was first introduced at that time, more than 50 years ago. Society has evolved since then, so it was important to review the act to ensure that the rights and freedoms

remain properly protected in an ever-changing world. The proposed amendments in this bill would reaffirm the values, rights, freedoms, and the way of life that Albertans hold so dear to one another. They would broaden and strengthen Albertans' rights with protections for personal autonomy, including autonomy in relation to medical care or treatment, property rights, and firearm rights.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand before you and move first reading of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of four Alberta newspaper articles which describe chronologically the colossal incompetence demonstrated by the UCP government in their misguided interference in the development of the Calgary green line LRT project. Some of them say: sought funding to be withheld. Next thing that happens, "green line LRT funding costs totalling \$2.1 billion," and goes on to say finally: funding is going to be recommitted. It's a colossal Keystone Kops series of articles.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a couple of tablings today. In my capacity as the Speaker and pursuant to section 22.3 of the Legislative Assembly Act I would like to table six copies of the following speaker directives: Law Enforcement Weapons Authorization Directive, being Directive No. SD 01/2024, issued on September 1, 2024; Legislative Security Officer Directive, being Directive No. SD 02/2024, issued on September 18, 2024. Copies of these directives can also be found on the Legislative Assembly website.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act Alberta Law Foundation annual report 2024.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Nally, Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, pursuant to An Act to End Predatory Lending An Act to End Predatory Lending 2023 report; pursuant to the Horse Racing Alberta Act Horse Racing Alberta annual report 2023.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:15 a point of order was raised, which has been withdrawn.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora rose and provided notice of a Standing Order 42, of which we will now hear.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Primary Care Compensation Negotiations

Ms Hoffman:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to follow through on its previous commitments by taking all

necessary steps to implement the primary care comprehensive model for family physicians without further delay.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the urgency in relation to Standing Order 42 around the importance of signing the primary care comprehensive model with family physicians without further delay.

Mr. Speaker, it's been two years since the Premier became the Premier, and 371 days ago her minister, who was new at the time, signed an MOU with the at that time new president of the Alberta Medical Association speaking to the need for an expeditious negotiation to come up with a solution for the crisis that was already under way in family medicine.

During that time, Mr. Speaker, it has gotten far, far worse. We continue to see family doctors leave this province. We continue to see family doctors choose to move out of family medicine and into other types of offices where they're no longer seeing a roster of patients in family medicine. We see many retiring, often earlier than they had chosen to, because they have no stability and no certainty from the current government.

Mr. Speaker, 167 days ago the Premier attended the Alberta Medical Association's representative forum – I was there, too – and she said that she would be signing the contract that was already agreed to verbally with physicians in the coming weeks. That was 167 days ago. The Premier and the minister said that it was something that needed to be dealt with expeditiously. I would say 371 days does not meet that criteria. But we know that the best day to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best day is today. So the good news is that this government can actually show commitment to following through on what they previously negotiated and said they would sign.

After the Premier said that at the representative forum in the spring, then it was clarified, or somebody wanted to give more time, and they said: "No. It will be done in September." Then it was said: "No. It will be done in October." And here we are, Mr. Speaker; the end of the month is on Thursday and doctors are still waiting. But in the meantime patients are the ones who are paying the price.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that in 2023 alone 202,000 Albertans arrived in this province, a net increase. We know that this year an additional 32,000 have also moved to this province. And while the Premier and minister will quote the number of people who have billing codes in the province of Alberta, that is not translating to people who have access to a family physician.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we had a health care town hall in Lethbridge just a few weeks ago, and there were many people who came there speaking to the top two issues. Number one was family medicine, because so many people who live in that community don't have a family doctor, and number two was wait times for a variety of surgeries. And while, Mr. Speaker, today the Premier said that we're expanding med schools into Lethbridge – there is a plan to do that, but it has not happened yet. In fact, the Premier made it sound like it was already under way.

3:00

When you talk to doctors who actually live in the community, they make it very clear that they don't know where the practice is going to be set up. I know that there are space issues in Lethbridge that we're not experiencing in Grande Prairie and that they, too, see this as something that is dire and urgent as they continue to have to turn patients away in the community of Lethbridge, many having to travel significant hours if they can even get access to a doctor at all. So while Alberta continues to attract more residents, the increase in

population needs us to have more physicians, and we are not seeing that in terms of the actual availability to doctors. Again, billing codes don't translate to access to an actual doctor.

In 2019, around the time this government took over, every major municipality in Alberta, including Edmonton, including Lethbridge, including Calgary and Grande Prairie: you could get a family doctor, and that is not the case anymore, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association went on to report most recently that 58 per cent of physicians are planning to either leave their practice or relocate it to another province and that by 2029 65 per cent – oh, that's the period in which they plan on leaving by. We know 65 per cent are already taking steps within that to make that happen. Doctors are closing their practices. In fact, not just doctors were talking about closing their practices; in fact, many doctors came up to me at the most recent representatives forum to say that they themselves don't have a family doctor, including the new president of the Alberta Medical Association.

In the majority of municipalities we can't get family doctors today. There were two family physicians in Lethbridge who recently went very public about the fact that they love living in Alberta and specifically in Lethbridge but that practising medicine here is no longer sustainable. They're going to British Columbia. We know that this impacts emergency rooms, and for anyone who's spending time on social media, I welcome you to please visit the Alberta Medical Association's social media accounts, where doctors are putting out regular quotes about what they're experiencing. When people don't have access to primary care, they end up in the emergency department, and when they are in the emergency department, they have worse health outcomes and we know that it's a higher cost to the system. So this is absolutely of urgent need, Mr. Speaker. We can't ask Albertans to continue waiting while they're losing family physicians.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, an SO 42 is a request for unanimous consent to set aside the normal business of the day to proceed immediately to the motion that has been proposed. Pursuant to Standing Order 42(1.2) it allows a member of Executive Council up to five minutes to respond to the request. It would seem the hon. the Minister of Health has risen to do just that.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the motion put forward by the members opposite, and I urge all members not to provide unanimous consent.

Alberta's government values physicians and the invaluable work and contributions that they make to health and well-being of all Albertans, and I've spoken about our ongoing work to develop a new primary care physician compensation model in this House many, many times. Let me expand on the work that we've accomplished to this end. The most important thing for all members to remember is that in 2022 there was a negotiated agreement signed with the Alberta Medical Association, and this covers all physician compensation and goes from 2022 to 2026. All physicians received 4 per cent, but family physicians actually received 5 per cent over that time period.

Since that time of the implementation, the physicians' service budget has increased from \$4.7 billion in '22-23 to over \$6.7 billion in '24-25. So despite the fact that we just had signed an agreement in 2022, I further signed an MOU in October of 2023 with the then AMA president Dr. Paul Parks to work on a new model of primary care physician compensation. In December of that year we announced that our government would be directing an additional funding of \$200 million over two years to help bridge the time between the development of the new model and when we could

implement the new model. Additionally, there was \$57 million over three years announced to help primary care providers with growing patient caseloads.

In April we announced that we had an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association for a framework for the new model. The next step in the process was for the management committee to recommend rates that family physicians and rural generals would be paid under the new model. It was then that we went to the rates committee, Mr. Speaker, which had 30 days to come to an agreement on a rate recommendation once the management committee's proposals had been received. This process is outlined in our agreement with the AMA, so final recommendations were expected to come to me this fall. We are still in fall.

Mr. Speaker, we are now, as I said, in fall, and I have shared publicly over the last few months that we continue to finalize the model. We knew from the start that developing a new physician compensation model would be a complex and time-consuming process. This work was never about quick fixes, and while we are close to finalization, there's still more work to be done. This includes ensuring the model will address ongoing concerns that we have heard from not just physicians and operators of physician clinics but also owners of physician clinics. We want this model to be successful operationally and financially, to be sustainable in the long term.

We have introduced new models before, Mr. Speaker, and expended quite a bit of money to make sure that they are operational only to have extremely low uptake from physicians. I want to share the example that I've shared many times before of the blended capitation model. The blended capitation model, the BCM model, was launched in November of 2016. In 2017 only one clinic had onboarded onto the BCM. Considerable work had been done by Alberta Health in collaboration with the Alberta Medical Association to support physicians transitioning to the BCM. The model is still being offered as an alternative to fee for service for interested clinics, but there are currently only six clinics enrolled in this compensation model with 62 physicians actively participating.

Mr. Speaker, we want a new primary care physician compensation model to be successful, and we are finalizing our work to make sure that we are confident physicians will be able to have it run for the long term. We've seen an increase of 518 more physicians since the third quarter of 2023. That's a 4.5 per cent increase. This is actually larger growth than what's been seen in B.C., which was 4.2 per cent over the same time period. I can assure you that, with the added dollars that we are seeing in physician compensation from that \$4.7 billion that we had originally seen in '22-23 to \$6.7 billion, in fact, physicians are actually using their codes and, in fact, billing the Alberta government, and we are happy to continue working with physicians as we finalize the new model.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

Operator Penalties

Q3. Ms Sigurdson asked that the following question be accepted.

How many operators were subject to a penalty as a result of a contravention of the continuing care health services standards, as amended July 16, 2018, required under the

nursing homes general regulation, the co-ordinated home care program regulation, or any ministerial directive made under the Regional Health Authorities Act, during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much. It's my honour to rise and talk about Written Question 3. It's essential that Albertans know the concerns that may be presented in their facilities that their loved ones live in and that we must make sure that this is a transparent process. We must make sure that people know where people are being placed and that facility is in good standing, yet it seems this government does not create a transparent process for that to happen with some very disturbing results, Madam Speaker.

3:10

In the spring we uncovered some disturbing hidden data – so it's not transparent at all – that reveals many continuing care and supportive living operators are not meeting minimum standards of care. They are not fixing the problems in a timely manner and are not being held accountable for unclean, unsanitary conditions that Albertans rightfully expect for their loved ones. This is a serious issue, Madam Speaker, and that's why this question and that we must bring this forward are so important.

We know that Albertans are living in facilities dealing with issues of uncleanliness, unresolved odours, rodent droppings, concerns about ensuring that residents receive a minimum of two baths a week – so they're not even receiving that many – a lack of critical infection prevention, and control issues with healthy food and water for residents and unchecked outbreaks of mould in a commercial kitchen. We discovered all of this sort of buried deeply in, you know, the websites of the Alberta government. These have to be more transparent so people can assess facilities to make sure that these issues are being dealt with and that their loved ones, oftentimes their parents, are not being subjected to this kind of low quality of living conditions. We must make sure that people have a high quality and that operators are responsible and mitigate, improve, take care of any of these issues.

We saw that the information was buried in the Alberta government's website, and it showed that inspectors are finding more problems than ever with a very large jump in noncompliant issues since 2018. In 2023 there were nearly 2,000 more issues flagged as noncompliant than five years previous. This is completely under the UCP watch, Madam Speaker, that these increases have occurred, and that's why this question is so important, because things are not being dealt with, and that puts vulnerable seniors at risk.

Inspections performed by the public health inspectors found some of the kitchens in these facilities lacking in cleanliness. This included reports of rodent droppings, repeated instances of mould, and one facility even had 12 repeated and frequent noncompliant inspections about odour control, that took over 10 months to resolve. Three hundred thirty-seven noncompliant issues were still marked as unresolved in the government's own data. These include 59 inspections resulting in noncompliance for hygiene issues; of these, 32 inspections found that policies and procedures weren't properly in place to ensure seniors were offered a minimum two baths a week. A hundred thirty-eight inspections resulted in noncompliance on infection prevention and control, and 45 inspections resulted in noncompliance with nutrition and hydration.

It's so key to repair the trust and build confidence that Albertans need to know that the minister is taking all of these contraventions and violations of care standards seriously. Albertans must have

publicly available information about the scope of violations in this province. Additionally, they need to know who is committing these contraventions and what those contraventions are. This is the only way Albertans can make informed choices about the care their loved ones are receiving. Yet that's not what's happening at the moment, as I've indicated, and that's why it's so important. It's not like we don't already know there are significant issues in our continuing care system, that we do read about in the media.

As an elected official I meet often with loved ones of people who live in continuing care and are very concerned for the well-being of their family members, their friends, and I receive phone calls, e-mails, letters from across Alberta regarding this, concerned about the continuing care system, concerns about understaffing, staff retention, proper training of staff, inadequate supervision of staff. Of course, the issues with staffing create a cascade effect, right? If staff aren't well supported, if there's not adequate staff – guess what – the services are reduced, people aren't getting the care they need, and that puts people in a very vulnerable situation. These are seniors in a continuing care facility that, of course, is a higher level care facility. People are there because they do need around-the-clock care, and if they're not having that, then they can be put at risk. So it's incumbent on the government to make sure that they are transparent about this and make sure that people are accountable, these operators, to ensure that people do get the services they need.

We know certainly this is a complex issue, and I know that the UCP has decided that moving the continuing care home care programs to another ministry is going to fix that. That was just recently suggested, but of course that's just administrative. The deep issues that I've already touched on continue to be prevalent in the system, and changing from one ministry to another is not going to make a difference.

Despite what the UCP is telling us, we know there's a significant lack of beds also. In the next five years we'll need an additional 10,000 beds in continuing care. What are the plans for that? We're not hearing anything from this government.

We also know that sometimes when there's a transition from hospital to a continuing care facility, we have chaos there and of course minimum standards aren't being fulfilled there. In the spring we talked a lot about motel medicine, where people are being discharged from the hospital and actually ending up in a motel. A man recovering from a stroke was partially paralyzed. He was taken to a motel where he couldn't use his wheelchair because it didn't have accessibility. He wasn't helped to use the bathroom, which was an issue because his wheelchair didn't fit in the bathroom, and he was fed fast food. Another individual was taken to a motel without being informed it was a motel and then taken to a different hotel without his family being notified. I mean, these are abhorrent situations for vulnerable people. The first fellow was recovering from a stroke, and he was pretty much abandoned by this government in a motel.

Certainly, when the Minister of Health at the time was asked about this, she said: well, we followed all the right procedures; everything's fine. It wasn't until later, when the Premier was back from being away, that she found that yes, indeed, this was a mistake and actually this isn't okay. Thank goodness that we see that it's important that people not just be put in motels and have motel medicine. That's why standards and governments holding providers accountable is so essential, but sadly these were horrific situations for really vulnerable Albertans, and we certainly don't want to repeat any of that motel medicine issue again.

There are other issues in our continuing care system, of course, that we want Albertans to know about and make sure that people are following the minimum standards . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Written Question 3? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason the question was rejected was the very fact that there is publicly posted information on all of the questions and items that the member opposite was speaking to. The information is available to anyone who wants to see it. It's online at <https://standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca/>. Like, I don't know why the member opposite didn't share that particular piece of information.

Alberta Health monitors all facilities with outstanding noncompliances, and then they are escalated for enforcement when the noncompliance could negatively impact the health, safety, or well-being of residents or clients. Obviously, we take that very, very seriously. As a government we want to make sure that our seniors, those who have formed the bedrock of this province, who have contributed so greatly, in their final years have a very safe, comforting, caring environment. It's the very reason why we in fact expanded the division in Alberta Health that is responsible for investigating concerns, so we have more people on the ground to do those investigations as they come forward. The licensing and compliance-monitoring branch of the continuing care division continues to work diligently to address current and ongoing concerns, and we're going to keep doing that. If we need more people to do that, we will have more people doing that.

3:20

The health and safety of residents in continuing care homes in Alberta is of the utmost importance to our government. We strive to ensure their experiences are positive and enjoyable. We want that. We all have family members that have gone into continuing care, and we expect that they will be treated with dignity and respect and be provided a safe environment. It's why, Madam Speaker, in Budget 2024 we continued our historic investment of \$1 billion over three years to begin transforming the continuing care system. We know that right now 1 in 7 Albertans are 65 years of age and older. Within the next 20 years that's going to be 1 in 5 Albertans who are going to be 65 years of age and older. We know that we need to expand the services and the facilities that we have available across this province. So this investment includes initiatives that will be enabled to shift for more care in the community, enhancing our workforce capacity, increasing choice and innovation, improving quality across continuing care. That's what Albertans are expecting. They want more choice. They want to have a say in the care that they actually receive.

Budget 2024 continues our government's commitment to the health and safety of Albertans in continuing care by including dedicated funding to incrementally increase direct hours of care in continuing care homes. Madam Speaker, that is going to be ongoing and will enable more person-centred care. It's expected to result in increased quality of care and, of course, quality of life for all the residents, with a decreased pressure on staff. That is what we're striving for, and we are going to succeed.

Furthermore, after extensive engagement we created and implemented the new Continuing Care Act to address this. That was on April 1, 2024, when the regulations and standards actually came into effect in Alberta. Of course, we want to make sure that every Albertan who enters a continuing care home has the care, the dignity, the respect that they are entitled to. That is of prime importance, and we're going to continue to make sure that that happens.

Members opposite, as I said earlier, continue to put misinformation out there. Of course, there's publicly posted information on the accommodation standards and licensing web page. I really would

direct all Albertans to go to that web page if they have any questions and certainly can reach out to my department if they have any further questions that are not answered on that page.

The Continuing Care Act also establishes consistent authority and oversight for Alberta Health regarding licensing and compliance monitoring of continuing care accommodations and the delivery of continuing care services in Alberta, reflecting current practices and settings and addressing the changing needs and expectations of Albertans. Just recently I was at a Continuing Care Association event, and they were very pleased with the changes that are being made. Because of the extensive engagement that we saw in the Continuing Care Act, what we heard very clearly was that there needed to be dedicated leadership for continuing care, and that's actually what's going to happen under the continuing care agency as we move forward.

Madam Speaker, I'm excited to put forward more information, but, as I said, the information is already there. So I'm not sure why the member opposite would want to create fear and dissension in the public. That information is readily available to everyone who would like to see it. I could go on and on. I'm not sure if my time is up.

The Deputy Speaker: It's five minutes still.

Member LaGrange: Oh, I thought we had three minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: No. You get 10.

Member LaGrange: Oh, okay. Well, I could, as I say, continue to go on and on, but I'll become very repetitive because the continuing care legislation really has set the stage to ensure it is enacted and implemented with person-centred care. This includes quality of life, person-centred care, dignity and respect, recognition of the contributions of caregivers, importance of staff, and enabling Albertans to age in place as a couple.

I know that when my in-laws were in their final years, they ended up in two different facilities at the same time. One was in a different city altogether, and it was so difficult after 64 years of marriage to see them split apart and to see what that caused us as a family and them as a loving couple to be that far apart in their final years. It was heartbreaking. So, Madam Speaker, that's certainly something we're looking to address, and we have made capital investments to make sure that we are addressing that particular issue among all the myriad other issues that are happening within the continuing care realm.

But getting back to the member opposite's question about, you know: why isn't this information readily available? It is readily available. As I said earlier, it can be found on the accommodation standards and licensing website. I could read it out again, but I'm sure people would be tired of me reading out that particular website: all to say that we are very focused on making sure that Albertans get the care, the love, the dignity, the respect that they need and deserve in Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll turn it back over if there's anyone else who wants some time.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Written Question 3. We just had the minister speak quite a bit on continuing care. The question also asked about nursing homes and also the home-care program. Thank you to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for introducing this question, which really aims to provide clarity on the treatment

of some of our most vulnerable Albertans. Any Albertan can receive continuing care services, no matter their age, diagnosis, or length of time they need support. Yes, continuing care services may be provided in different settings, including individual homes, community-based service locations such as adult day programs, supported living facilities, and facility-based continuing care.

A 2021 review completed for the Alberta Department of Health found that the demand for continuing care services will grow by 62 per cent by 2030. But there are some serious challenges facing our home-care, senior-care, and continuing care systems. Speaking from experience with home care, the home-care program directly, as a full-time caregiver to an elderly parent, the need for quality care for seniors is particularly salient for me. We're all aging, and whether or not we have plans about what that process will look like, we will inevitably be in a position one day where we will need to make the hard choices on account of our age. For many families relying on some type of seniors' care facility, you know, to care for our aging loved ones is considered a given, and these families should be able to trust that when their family members enter these facilities, they're being well cared for.

Operators in continuing care have strict legal obligations to meet standards that guarantee the care they provide is safe, medically sound, and meets the unique needs of their residents. These aren't optional; they're essential to protect the dignity and well-being of Alberta seniors. Unfortunately, we have seen alarming trends of noncompliance that should be raising major red flags for this government. In 2023 government staff performed 4,737 inspections on Alberta senior facilities, with 4,263, 90 per cent, violating provincial standards for continuing care. To put that into perspective, 9 out of every 10 facilities had some issue with noncompliance. Issues with noncompliance include a lack of cleanliness, odour control, nutrition, hydration, and infection prevention. Data showed that 337 issues had still not been resolved as of January 2024.

Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, this is unacceptable, and we need a better picture of the full scope of noncompliance of the province. It's not just about knowing facts. It's about demanding that the best practices are consistently upheld for those who need it most, our most vulnerable.

Albertans need confidence that issues of noncompliance will be addressed efficiently and effectively. But we've seen reports that degrading living standards in these facilities have damaged Albertans' trust in these systems and called into question the minister's ability to uphold standards in these facilities. To restore that trust, Albertans need assurance that every violation is taken seriously, that contrainterventions are handled transparently, and that there's real commitment to upholding standards across the board. Albertans have a right to know which operators are violating standards and what those contrainterventions entail. But the UCP doesn't seem to agree and would rather keep them in the dark.

3:30

To make matters worse, new regulations put forward by this UCP government that took effect on April 1 removed the minimum daily hours of care for each resident. The Minister of Health said she wanted to give operators flexibility. Based on the sheer number of violations, we need to have a minimum number of hours of care put back in place. This government would rather give operators flexibility than focus on supporting seniors in living facilities that have serious challenges of noncompliance. As Heather Smith, president of the United Nurses of Alberta, said, "We are taking the care out of continuing care." I think that everyone in this Chamber would agree that they would prioritize maintaining a high quality of life in our later years.

As our aging population increases, we need to be prepared to provide more support for seniors, not less. This UCP government's approach to health care has been largely reactive instead of proactive, but now is the time to focus our resources on prevention. From 2016 to 2021 the number of Canadians aged 65 and older increased by 18.3 per cent to 7 million people. In Alberta there are currently 745,000 seniors, a number expected to top 1 million by 2035. The demand for elderly care services is expected to rise steadily, encompassing various aspects such as health care, assisted living, home care. It's no surprise that this surge in demand will exert additional pressure on caregiving resources and the health care system as a whole, which will be compounded by necessity to address age-related conditions, chronic diseases, and long-term care needs. There will be higher demand for skilled caregivers specializing in geriatric care, long-term care facilities, and social support programs aimed at tackling issues like isolation, mental health, and community engagement.

For those losing their trust in these facilities, they're doing all they can to step up as caregivers for their loved ones. Caregivers, like myself, are doing the work of feeding people, bathing people, managing medications, getting people to and from appointments, and in some cases doing even significantly more nursing-level care at home. As a caregiver myself I can attest to the fact that there's really poor quality support for seniors in our province. About 50 per cent of caregivers have to take time off work and really lose out economically at a time when they're also paying out of pocket for all expenses associated with caregiving. Approximately 8 million Canadians are involved in some form of unpaid caregiving, including caring for parents and neighbours. This unpaid work, which often amounts to a few hours per week, has been quantified, taking into consideration out-of-pocket costs, low wages, and forgone vacations. These estimates tally up an estimated \$100 billion annually across this country, equivalent to about 4 per cent of our national GDP.

Given these costs, it is in our province's best interest that this government commit to setting up a network of support for elderly Albertans. Not only will we see the benefits of our health care system, we will see the benefits of our economy, especially our senior population, when they do so much to stay connected, active, and engaged in their communities. In fact, Alberta has had the highest percentage of seniors who volunteer in their community in any Canadian province. Consistently they're the top volunteers, donors, and most politically active citizens in our communities. We must do all we can to make sure seniors are given the opportunity to be pillars of their communities by maintaining their health and wellness for years to come.

Madam Speaker, I hope that the question brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is answered. With access to this information people can make informed choices about home care for themselves and for their loved ones and what they receive. I encourage the members opposite to look at the long-term impacts that a rapidly aging population will have on our economy and health care system. I encourage them to provide clear answers to this question. Albertans deserve transparency, accountability, and the right to expect safe, high-quality care for their loved ones.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for the written question. The question was regarding the number of operators subject to penalties as a result of a contravention of the continuing care health services

standards as amended on July 16, 2018, required under the nursing homes general regulation, the co-ordinated home care program regulation, or the ministerial directive made under the Regional Health Authorities Act from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023.

Before we proceed, I would like to point out that the information is publicly reported and available online through accommodation standards and licensing at standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca. The information there is publicly available and accessible with an Internet connection.

This government takes the issue of noncompliance very seriously. Consequently, the Ministry of Health actively monitors all facilities to ensure they meet its high standards. Facilities with unresolved noncompliances are closely supervised and enforcement actions are taken when issues risk the health, safety, or well-being of residents. What is more, the Ministry of Health recently expanded the division in Alberta Health that is responsible for investigative concerns. The licensing compliance monitoring branch within the continuing care branch works diligently to resolve ongoing concerns and ensure facilities adhere to our rigorous standards. After all, the health and safety of residents living in continuing care homes in our province are critically important to this government. Expanding the capacity of those responsible for investigating concerns is one way to ensure the experiences of residents are positive and enjoyable.

In Budget 2024 the ministry further underscored its commitment to transforming continuing care by allocating an additional \$1 billion over the next three years. This historic investment is about transforming the continuing care system and improving the care experience. It includes initiatives that will enable a shift to more care in the community, enhance workforce capacity, increase choice and innovation, and improve quality across continuing care in Alberta.

Budget 2024 also continues the government's commitment to health and safety in continuing care. It includes dedicated funding to increase the direct hours of care in continuing care facilities. This is a step that will enhance person-centred care and improve both the quality of life for residents and reduce pressure on our dedicated staff.

Furthermore, the Continuing Care Act was created and implemented to address this issue. Officially coming into effect on April 1, 2024, the act establishes consistent authority and oversight for Alberta Health regarding licensing and compliance monitoring for continuing care accommodations and the delivery of continuing care services in the province. The Continuing Care Act reflects current practices and settings along with addressing the changing needs and expectations of Albertans. This new legislation is a cornerstone in our commitment to Albertans, creating a framework for modernization and innovation in the provision of continuing care. It also improves protections for continuing care residents and clients by enabling government to assume a more consistent level of oversight and enforcement. This oversight extends across the spectrum of continuing care and services and settings.

One of the core elements of the Continuing Care Act is its focus on person-centred care for Albertans. It emphasizes values like quality of life, dignity and respect, recognizing the contribution of caregivers, and supporting the needs of both residents and their loved ones. The act supports aging in place, enabling couples to remain together in care facilities, a deeply meaningful policy for many Alberta families.

At its heart, the Continuing Care Act represents our commitment to a health care system centred on Albertans' needs and person-centred care. By placing quality of life, respect, and compassion at the forefront, our government is aiming to build a system that

honours our province's values and supports every Albertan from youth to seniors in achieving their full potential. One of the key objectives of the Continuing Care Act is to bring health care to people in their communities, close to their loved ones. This approach is intended to foster a more inclusive, supportive care environment, reflecting Albertans' desire to live and age in their own homes and communities. This is a desire felt by many Albertans across the province. The act aims to address this by emphasizing preventive care, increasing support for families – the first line of caregiving – and ensuring that Albertans can continue to receive quality care in the years to come.

Madam Speaker, we have made information available to the public. Again, it is found online through standards and licensing at standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca. We believe in transparency. We want more transparency. That is at the core of refocused health care in Alberta, and it is the reason we are making sure there is a continuing care organization that can actually focus on continuing care. If we can make sure that recommendations and new legislation are implemented, it can ensure that we are following best practices not only in Alberta but across Canada and around the world. Residents of continuing care facilities deserve to live with dignity and respect. That is what this government is doing.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:40

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

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for reviewing the Continuing Care Act for us all. That was a healthy review.

Mr. McDougall: Free of charge.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for asking the question. It was a very good question: how many operators were subject to a penalty as a result of a contravention of the continuing care health services standard? To have the minister answer the question: it's unknowable; no one can know this; it's impossible. And then she would go on to say: stop spreading misinformation. Asking a question, Madam Speaker, is not spreading misinformation; it's trying to find out what's going on. It's a written question. It was put forward, and we should be having this opportunity here to just say that we care. We want to know the answer because you know who else cares? The Albertans that want to care for their loved ones and know before they go to a facility or go into some other continuing care scenario: what are they going into?

So the question has been asked because these standards have been set: what contraventions of the standards have happened? We want to know this answer, and we'll get through this with a little bit of a discussion because we've had some experiences in Sherwood Park which have really shaken me. This summer I met with constituents who brought forward their story of Randall, who was in care, and I'll get to that in just a minute.

Today we're discussing the issue that weighs heavily on the hearts and minds of many Albertans: the care our loved ones receive as they age. This issue affects not just families but the very fabric of our community. In fact, I just attended the groundbreaking of a new facility in Sherwood Park along with ministers across. My constituency consists of 17 per cent seniors, which is higher than the provincial average, so this topic is very important to me. And as the Member for Edmonton-South pointed out, by 2030 the province estimates demand for continuing care services will grow by 62 per cent. As Albertans we deserve to know that our seniors and vulnerable populations are receiving proper care that they need. So

it's a great question to ask, when the Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked it.

First and foremost, it's essential that Albertans feel assured that as their loved ones age, they will receive care that is safe, compassionate, and tailored to their needs. The operators of our continuing care facilities, home-care programs, and nursing homes have legal obligations to meet specific standards, and these standards are not merely bureaucratic red tape. They are safeguards designed to ensure that the care is medically sound and responsive to the unique needs of each resident or patient.

I'm going to go back to a time when we were dealing with another area of discussion in this House, when we were talking about motel medicine, and what we witnessed on this side of the House from the government of Alberta was that they were treating AHS like a general contractor. I come from the construction business, so we're familiar with this. We have owners and developers, we have general contractors, we have subcontractors that do a lot of the work, and then we have the customers. When the customer has a problem with a home builder and they go to the home builder and express that problem, the home builder does not go: "Ah, you know what? That's the general contractor's problem." And the general contractor does not then go, "You know, that was the subcontractor." The homeowner paid the home builder, and they want that home builder to be accountable.

Much like with continuing care, Albertans want the government to be accountable and don't want them to hide behind layers of bureaucracy and third-party operators. We need to be able to have responsiveness and clarity from Albertans directly to the government, and that is your responsibility on that side of the House right now. These obligations are the bedrock of trust in our health care system. Operators are required to maintain a level of care that not only meets legal expectations but also respects the dignity and rights of those that they serve. However, we must confront the reality that not all operators uphold these standards or maybe they make mistakes or aren't following their internal protocols.

Now, imagine the heartache when a beloved relative is residing in a facility where it seems like safety and care standards are not being upheld. The constant worry gnaws at families: "Are they getting the medical attention they need? Are they treated with the dignity and respect they deserve? I would like to know a little bit more about the facility; I'm going to ask the government. Are they able to report the contraventions of the act that have been made by the facility?" It seems not.

Each day families with these worries grapple with feelings of helplessness, wondering if their cries for help are going unheard. It's a painful realization that, despite your love and concern, there may be barriers preventing folks from advocating for their relatives' well-being. This anxiety can be overwhelming, amplifying the distress of not just the individuals in care but the entire family, who are left to navigate a system that should prioritize their loved ones' safety and comfort.

One family in Sherwood Park told me the story of their adult son Randall, who was dependent on care in a provincially funded facility that did not take care of him the way they were supposed to, and he died as a result on June 17, 2024. His obituary read, "In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you contact your MLA." I plan to seek justice for Randall through improved legislation, enforcement of standards and accountability. The anguish of Randall's family should not be experienced by anyone. Families in Alberta should be able to trust the facilities where they have entrusted their loved ones.

In 2023 numerous reports surfaced highlighting significant problems within our continuing care and home-care system. These

revelations have shaken public confidence and raised pressing questions about the minister's ability to enforce the standards that protect our loved ones. It's crucial that we understand the scope of these violations and contraventions within Alberta's continuing care industry. We must hold operators accountable, ensuring that best practices are not just idealized but are actualized.

It's great to hear the platitudes and ideals that are set out by the government, but we need action for Albertans. When operators fail to comply with established standards, the livelihoods and well-being of our loved ones are at stake. The public needs to know: what contraventions has the minister observed in health care facilities and our continuing care facilities? What specific failures have been documented, and what actions have been taken to rectify these issues? The answers to these questions are vital not only for transparency but for the rebuilding of trust.

To repair this trust, it's imperative that the minister takes every contravention and violation of care standards seriously. Albertans must have access to publicly available information detailing the nature and scope of the violations. We need to know who is committing these infractions and what these infractions are. This information is not just about accountability; it's about empowering families to make informed decisions regarding the care they or their loved ones will receive. It's not just in continuing care. We are seeing it in cancer care and other areas of care in this province where we do not know what wait times are, we do not know what issues have been had in care, so people cannot make educated decisions for their families.

Imagine being able to consult a comprehensive report that outlines the performance of care facilities in your area. Armed with this knowledge, families could make choices grounded in facts, ensuring their loved ones receive the quality of care they deserve.

To move forward, we must foster a culture of transparency and accountability. The government must commit to regular reporting on compliance standards, including detailed breakdowns of violations. The government must monitor care facilities more closely, ensuring that they adhere to regulations and provide safe, respectful, and dignified care and don't hide behind bureaucracy.

We also need to engage families and communities in this conversation, establishing forums where residents and their families can voice their experience and concern with help to shape a system that truly responds to our needs. We must cultivate a system that encourages feedback and actively seeks to improve.

Let us remember that the care of our loved ones is not just a matter of policy; it's a matter of humanity. As we advocate for transparency and accountability in Alberta's continuing care system, let us do so with a collective voice that prioritizes the well-being of our seniors and vulnerable populations. With enough political will we can build a system that not only meets the legal . . .

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate on Written Question 3? Unfortunately, hon. minister, you only have one slot to speak on this particular question. We've got many more to get through today in which you'll have the opportunity to respond.

Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview like to close debate?

Ms Sigurdson: I think there are other members, or is it time to – yes, we would like to close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:51 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Ganley	Pancholi
Brar	Goehring	Renaud
Ceci	Haji	Sabir
Chapman	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Hoyle	Sweet
Eremenko	Kasawski	Tejada

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 18	Against – 46
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[Written Question 3 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

Supportive Living Accommodation Investigations

Q4. Ms Sigurdson asked that the following question be accepted. How many audits or investigations were undertaken by the Ministry of Health during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, in respect of a complaint made under the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to now speak to Written Question 4.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Again, similar to the previous question, it's very important that the government be transparent about these audits and investigations and make sure that Albertans know about what is happening in these facilities so they can make the best choices for their families and also to mitigate these issues that can be outstanding. Certainly, we've seen that some things may go unresolved for months at a time, unfortunately.

4:10

Of course, that does limit the quality of life for people in continuing care facilities. Certainly, the members opposite did speak about person-centred care and making sure that people had the care they need, but when these audits, investigations aren't being undertaken on a regular basis and mitigated if they are found to have some contraventions, then, obviously, person-centred care is not happening and that's compromised. That's not fair to our loved ones and certainly not the standard that we want to uphold here in Alberta.

Despite some of what the minister says, there are some very egregious situations that are occurring on an ongoing basis here in Alberta. One of the significant issues that has come to my attention and, I know, to other members of this Assembly is the co-location of mental health patients with seniors in a continuing care facility. Of course, both populations, both people with mental health issues and seniors who need that extra help in continuing care, should be well served, supported, and it's not choosing one or the other. But co-locating them has been shown not to be a good choice, a good outcome, for either population. That's why standards become compromised, and if there is not transparency about audits and investigations regarding this, then people can be put at risk.

Certainly, I've heard many stories from often children of seniors living in continuing care that have people with mental health issues who are often much younger. They're not seniors themselves, so even that creates very different needs, then, for each population, so those need to be understood. Obviously, then, person-centred care, if everybody is lumped together – unfortunately, I've heard about situations for one facility, you know, where the police had been called hundreds of times in that year because of a violent episode where a mental health patient who's not getting the care they need is acting out, and they have caused difficulties for others living in that facility, vulnerable seniors.

I know about a situation where a senior was choked. That was a serious medical thing that happened, and it took some while to make sure that that senior was safe and that the mental health patient got the care that they needed. I know another situation where a mental health patient was very upset because – I'm not quite exactly sure. But they went to the reception area and sort of smashed computers, threw chairs around. Of course, this created much upset and upheaval. This is people's home. This is where they live, so if this kind of violence is occurring, then, obviously, they're not feeling safe or supported in those facilities. That's why this question is so important.

I know that I've talked to the daughter of a resident there, and she said that her father no longer wants to leave his room, and when that happens – guess what? – seniors are then isolated, and that negatively impacts their mental health because, of course, we are social creatures. We need to connect with others. It's healthy for us to be around others and to do activities with them, whatever they may be. This happens all the time in seniors' facilities across Alberta where there are, you know, activities for crafts or they're playing games or they're just eating together. But this daughter said that her father no longer wanted to leave his room, and he was becoming more and more withdrawn. It was negatively impacting his mental health because he was afraid. He was afraid to go out in the hallway because he didn't know what was going to go on. There had been so many issues that had come up where there was a risk of violence that he no longer wanted to go outside.

Besides that, it also negatively impacts seniors' physical health because, of course, we know that as we age – and I can speak to this with my own experience of having some arthritis in my knees that if I don't keep moving, then it's harder and harder to move. So seniors who aren't having that kind of activity every day, where they're getting up and getting out and moving around, then their mobility can become more and more restricted, which, of course, compromises their health and, I would say, mental health, too. Of course, we know it's all connected.

This situation is happening in many facilities across our province, and the minister is not looking into any of these issues, or we haven't heard any reports. I mean, she had promised a report earlier about those situations, but we still haven't heard anything. You know, this is heartbreaking for families of residents, who want to make sure that their parents are well cared for and taken care of, as

it is for the mental health patients, who aren't perhaps getting the stimulation or the activities they need. So I just want to make sure that the UCP understands that despite what they're telling us, that they care about, you know, having person-centred care and making sure that the minimum standards are followed, they're not being. They're not being, and that is a very significant issue for Albertans.

Another thing that the minister just mentioned was that they want to mitigate some of these issues because these, of course, were in 2023. In April 2024 the new regulations came into effect. She did say that, and she says that this is going to very much help make sure that, you know, these audits of investigation standards will support much more a better system, I guess, is perhaps how I'll say it in general. But, strangely enough, in those new regulations the minimum standards for daily care were eliminated. They're eliminated, so actually now those standards don't even exist anymore.

Of course, we know that what was there before was abysmal; it was only 1.9 hours of daily care. But now there is none, and in defence of this, the minister suggested that she wanted to be flexible for providers. Well, what about patients? What about the residents themselves? How come, you know, their needs aren't – because now families don't have anything to count on. They don't know if their parents are going to get the support they need. There's some suggestion that, oh, well, they're getting 3.67, or something has been quoted, but there's nothing in regulations. Standards can't even be adhered to anymore.

Even if the minister thinks that they're all well intentioned and they're going to do it, you've got to believe that they're not going to fulfill on that, and they have no recourse to actually hold that operator accountable. And I've heard many stories, and different operators are not fulfilling on that, and, of course, then there is no call to justice. There's no opportunity for the government to actually hold them to account. It's just supporting sort of the desires of the operators without taking into consideration what the residents need. That shouldn't be the way it is. The resident's need should be – and certainly there is an expectation generally that it's 4.1 hours of daily care.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, I just need to correct some of the information that I'm hearing coming from the members opposite and reiterate the fact that they continue to allude or imply that there are no audits in place, that there is no compliance necessary, when, in fact, that is not the case. The licensing and compliance monitoring branch of the continuing care division within my ministry is an active ongoing branch. They continue, when they get complaints in, to investigate each and every one of those complaints. We've added more individuals to make sure that there are no backlogs. In fact, we want to make sure that we are responding in a quicker, more efficient manner.

4:20

But, Madam Speaker, when the members opposite talk about transparency and reporting, et cetera, these are the same procedures that they were following when they were in office a number of years ago, and I do not see that they did anything to improve them, where, in fact, we're looking to improve them. In fact, when we looked at the legislation, some of the pieces of legislation in the continuing care acts that were previously present before we introduced the new Continuing Care Act were 35 years old. The members opposite had four years to address that, and they did not address that, the fact that some of the legislation was 35 years old. We've advanced a long

way during this time period, so we felt it was necessary to bring in new legislation that was modernized, that was updated, that, in fact, took into account the needs and wants and the choices that Albertans want as they age and go into continuing care facilities.

Madam Speaker, they continue to mention the new regulations under the Continuing Care Act about not formally stating the minimum number of hours. What they fail to actually mention is that now every resident is funded for 3.62 hours per day compared to the 1.9 hours that they were previously funded. That is almost double the amount of hours that they previously had been funded for. So now with the significant increase we can continue to make sure that seniors and clients of continuing care facilities are in fact getting what they need when they need it. We have contracts and funding agreements in place with continuing care home operators in Alberta that specify the staffing mix and hours of care, and it has to be based on the needs of the clients, of the individuals, the residents within that site. They have to also be posted.

We're making sure that those care needs are being monitored – so we do monitor the contracts – and making sure that they are adhering to and making sure that they, the residents, get the level of care that is needed and required and being paid for. And if that isn't happening, then through the contracts there are ways to deal with that, up to and including making sure that we can remove those contracts for those who are not complying.

So, again, we've got an approach for accountability that for many years wasn't in place, and this is new, and I'm glad that we are able to continue with the new Continuing Care Act to make sure that our residents, our patients, our loved ones are getting the care they need because they deserve that care and respect. I believe the members opposite would agree with us that investing a billion dollars more into continuing care will in fact help us to get to where we need to go. We know there's more to be done. We know there are more facilities. We need to improve the workforce. So we're taking a multipronged approach, making sure that we have our postsecondaries able to handle more capacity to train more individuals to work with our seniors and those that are living in continuing care.

And we're improving our home care and our self-directed care. We've got home care at historic levels of funding to make sure that we can address that. Madam Speaker, again, it's really about making sure that we do everything possible to make our seniors and those that have other disabilities that are in continuing care or assisted living type settings have the proper type of care, the proper amount of care, and that they are treated with dignity and respect and that they are safe and that there is a way, a mechanism for families to bring forward complaints that then are followed through very thoroughly and that there are also penalties that are in place if they are so required.

So while they, the members opposite, continue to try and insinuate that there isn't a process in place, in fact, Madam Speaker, there is a process in place, and also it is publicly posted. The information is publicly posted. It is on the standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca site, and it does answer these questions that they continue to ask on an ongoing basis. They can just go to that site and get that information, and all Albertans can view that information. We are constantly looking to see how we can improve it, and we will continue to make sure that we are improving it as time goes on, but that information is readily available.

Madam Speaker, I would say that we continue to strive to make improvements with our Continuing Care Act regulations and standards, and we will continue to do so because we love, honour, and respect all of those vulnerable individuals, many who are in fact our family members. We want to make sure that they have the proper facilities and that they're being looked after carefully. We

want to make sure that even for those that are at their end of life there are proper procedures in place and facilities that will love and care for them throughout the whole continuum. Whether you need a little bit of help as you start to age or go into a facility or on the other end of the spectrum when you're at the end of life, everyone deserves dignity, respect, care.

We want to make sure that happens, and that's why we've upgraded the Continuing Care Act. As I said, it replaced a number of acts, which included the Nursing Homes Act, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, the Resident and Family Councils Act, the Long Term Care Information Act, associated regulations and relevant content under the Hospitals Act, as well as public health, specifically, the co-ordinated home-care program regulation. All of those have been brought into one act. That was all done under extensive engagement, not only with everyday Albertans but with the facilities that actually look after seniors.

I know that the members opposite would agree with me that those individuals that go and work in these facilities are for the most part loving, caring people that really want to do the best work possible to look after seniors, look after those with disabilities, perhaps mental disabilities and/or other types of disabilities, where they need more assisted living and/or continuing care. We know those individuals come with a heart because they've got a heart to do this great work, and we want to enable them to have all the tools that they need through the continuing care legislation as well as the regulations to do that work, so that's what we've done. We've increased the hours of care from 1.9 hours per day per resident to – I just want to make sure I get it – 3.62. That was what I had in my head, and that's what I'm going to say again. It's 3.62 hours per resident per day, and we can hold those facilities to account if, in fact, they don't fulfill their obligations because we do have contracts in place and we control the funding that goes to them.

Madam Speaker, I would really just reinforce again this modernized legislation does enable us to investigate every single complaint and also make sure that there are enforcements in place should they be required. Again, we love our most vulnerable, so we want to make sure that they have the facilities that they need as well as the care that they need, and we are going to continue to do that. We're going to continue to make improvements.

We just recently announced that the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services will be the oversight minister of the continuing care agency because we know that what we heard through the engagement sessions was that it needed dedicated leadership, so that is what we're moving towards. We continue to see our associations and our continuing care facilities and partners and providers support the direction that we're going in and have been very helpful in this area.

Madam Speaker, once again, everyone who wants answers to the questions that were posed can readily see that it's publicly posted on the accommodation standards and licensing web page at standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca. The members opposite should know that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this written question. Just for clarity, if we're on the record, the question reads, "How many audits or investigations were undertaken by the Ministry of Health during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, in respect of a complaint made under the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act?" There's a reason that actually this written question was

submitted, and if you'll recall, the time that I just read out was a time when we had a lot of concerns. We were not getting a lot of information at all, and I would suggest that we're still not getting a lot of information although the Minister of Health likes to talk about the transparency that is, you know, the UCP. Well, that is not necessarily the case.

4:30

Let me give you an example. The Minister of Health referenced a number of pieces of legislation, and I will admit that there were some things that were collapsed and included into the standards. I think it was, like, the family and resident councils. I don't think that's necessarily a bad move because there was some misunderstanding or not everybody understood the purpose of that legislation. So to have it into an inspection process: that's not a bad thing.

However, let me go back and talk about in the spring of, well, the last time we were here. We had a lot of questions for the Minister of Health and, actually, at the time the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services around another piece of legislation and reporting, and it's likely the same department in the Ministry of Health that does the inspections and reporting, and that was called Protection for Persons in Care Act. Now, although it doesn't fall into the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, it certainly is a complementary piece of legislation as Protection for Persons in Care covers people that are residing in the facilities that are described and covered in this piece of legislation.

Suddenly it appeared, though, Madam Speaker. It was a bit of a miracle. The last session we asked questions about: why is it that Protections for Persons in Care is in that department as a result of that legislation? I know that people are calling in about abuse allegations all the time. I get them in my office. I get CCed e-mails. I know they're happening.

For 2020 to 2021 there was no report last session. For 2021 to 2022 there was no report, no decision summaries. Again, for 2022-23 we didn't see anything, but today when I checked, they're there. So I went back and looked: what was the date that they were published? Well, that was in June. So in June all of these documents were put there, and that tells us exactly how many abuse allegations were made.

Just in the last report, Madam Speaker, 37 per cent of the abuse allegations were emotional, 46 per cent were necessities of life, 11 were bodily, five sexual, and one financial. These are really significant allegations of abuse, and the report goes on. If you just go into open data, you can just type in "Protection for Persons in Care" as you're sitting there, and you will see the report pop up that was published in June, that was years late, that people didn't talk about until we as the opposition started raising that. So when the minister talks about, you know, the transparency of her ministry, I would suggest that it is not that. Our concern at the time that we submitted these questions was very much that we were not getting information that we needed not only to provide oversight, that is our responsibility, but to share information with Albertans.

Now, we know accommodation standards, the supportive living accommodation, does not just cover lodges and nursing homes and things like that. It also covers people that are approved for funding and receiving funding through persons with developmental disabilities, or the acronym we like to use is PDD. We know that when there are four or more people living together – and I'm not going to talk about why we shouldn't have, like, lots of people with developmental disabilities living together because that's not exactly community living. When we have homes of four people or more, they fall under this legislation.

Those inspections are vitally important because we don't get a lot of information from agencies like that. For example, let's say I have a son or daughter or I'm the guardian for somebody and I'd like to find a service provider and I would like them to live in a four-person home, it's just a different kind of support. I'm able to go on to the Internet, type in the location or the name, and get some information, but there was information missing for years. I couldn't tell if there were abuse allegations and subsequent investigations or findings or decisions with a summary of the actions taken after that finding because Protection for Persons in Care was not updated. So transparency: not so much. You can understand why we're a little bit concerned about getting this information. What were the inspections? What were the results?

I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the compliance standards that are important to see and some of the other pieces that we need to see as opposition, but not just for opposition but for Albertans in general. PDD, again, is a department within a ministry, a very large ministry. Billions and billions of dollars that touch hundreds of thousands of people, but this government thought: hey, what the heck; let's stick some more in this particular ministry because it's so easy to provide oversight. Anyway, that was sarcasm.

But one of the problems here is that PDD, for example: we don't have a lot of information about that funding. One of the things we have not seen updated for years – for years; actually, since I think about December of 2021 – is that this government, who the minister claims is really big on transparency, has not updated the wait-list. Now, again, they don't call it wait-list; they call it, you know, in planning, but it's a wait-list. People met the criteria, and they just sit. What this government has decided to do is that they're only going to move people off a wait-list into supports when they meet a certain criteria – now, you can't find this criteria written down anywhere because it's not something that we see in policy – unless there's a health and safety crisis that is so bad that there is imminent harm to that person or the community. So the hundreds of other people sitting on that wait-list: they don't really matter at this point because this government is only providing service, new contracted service to those people in PDD that will likely go into a supportive living accommodation because they don't meet their new criteria of imminent harm.

So for a government, Madam Speaker, claiming to be transparent, I question that because in the portfolio that I'm tasked with providing some oversight, I can tell you that is exactly the opposite of what this government is doing.

Now, these two ministries interplay quite a bit when it comes to home care and when it comes to accommodation standards, but I can tell you that home care: a whole other problem that we'll get into on another day. But these accommodation standards: we need the information. Now, I will say that the minister mentioned, you know, people looking for a place to, say, move a parent or to move a dependent adult or someone you are a guardian for: you can actually go in and get some information. But you can't get it all, and you can't get detailed information. So I would suggest, instead of crowing about the good work that's being done – we do love people that are vulnerable. I think the people that work with them do care about them a great deal as well. But I think we need to provide even more information because the information I see when I search facilities that I know very well: I'm not getting enough. And if I was a person that did not know what was going on in that facility, I might make a decision that I regret later because I'm not getting the information that I need. It's sparse, and until very recently it was outdated.

So I would suggest, instead of pointing fingers and saying, you know, "We already answered that question; we're transparent," that

the minister look at these pieces of legislation and how they interact and then question the transparency and: what are we actually reporting? Because it's not just me that looks at things like Protection for Persons in Care. That is a very, very, very serious tool that we have. It's a piece of legislation that the Conservatives brought in. I actually agreed with it at the time. I supported it at the time. And it's unfortunate that this version of a Conservative government has decided until very recently, until they got called out by the opposition, that it wasn't important to stay on top of. So why are we so sort of hesitant when the minister says, "Oh, trust us; it's all good; it's all updated"? It's really not. We're getting little bits of information so you can check a box and say, "Yeah, we're doing it," but it's not enough.

You know, we all have loved ones and very vulnerable people that we care about, some that are even watching right now. Hard to believe that they would be watching this stimulating debate, but I know of a 78-year-old woman, Carol Mayor, who happens to be the mother of my colleague over here, and she is watching intently. She is a senior sort of struggling with her own issues. So I'll say hello and happy birthday to her.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, what I would really like to say is that it is important. We do see some level of reporting right now on the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. I do see the ministry has caught up for their Protection for Persons in Care. But the ministry, Seniors, Community and Social Services – it's kind of like a moving target sometimes because you're constantly switching ministries, so it's hard to know who to even ask. But I guess that's part of the show. But I would . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join us in the debate? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for the question. I will not be supporting the question from this member because the information that the member is looking for is already available online via the accommodation standards and licensing website, standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca.

4:40

I'm not surprised at these questions because this is clearly an effort by the NDP to delay proceedings of this House, to further politicize matters related to our loved ones. I was elected by my constituents to productively and thoughtfully work in this Chamber to support the needs of those in Chestermere-Strathmore and across Alberta, and to see the NDP simply trying to waste time and to score political points, Madam Speaker, frankly, that's very disappointing.

Alberta Health and more specifically the licensing and compliance monitoring branch is responsible for actively monitoring, investigating, and ultimately addressing and resolving any current or ongoing concerns related to supportive living and continuing care.

Madam Speaker, fellow members of the Chamber, Albertans living in continuing care include our parents, our grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends. The health and safety of all those in continuing care is of the highest priority to this government, so I wholeheartedly support our government's concrete and decisive actions on this file. These actions include the extraordinary investment announced in Budget 2024 of over \$1 billion over three years to substantively improve the entire continuing care system.

These investments include a shift to more community-based care. Madam Speaker, we know that there is a shift among seniors to receive more community-based care. This is what they're asking for as well as improving the capacity of the workforce, enhancing choice, cultivating innovation, and all with the ultimate goal of

improving both the quality of care and the quality of life for all those who live and work in continuing care facilities.

Now, Madam Speaker, this historic investment allocates funding and resources to accommodate the required increase in hours dedicated to direct care in the residents' homes, and that will assist in the implementation of further person-centred, individual-centred care. Of course, these investments will also result in increased capacity in every corner of our province, and that is something that Albertans are asking for and something that our government has been investing in since 2019. This capacity will be needed in the years to come as we are seeing an increasingly aging population.

I'm proud to say, Madam Speaker, that the Continuing Care Act is continuing this essential work. As of April 1, 2024, these new regulations will allow for us to support this modernization and innovation without impacting or interrupting service delivery or funding. Now, as I previously mentioned, residents in continuing care facilities are our friends and family, and the years that our loved ones spend in continuing care should be enjoyable ones that actively accommodate each of their unique needs and desires for support as well as the independence that they want to live an active and fulfilling life. If there is a desire for them to receive care in their communities or at home, it's our sincere desire to fulfill these wants and needs as much as we possibly can.

I will say that my opa and oma are getting to that age. They're looking at moving out of their home that they've lived in for so many years, and they're looking at different options for where to spend, you know, as they call them, the golden years of their life. They want to look at all the options in their community and make a decision that is best for them. It's because of this and the reasons I discussed here today that I support the changes that our government is implementing through the Continuing Care Act.

Now, our government supports action over political posturing and polarization, particularly as it relates to our loved ones, Madam Speaker. As such, our province is actively securing the continuing care future that we need in the short, medium, and long term. This is very important to all of our family members, those on this side of the House and on the other side of the aisle. I would ask, you know, the members of the opposition to consider that and to see that the actions we've taken as government are truly critical for our seniors, for our loved ones, for family members. I will also add that no conversation surrounding the improvement of continuing care is complete without considering all the staff, the residents, and the family, and we've done just that. So I'm proud to support the legislation and the investments our government has made.

Thank you very much.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I search www.standardsandlicensing.ca, I get a page that says: hmm, page can't be found. So then I tried standardsandlicensing.ab.ca, and I also get the same kind of: 404, page can't be found.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It is our job as elected representatives, of course, to support our constituents in being able to navigate the system. If I in preparation for this written question through all of my many searches and googles couldn't even find what has been referenced so many times this afternoon, then I'm not so sure that this is actually the transparency that government is meaning. "Hmm, page can't be found" doesn't feel like much of a response to a family member who is scrambling to find appropriate care for their loved one.

This is very near and dear, as it is to the folks who have already spoken to this particular written question today, and I'm sure it's near and dear for many people across the aisle, Mr. Speaker. Many of us at some point or another have had to or will have to figure out what is not an easily navigated system. At the very minimum, when we are looking for appropriate care for our loved one, trying to decipher the whole myriad of acronyms and terms in a world that we may not be familiar with, the very least that I want to know is if a service provider has had an investigation made against them, what the result of that investigation was, and what actions were taken to mitigate whatever concerns had originally been raised.

Let me tell you, standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca does not provide it. There is an information guide, but, again, as a loved one looking for care for my family member, I'm not interested in 60 pages of bureaucratic fine print. I want to know who the good actors are in this space so that I can make sure I am doing the minimum due diligence for my loved one. As I mentioned, I had to do it for my own mom, and it's tough. It's tough. We would all be doing a service to our communities and to our families if we support providing some of the most basic information.

A question when I review the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act that also came up was around the process to actually instigate and initiate an investigation. A complaint first has to be made, and then a complaint officer needs to decide whether or not an investigation is actually going to be pursued. Once an investigation is going to be pursued, then it goes over to an investigation officer, who has all of the same rights and privileges that an inspector has. Obviously, there's going to be some level of threshold that needs to be met when a complaint is made to actually warrant an investigation and then at that stage to decide whether or not that investigation is founded or not founded. It is not clear at all to me what that threshold is.

I would also like to know, and I think Albertans would like to know, how many complaints have been made. What percentage of complaints actually result in an investigation? What percentage of investigations, then, are considered to be founded? And, again, what are the specific outcomes of that investigation when it comes to government and the continuing care minister and the oversight Minister of Health? What are going to be the specific actions taken to mitigate those risks so that additional families do not have to deal with some of the heartache of not knowing what is happening when they're not around? That is a terribly unsettling feeling, Mr. Speaker. It is terribly unsettling.

And it's not just seniors who need long-term care, continuing care, supportive living. These are individuals of all ages and of all stages that need appropriate care, and they are there specifically because they cannot be entirely independent. It is exactly for those scenarios where government needs to make sure that we are doing – you know, "good enough" is not going to cut it. "Hmm, can't find the page" is not going to cut it. We've got to be able to provide better, more transparent service for the people who need to be able to access community continuing care.

4:50

Another piece that I really struggled to find when I was researching in preparation for this piece was the actual number of individuals who are impacted. I'd love recommendations from the opposite side around websites or web pages that might be able to provide that information, too. Perhaps they could table that tomorrow. But the latest that I could see was that in 2021 a fulsome review was completed of continuing care, and in that review from the GOA it reported that there were more than 33,000 supportive living spaces, including almost 12,000 designated supportive living spaces and 15,000 long-term care spaces across the province. So

that's 48,000 spaces in this province across – gosh – hundreds of facilities in communities large and small.

We have an aging population, and that number is only going up. We know that the needs and the demands on those kinds of facilities are only going to increase. We are in an affordability crisis, Mr. Speaker, which is even more important, to make sure that those dollars that are going towards paying for the monthly accommodation costs and the monthly needs of our loved ones are going to places of good repute, are going to places that have been held to the very highest account that they should be held to. These are some of the most vulnerable – I don't like using the word "vulnerable" because these folks are not victims. They have agency, they have autonomy, they have rights, and they deserve dignity and quality of care, and their families deserve to have all of that information to make sure that it, too, is being provided.

I, like my colleagues here, express real disappointment that the transparency is not apparent. You shouldn't have to be an elected representative and stand up here in this space to ask for information. It should be clear. It should be accessible. It should be right there on page 1 of any Google search so that you can make as informed a decision as possible under what is absolutely a challenging circumstance.

These are not easy decisions to be made, and they are oftentimes decisions that are being made urgently and in a rush and under great stress and duress. When you have a loved one in the hospital and they are pushing to get that loved one out of there because they have another person who desperately needs that bed, maybe more than your own loved one, you've got to make a call, and it's got to be quick. I'd like to be able to have the ability, I'd like to ensure that my constituents have the ability to do a quick search and find out that under this challenging circumstance they are in fact making an informed decision.

I do want to reference one more piece, again, in my kind of dive for information. The Health Quality Council has produced very valuable reviews that are based on surveys of family members and of residents who are accessing supportive living, what we now call continuing care. That is an annual review. That is an annual survey specifically from the voice of lived experience, and I encourage people to at minimum seek that out, Health Quality Council of Alberta, and you can get those annual reports in terms of how Albertans have been responding to this very important issue. How have they experienced the process as family members? How do residents experience the process, as well? In the last report a couple of pieces that were incredibly important are addressed. I encourage people to access that when they can.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am speaking in favour of this question, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for asking this important question. The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act laid out numerous items for these types of institutions, including nutritional requirements, medication administration, prevention of abuse, safety, temperature, and maintenance requirements. All this question is asking for is the audits related to these requirements between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023. I think that's a reasonable request.

In our culture, in Nehiyaw culture, elders are the most important people in our community. They are our knowledge holders, they are the ones that have built up our community, but most importantly, they deserve our respect. They deserve our respect not because they

are grandiose or we speak on mountains about their accomplishments. They deserve our respect because we are the ones that are charged to prevent any abuse or harm to them. In that way they can be seen as requiring our support. As legislators it is our duty to make sure that we are taking care of them.

In my culture we offer this in really unique ways. We do this by ensuring they are fed. We ensure they are fed the proper nutritious food. I'm going to tell this quick story because it is relevant and germane to this point. I've been to many community meetings on my nation and with other nations across this beautiful province. The topic of pizza comes up quite often, the topic of being able to have foods that you're able to consume and not have physical issues with them. I can only tell you how many times I've been told by my elders, "Don't have pizza at this event," and I apologized profusely, but that doesn't change the fact that we weren't considering their specific dietary restrictions.

In our culture this is not just about talking about what should or should not be eaten. This is about talking about taking care of vulnerable Albertans, Albertans that have built up this beautiful province, Albertans that require us to stand up and look after them in things like legislation and regulations. Certainly, if we are not doing our job well enough, well, we should probably hear about it.

In our culture there's also a Cree legal term called *pastamowin* which requires us to look after each other, and if we don't do that, then I'm sorry; we've committed an egregious breach. Sylvia McAdam is a Nehiyaw academic who

uses the term 'pastamowin' to describe laws against causing harm to other people. She is also clear that the law not only prohibits overt actions that cause harm, but also allowing harm to happen by not helping somebody who needs it. She describes it, while offering a contract with Canadian common law,

and I'll quote this:

It is also important to state that silence and non-action do not exempt any human being from breaking the laws. It's considered a *pastamowin* to remain silent or take no action while a harm is being done to another human being or to anything in creation. In common law it is called acquiescence; acquiescence is compliance, or when you are silent it is considered consent from a reasonable person. In other words, if a person is getting assaulted and you do nothing to stop or assist, then you have committed a *pastamowin* because you failed to prevent or protect another human being.

Pastamowin is a principle that requires us to prevent silence or taking no action, especially for the most vulnerable in our community. Seniors deserve our commitment to work for them. We have an obligation not only as legislators but also as children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of elders in our community.

That leads me to wonder: why is this government against transparency to Albertans specifically to this time period? Albertans have a right to understand the work being done by this government to address the countless problems in continuing care and supportive living operations. I don't think that it's unreasonable to ask for or provide that information. I mean, I've been asked for it from Albertans, and I have to go back to this government and ask for it. I shouldn't have to. They should be able to access that information freely to make important decisions for their loved ones, or for seniors themselves to make important decisions that affect the rest of their lives.

Albertans deserve more than just finding out about the security of a facility through the news, like the senior who was found after having gone missing from the Sunde Seniors' Supportive Living Facility. This is in the minister's own backyard, yet Albertans had to find out through the media that this senior had gone missing. I don't think that is reasonable, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think any

Albertan can think that is reasonable either. We should have better processes, and this is a very specific time period that we're looking at.

5:00

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, time for debate of this matter has concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Transition to Adulthood Program Eligibility

514. Member Batten moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to adjust the maximum age of eligibility for financial supports available under the transition to adulthood program (TAP) from the day before a participant's 22nd birthday to the day before the participant's 24th birthday for the following purposes:

- (a) to ensure that the maximum age of eligibility for all supports available under the TAP program is consistent; and
- (b) to remove a barrier that otherwise may prevent a young adult from achieving their full potential.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move Motion 514. As part of my preparation to move this motion, I found myself reflecting on the youths of today and, honestly, how far removed my understanding is of the world they navigate. For perspective, I purchased my first cellphone when I was 24 years old. I could suddenly Ask Jeeves all the questions I wanted to. Suffice to say that my research and outreach to youths here in Alberta has certainly opened my eyes, and I ask you to consider the following things when voting for this motion.

Young adults have grown up with the Internet at their fingertips, allowing for some degree of international awareness and seemingly unlimited contacts. It means that their best friends are unlikely to be their neighbour who shares their backyard fence. They will never know the freedom and the responsibility of being told to come back when the street lights turn on. They will never know a world where there isn't an active climate crisis.

And some things remain the same. It remains that the young person's brain continues to develop critical areas during this period. For example, the area of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and the ability to reason is very slowly maturing during this time. Areas responsible for emotional regulation are restructuring so that you can learn to keep your cool when challenged and so that you can exist and contribute to society. The whole concept of risk assessment is ongoing during this period. The combination of emotional and cognitive development presents a critical juncture in a young person's life.

The need for social connection is another thing that has not changed. The early 20s are a time of establishing your identity, which is highly influenced by the social relationships and experiences you have. Although the methods by which these connections are formed and maintained has changed, the relationships with your family, your friends, your community present a sense of security and stability as you navigate these important years.

But what if you're one of the thousands of Albertan children and youth who are not so fortunate? What if you never really had a home or if you're moved frequently between homes? What if you've never been in school long enough to make true friends, let

alone connections with your teachers or the support staff? What if you receive harm because of your ethnicity, for which you have zero control and possibly less understanding? What if you never had a stable relationship with any adult ever or that the relationships you had with adults were not okay; they weren't safe? And what if the lack of safety and security has dramatically stunted your brain's development? Because it has.

The reality is that this world is different than when we grew up, and it's different than it was even five years ago. The challenges faced now are keeping young adults in their parents' homes far into their 20s if not their 30s. This, of course, is due to a lot of different reasons; however, Generation Z, currently aged between 12 and 27, are said to be the most depressed and anxious generation ever. This generation, our children and our youth, requires different resources to help build resilience and to thrive no matter where they're raised.

It's challenging for all but so much worse for some. In care of the government means exactly that; we are to provide care to these youths, to enable them to develop into well-adjusted adults who add value to society. That is the promise made to every child and youth who is removed from unsafe spaces and placed into a purpose-built space that brings this commitment to reality.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing is a failing of this commitment. Since 2019, when the age for financial support to these youths dropped from 24 to 22 years of age, there has been a significant increase in the number of young adult deaths who have aged out of the system. Recent Canadian statistics share that almost 60 per cent of youths experiencing homelessness had current or prior engagement with children's services. Over 50 per cent of trafficked girls had current or prior engagement with children's services.

The office of the Child and Youth Advocate publishes an annual report sharing the numbers of children and youth who have experienced a serious injury or have lost their lives. In the 2023-24 report Alberta shows a record high. This information alone demonstrates that we don't have it right. We won't know the final numbers for 2023-2024 for another couple of weeks, but given the changes such as this decrease to eligibility for services I'm not anticipating a sudden decrease in numbers of deaths.

We need to build a system where children and youth are at the centre, their needs. It needs to be a social connection, a secure and stable environment, and the chance to make mistakes where the consequences are not permanent. Remember, for some children and youth failing might mean punishment.

Knowing what we know now, will you consider voting for this motion? This motion will serve some of our most vulnerable Albertans. The benefactors of this motion are children who have grown up in unhealthy environments, who are likely to have been victims of abuse and neglect. These are children to whom Alberta owes a huge debt because we know that the system they grew up in and through was not and is not sufficient for their needs.

We know that brain development continues well into the 20s and that abuse and trauma changes the brain in ways that we cannot see and cannot predict. We know the vital importance of being connected to someone who cares for you. We know the impact that the affordability crisis has had on our homes. Just imagine the impact on a 22-year-old aged out of the system and now trying to transition into independence without being provided the necessary resources to do so.

If we want better, we need to do better. I saw an advertisement the other day where the take-home message was to not do drugs. Now, it wasn't a repeat of the This Is Your Brain; This Is Your Brain on Drugs campaign of the '90s but instead a simple message telling you that your human brain is not fully developed until the age of 25, so why not wait till you're 25 to try this? I love it. It's

evidence based. It meets adults where they are. It's respectful to their autonomy and decision-making abilities while providing guardrails to keep them safe. It's brilliant, and it's the right thing to do. Can we not do the same for the children and youth for whom we are responsible?

Albertans care about children. Vote for this motion and demonstrate that you do, too. This motion proposes update to legislation to reflect the realities of 2024. We have the ability to change the projection of the lives of children and youth in care for decades to come. By voting for this motion, you're sending a message. Please consider carefully what message you are sending.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Motion Other than Government Motion 514 has been moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to welcome everyone back here for fall session. I rise today to speak to the motion brought forward by the member opposite.

As everyone here knows, entering adulthood is tough for any young person, and those transitioning out of government care are no exception. In fact, they often face many more challenges than anyone else normally does. Whether that's a loss of family or experiencing domestic violence or abuse or the impacts of addiction, these young people often have trauma that may put them at a greater risk of challenges and greater adversity as they start their lives in the adult world. While many of us take for granted the ability to rely on a mom or a dad to help cover a bill, get help, or with our education, or just lean on for some words of wisdom, young people transitioning out of care may not have that ability. That's why our government was proud to create a holistic program to help those young adults launch into the next phase of their lives, the transition to adulthood program, or TAP.

5:10

Now, TAP was launched in 2022 and is designed to help young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who were formerly in government care gain skills that readily help them live independently and find success. The program is tailored to the young adults' individual needs such as entering the workforce, going to college or university, starting a trade program, accessing supports and mentoring, and not to mention building lifelong connections to the positive role models in their lives such as friends, teachers, caregivers, and extended family. TAP participants can connect daily with a compassionate professional TAP worker who offers support and expertise, helping them apply to postsecondary or a job, find permanent housing, and connect to mental health supports and cultural activities.

While the core financial benefits of TAP are for young adults up to the age of 22, Mr. Speaker, supports do not end there. TAP recipients up to the age of 24 can continue to access their TAP worker and a wide range of other supports. One incredible support that young adults in TAP can apply to right up until their 25th birthday is advancing futures, and they can receive this support for up to five years or until the day before they turn 31. This program covers the cost of a young adult's postsecondary education, whether that's academic upgrading, a skilled trade, college, or university, along with their living costs while they study. This is the only program of its kind in Canada, and each year it helps many young adults pursue their goals and their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, these are life-changing programs for our young adults, and I'm opposed to the member opposite's motion because

these programs are already removing barriers and empowering vulnerable people, including those aged 22 to 24. More than 2,000 young adults accessed TAP last year, and I'm pleased that our government increased funding by \$3 million this year to bring our total investment to \$51 million. Through advancing futures nearly 1,000 students received \$14 million in student bursaries, 89.5 per cent completing their programs of study, and 43 per cent of graduates were Indigenous. The benefits of these programs include improved labour market participation, higher earnings, improved parenting and other life skills, mental and physical health benefits, and increased employability. That's why TAP has resulted in so many incredible success stories.

One young Indigenous woman entered TAP after being in foster care, and because of the program she is now going to medical school and plans to become a doctor here in Alberta. Another young adult told me how TAP was allowing him to pursue his dream of becoming a welder in Fort McMurray. These are powerful stories, Mr. Speaker, because, as I mentioned, many of the young adults in TAP have faced significant adversity. Their resilience is so inspiring, and I'm heartened that TAP helps them find a way in the world.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the secret to TAP's success and the success of its participants. It's not solely the financial funding that helps young people be successful; it's helping young people learn how to cope and overcome any challenges they face, because they should not be defined or limited by their trauma and negative experiences. TAP prepares vulnerable young people to live successful lives on their own terms; to learn how to use their money wisely; how to navigate finding the supports they need so that they can pursue education, chase their dreams, build careers, and have the opportunity to find happiness.

That's why we were developing TAP. We were looking at best practices and research on how to support youth transitioning to adulthood. We heard from subject matter experts, Children and Family Services staff with years of experience supporting young adults, and, critically, the young adults themselves. I know the opposition may bring up the previous program, the support and financial assistance agreement, but the reality is that TAP provides more and helps ensure that no young person is prematurely cut off from the services and supports necessary to help them to become independent.

Under the previous program files were closed when other supports were provided. Under TAP those 22 to 24 can and often do opt to maintain a case practitioner even if they are gainfully employed or receiving financial supports through other programs. This has proven to be a valuable part of the program. More young adults enrolled in TAP are staying in the program longer than anticipated and accessing the supports and services that they need until the age of 24, and young adults 22 to 24 who are experiencing some instability continue to have a caseworker help them connect or reconnect to the right services.

The types of supports offered to TAP recipients are, again, consistent with how many families support their own young adult children to be independent. We want them to continue to grow and develop, because the more resilient and independent they are, the brighter their future and Alberta's future will be. What's more, while the previously offered support to young adults was focused primarily on financial assistance, we continue to ensure that there are a wide variety of supports and services available to young adults aged 18 to 24 through TAP, advancing futures, and other programs for youth in transition.

For example, we invested \$2.5 million in a newly established youth apprenticeship connections program to support 500 youth and young adults to build a career in the skilled trades and \$2

million through the youth employment connections program to support career and employment skills development. These programs are available for youth and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24, and over the last year 260 young adults have accessed this program, which includes career planning, helping finding a job and getting skills, work experience, and peer support.

We're also partnered with Native Counselling Services of Alberta as they launched an app for Alberta youth and young adults aged 14 to 26 transitioning to adulthood from government care. The Connections app is free, easy to use, and provides over 150 resources related to housing, education, mental health, money management, and so much more, Mr. Speaker. There's a how-to series which helps develop life skills, including easy recipes and tips on completing basic household chores.

And we're also investing in the caregivers who give them safe, loving homes. We've made it easier for young adults who turned 18 while living in a foster home to stay with those caregivers until their 22nd birthday should they and their foster parents wish. This is not unlike the circumstances for so many young Albertans who continue to live with mom and dad while figuring out their next steps for the future. To ensure this arrangement is successful, caregivers continue to receive financial compensation for the skill and care they provide while that young adult remains living with them. It supports TAP participants' needs as they focus on career and employment goals or education.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to making sure we get it right with the TAP program, which is why we launched the Youth Advisory Task Force in the fall of 2023. The task force is made up of young people who have been involved in the child intervention system, who are able to provide feedback about the programs and services that are offered. This feedback focuses on their lived experiences with the child intervention system, TAP, and advancing futures. The task force also provides an opportunity to advocate and raise awareness about the needs of young adults transitioning out of care, which will help shape policies and programs.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader in postintervention supports, and we will continue to provide TAP, advancing futures, and other youth in transition supports and services as they are currently designed to help ensure that young adults and Albertans transitioning out of government care have the connections, the support, and the skills they need to meet their full potential. We are focused on their growth and development and their success, and we will not stop that growth.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in support of Motion 514, brought forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Acadia. What's that saying? The more things change, the more things stay the same. I can tell you that I've now been in this House for five years where I've listened to repeated ministers of children's services, or now Children and Family Services, avoid saying the thing that they continue to not say about this cut to the former SFAA program and now the refusal to extend it to the transition to adulthood program, and that is that they don't want to say that they just don't want to spend the money on youth transitioning out of care. That's what this is all about. The minister stood up and talked right now about how TAP is a more holistic program than the support and financial assistance agreement program, but the holistic part that is missing is the financial support for those aged 22 to 24.

5:20

Now that program, that extension, actually did make us leaders in the country in terms of supports for children transitioning and youth transitioning out of care. In 2014 the then PC government brought in changes to extend the SFAA program to those aged 24 because they recognized a lot of the same information that the Member for Calgary-Acadia already talked about. The reality is that in terms of brain development young people: actually, their brains aren't fully developed until up to age 25, but when you factor in that we're talking about children in care, they've often suffered remarkable trauma; they might have medical issues; they might have had addiction issues in their families. So, yes, they need more time. And the former PCs: they recognized that. That was when we were leaders in this country when it came to supporting youth transitioning out of care by extending that financial support to the age of 24.

Now, Mr. Speaker, those of you who were around back in the 2019 to 2023 term will recall that the decision to roll back the eligibility age to 22 actually was a sneaky move that was brought in that was not meant to actually come to the light of day but managed to come to light of day in estimates in fall of 2019 because highly concerned support workers, social workers, who are deeply concerned about the supports for the young people they cared about and were supporting in their transition out of care, heard about this change and were so alarmed that they brought it forward so actually we forced the then minister of children's services, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, to actually admit in estimates that that cut was happening. At the time we were talking about 500 young people between the ages of 22 and 24 who were going to be cut off from these financial supports.

Now, some of you will remember that that change didn't actually get implemented right away, not because the minister or the government at the time realized that this was a heartless and cruel cut but because there was actually a constitutional appeal that was launched against that cut because it was a risk to that. It was a young woman, a single mother who was saying that she felt like she was going to be forced back into sex work by the cuts, cut off from this financial support. That led to an appeal and an injunction, that lasts for a period of time, and then the ministry did again delay implementing it because – they claimed it was because of COVID, because they recognized that cutting off people, young people transitioning out of care is a hardship, and it was a hardship that, for some reason, for one moment, they had a change of heart and said: well, we don't want to impose it on them during COVID. But, Mr. Speaker, they actually then did impose them when COVID was still going on, but they weren't public about that either.

So now we have the transition to adulthood program. But, again, what continues to not be talked about is that it is not the same level of support because those young people transitioning out of care age 22 to 24 do not get financial support. Why, Mr. Speaker? It's confounding that not one single minister from the UCP has ever been able to just say: we don't think it's worth the money. That's what it is, because if they do truly care about youth transitioning out of care, they would provide all the supports they can. Yes, they need a social worker. Yes, they need connections to employment and to postsecondary and to training and skills training. Yes, they need that, but they also need financial support. That is true more than ever right now because we know that all Albertans are struggling through an affordability crisis, all Albertans are struggling to make ends meet, but it is even more true of these young people.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. These young people transitioning out of care are not just young people who it's a compassionate thing

to care about how they do; these are young people who were the legal responsibility of the government of Alberta until they turned 18. The government of Alberta was acting as their parent, and as such they probably should be acting like all other parents do.

Let me talk about that, Mr. Speaker, because up to 60 per cent of Canadians aged 20 to 24 still live at home, and 97 per cent of parents surveyed reported providing financial support to their children between the ages of 18 to 35. I'm sure there are many of us in this House who have adult-aged children who we are still supporting; either they live at home or they get financial support. Let us be clear that the children, the young people, we're talking about here do not have that. They do not have family members. They are in the care of government until they turn 18. So just like our responsibilities to our kids don't end the moment they turn 18 – and it sounds like most Canadians continue to provide that financial support to their children as they, yes, get into early adulthood – why would the government of Alberta not do the same? Let's be clear. It's because they don't want to pay for it.

The minister talked about how there are 2,000 young people accessing TAP, 1,000 of them accessing advancing futures. By the way, Mr. Speaker, that is a tired line that we have been hearing for five years in this House. Every time we talk about youth transitioning out of care and the vulnerability of those young people, the UCP ministers respond with: advancing futures. Advancing futures is great, but by the minister's own admission only half of the young people in the TAP program are actually accessing advancing futures. What about the other thousand? These are, again – let me remind you – young people who were the responsibility of government.

Of those – I think the numbers haven't changed that much – let's say on average about 500 of those young people are between the ages of 22 and 24. There have been estimates about how much this would cost. If it maintained the funding that was provided under the SFAA program, it could be up to about \$2,000 per young person per month. That would work out to about – it depends on the estimates because, of course, we've never gotten transparency on this, Mr. Speaker. It would be roughly between \$6 million to maybe \$14 million that this government does not want to pay for very vulnerable young people.

Instead, we can go through the list of things, Mr. Speaker, that this government is willing to waste money on. I mean, \$80 million for Turkish Tylenol that never actually got used: that was fine, but young people transitioning out of care who are the responsibility of the government? No; that just is too much to pay. Let me be clear. If they're not persuaded by the moral argument of responsibility for these young people and wanting to invest in their success, let's actually talk about the economic argument because it's very, very clear that when you invest in these young people and assist them in transitioning out of care, we're actually saving money in terms of costs of health care, in terms of costs of incarceration or lack of employability. We're actually supporting those young people and making sure that they're going to be successful.

Let's do advancing futures by all means, but there are going to be some young people who will not be part of the advancing futures program. Fifty per cent of the young people in the TAP program according to the minister are not part of the advancing futures program. What about them, Mr. Speaker? Those young people deserve our support as well.

I want to go back and say that there's another piece of this. The Member for Calgary-Acadia repeatedly talked about the impact that it had in terms of deaths of young people transitioning out of care. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. That is an incredibly profound impact because this change was made in the fall of 2019. In the years that

followed, we saw 14 young people over the age of 18 die in 2020 to '21, then 22 the following year, then 16 the following year, then 16 the following year, and this year is only half over and we already have eight, so it's probably going to be about 16 as well given the numbers.

We may not be able to draw a direct correlation between saying that that cut created that because we know it's more complex than that, but there is definitely a crisis, and cutting off financial supports for those young people certainly does nothing to help that crisis. By the way, Mr. Speaker, I've been in this position long enough to say that I think there is a bit of a correlation there, and I think it's not extraordinary to say that. We need to be very clear that there's an impact by refusing to financially support and provide all the supports we possibly can to these young people transitioning out of care.

What the government keeps saying is that they don't care. They've repeatedly also said, Mr. Speaker, that they're not going to implement so many of the recommendations put forward by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, including most importantly – and here we are with a government that says that they care about recovery, that says that they care about addictions, and we still do not have a youth opioid strategy in this province. We have been calling for that, and more importantly the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has been calling for that. Where are the young people, especially these vulnerable ones who are transitioning out of care, fitting into this government's plans for addiction and recovery? Silence. Absolute silence. Meanwhile we know that, from the annual reports of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, those young people who don't get financial supports anymore from this government are the ones who are highest at risk of dying from addiction and overdose.

Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if I'm tired of five years of listening to the same talking points, but I am going to vote in favour of the motion from the Member for Calgary-Acadia because it's the right thing to do, it's the economic thing to do, and it is actually the responsibility of this government of Alberta.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Motion 514, which urges the extension of the transition to adulthood program, or TAP. More specifically, Motion 514 urges the government to extend the maximum age of eligibility for financial supports under TAP from 22 to 24 years old.

While I understand the concerns that have led to this proposal, I must firmly oppose it. First and foremost, let's consider the purpose of TAP. This program was designed to empower young adults, particularly those transitioning out of government care, to live independently, pursue education, and build successful careers and lives. Implemented in 2022, TAP is delivered by a dedicated workforce of participants. There are four specialized pathways to support youth as they transition out of care into adulthood. These include employment; education, including the advanced futures program; stability; and adult supports.

5:30

Individuals coming out of care often have experienced trauma and living with mental health and are more likely to face discrimination and barriers to education and training. Youth who are transitioning from care often lack the networks that are needed to find good employers to sponsor them for entry into apprenticeship education programs. The government, through TAP, is helping remove that barrier. The goal is to provide those

completing care with the skills and support necessary to thrive, not to create a system where they rely on government funding into their mid-20s. The intent is to foster a sense of responsibility and self-sufficiency, allowing these young adults to navigate the complexities of life with confidence.

Raising the age limit for financial support will ultimately reduce the funds available for other participants in the program. With a budget of \$51 million, which includes a \$3 million increase from the previous year, we must be responsible stewards of our resources. Extending financial assistance for an additional two years would divert essential funds that could be used to support a greater number of young adults in acquiring critical life skills and successfully navigating their transition into adulthood. It is vital that we make choices that help as many people as possible. This is not just a matter of budgeting; it's about prioritizing the most effective use of our resources to empower as many young adults as possible. By keeping the financial support window to age 22, we ensure that we can provide comprehensive resources and support to a broader range of individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Additionally, we need to recognize the success of the current program. It has been reported that 448 out of 490 young adults who aged out of the system accessed TAP successfully after their 18th birthday, an impressive 91 per cent. This shows that the current age limit is not a barrier but, rather, a structure that encouraged independence and self-sufficiency. If the existing program is working so effectively, why do we feel the need to extend financial support for an additional two years? This is not just an oversight; it's a fundamental misunderstanding of what these young adults truly need.

Four years of financial support from this program is more than sufficient. Young adulthood is a time for growth, exploration, and learning from experience. By providing financial support until the age of 22, we give young adults the opportunity to establish themselves without fostering dependency. Let's be clear. Offering financial assistance for too long can create a safety net that can ultimately become a trap, undermining the entire structure of the TAP program. We should be encouraging these young adults to take charge of their lives and develop skills they can use to conquer their worlds.

Moreover, we must consider the broader implications of fostering dependency. When young adults receive extended financial support, it may inadvertently send the message that they cannot succeed without help. This could diminish their motivation to seek out employment or pursue education, ultimately leading to a cycle of reliance on government programs. We should not be cultivating a culture where young people believe that they are entitled to financial support indefinitely. Instead, we should empower them to pursue their goals and achieve their dreams through hard work and perseverance.

And before the NDP continue to criticize this, it's critical to note that TAP offers a wide range of supports beyond just financial assistance. Until the age of 24 participants still have access to social and emotional supports, mentoring opportunities, life skill development, mental health and addiction services, and job placement assistance. While financial support is important, it's only one part of the program. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Petrovic: The skills and connections gained through the mentoring and emotional support are what truly empower our young adults to succeed. This holistic approach ensures that they have the tools they need to thrive in various aspects of their life.

Now let's address the elephant in the room, the NDP's perspective on this issue. Their push for extended financial support reveals a troubling tendency to keep our young people dependent on government assistance rather than empowering them to stand on their own two feet. Fostering a system that encourages dependency is not the solution. We should focus on giving them a hand up. The NDP seem to believe that young adults should remain reliant on government programs, which only serves to undermine their growth and potential. It's shameful that the NDP would rather maintain a system that fosters dependency instead of one that encourages pursuing independence and success. They fail to recognize that true support comes from equipping young adults with the tools they need to thrive, not by extending financial lifelines that may ultimately hold them back. Their approach may be well intentioned, but it lacks a more holistic understanding of what it truly means to be empowering of young adults.

The transition to adult program is aimed at helping develop young adults transition out of government care. It's not about keeping them dependent on government programs. After all, this is not only an investment into each individual in the program; it is an incredible investment into our province's future. We should be celebrating those who take initiative, who find jobs, who choose further education and pursue opportunities to find success. To truly support our young adults, we must focus on creating an environment where they can thrive independently. This means investing in skill training, career counselling, and mentorship programs that guide them towards meaningful employment. We should be promoting initiatives that advance entrepreneurship, vocational training, and higher education rather than extending financial assistance that may only serve to delay their entry into the workforce.

That is why the proposal to extend financial supports under the transition to adult program is misguided. Instead of helping young adults transition into independent and successful lives, it risks creating an environment of dependency that stifles their unacted growth and potential. We have a responsibility to ensure that our youth are prepared for the challenges of adulthood, and extending TAP's financial support beyond age 22 is not the way to do that. We must prioritize programs that empower young adults, equipping them with the skills and resilience they need to succeed. We need to invest in their future, not through prolonged financial assistance but through comprehensive support that prepares them for the realities of adult life.

Let us reject Motion 514 and reaffirm our commitment to fostering independence and resilience among our young adults. Together we can build a stronger future for our youth, one where they're not merely surviving but thriving. For the reasons I have outlined today, I respectfully urge all members of this House to vote against Motion 514.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has the call.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I have a lot of notes that I wrote, and I'm struggling to refer to them right now because I found some of the things I just heard from the member opposite to be a little bit distressing, this pull yourself up by the bootstraps idea, the idea that support, financial or otherwise, creates dependency. I've got some stuff in here about poverty-related stress, so I'm going to start with what I had and we're going to get there.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to this important motion because what we are asking for is a restoration of critical supports

for a very vulnerable group of young adults who are transitioning out of government care. In 2020, when this government made changes to the transition to adulthood program, there were around 2,200 young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were getting financial assistance. When the UCP dropped that age of availability by two years, from 24 to 22 – I guess when you're getting supports at 22, you're not dependent, but something happens. Like, a switch flips on that birthday. You're 23 years old. You're getting financial support from the government: boom, you're dependent on them for life, right? I wasn't aware that was a change that happened between ages 22 and 23, but that seems to be what the member opposite believes.

At that time, when they made that change of availability by those two years, there were 500 fewer young people who then had access to the financial supports on this program. That's a reduction of around 20 per cent. At the time the minister of children's services was quoted saying, "We saw quite a sharp decline of uptake in the program at the age of 22, so we are reducing the age of eligibility from 24 to 22." This is just another example of a bit of disingenuousness because the math really doesn't work in the minister's favour on that one. If 20 per cent of youth in the program lost those financial supports, it really isn't a sharp decline in the program uptake.

Honestly, it's not surprising to me that we wouldn't see a sharp decline because the kids, the youth, the young adults that we're talking about in these programs: these are people who are, to be clear, in the care of the government, okay? They don't have anyone else to take care of them, to support them. I have kids. It's really hard for me to imagine what that's like, to not have a safe and secure home to come to, to not have parents who love you, support you, provide for you, whether you're eight, 12, 20, 22, 23, or 24. I don't think of it as – well, I do think of my kids as dependents, because they have a need. They are children. They require love, care, support, and it's not like there's some kind of arbitrary cut-off date for when that happens.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

5:40

When we go back to the shuttering of those two years of financial supports, it's really not clear to me why we would do that even if there was a decline in the number of youth accessing the program. It is good news, actually, if youth are in these programs and they find that path to success. If they avail themselves of the supports the government provides, nobody on this side of the aisle would ever suggest for a single second that we don't want these young adults to be successful, to use resources that are made available to them, and to be able to make a life for themselves. But, of course, we also recognize that the circumstances that these youth come from do not set them up for success, and that is why additional supports are required to help launch them as adults.

I'm not okay with the idea that we just leave behind the young people who aren't quite there yet – right? – the ones who maybe just need a couple more years of support. Again, these are young people that are in the care of the government, and the government is responsible for providing that care, for ensuring that these people are going to be able to find success as adults in the world. I know that, like I said, the support and care for my children is not going to be cut off at some arbitrary age, and I'm really not sure why the lottery of birth should mean that these young people don't have the supports they need to make that successful transition to adulthood.

I'd like to remind the members opposite that these are actually really critical years in development for young people. The Member for Calgary-Acadia mentioned this, that the brain development in

young people – and I'm really glad that she raised this issue. Our brains aren't finished developing until our mid to late 20s, and the part of the brain that's still cooking in those final years is the prefrontal cortex. That's a really key piece of the brain, right? That's the part that's responsible for planning, for prioritizing, for making good decisions. So this is a really critical time in a young person's life, when they need supports.

Prefrontal cortex, right? It's executive function. It's that ability to self-regulate. Some of the things that come along with that are like: how do you delay gratification? How do you not cave to instant gratification? How do you make decisions? How do you problem-solve? How do you set long-term goals? How do you balance any, like, short-term rewards you might find with whatever long-term future goals that you have?

When I think about that, I think about how our kids are growing up – well, our kids. Kids these days – oh, kids these days – are growing up in a really different world than anyone in this room ever did. They have way more access to information than any generation that came before them, but they also have to manage all the distractions that come with living in a modern world. We all carry these things around in our pockets that are binging and popping and dinging, and they're designed to draw us in, to suck our attention, to take our time and resources. So we've got youth growing up in an environment that is specifically working against that ability to delay instant gratification. At this critical time in youths' development, now is when we want to reduce supports for these, to be clear, very vulnerable young people. It's wrong, and it's incredibly short sighted.

A comprehensive support system to age 24 would help ensure every young Albertan has a fair chance at building a stable, successful future. I think it's really important to recognize our own privilege and the privilege of our birth and the kind of family that we grow up in. I grew up in a great family with a really supportive parent who was there for me, who is still there for me. I'm 46 years old, and I've still got a supportive parent, and she's still financially supportive. You know, my daughter needs to sell 10 cases of Girl Guide cookies: grandma is there. Well, not everybody has a grandma to be there, not even for Girl Guide cookies. They don't have a mom or a grandma to be there to help them with basic grocery bills, with housing. I mean, the cost of living these days is very distressing for young people.

The shortsightedness, you know, is another thing that we see, where it's like we want to save this – and I can't remember what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, but she had a very specific number in what it would cost: \$6 million to \$14 million. So we want to save \$6 million to \$14 million, and what is the cost of doing that? Youth aging out of care, a little fun fact except it's not fun at all, are 200 times more likely to experience homelessness. So is preventative care the better way to approach this issue? Obviously. We know that the costs of addressing homelessness, the additional costs on the justice system, the health care system are vastly more than \$6 million to \$14 million.

The member opposite talked about choices. Yeah. We're making some bad choices here. We are choosing to not invest in the kind of preventative care that will set these young adults up for success, and we are going to pay for it down the line. We're going to pay for it with health care, we're going to pay for it with increased justice costs, and we sure as heck are going to pay for it when it comes . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 514. I am proud to stand in favour of the

motion proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia. For context – I know we’ve talked about this already; I’m very thankful for all the data and the information presented by everyone who spoke before – this motion is about restoring the critical support for young adults transitioning out of government care. Previously this program was known as the support and financial assistance agreements and was available to youth aging out of care until the age of 24. That is, of course, until the UCP lowered the age of eligibility to 22, and the program is now known as the transition to adulthood program.

I want us to take a moment to consider the gravity of why my colleague has put forward this motion. We are talking about vulnerable youth who have already had to face adversity throughout childhood that many of us have been fortunate enough to avoid and, as the mother of two youths, one who is about to be considered an adult, challenges I wish that no child would have to navigate.

We’re talking about supports available to young people after they’ve aged out of government care at age 18. I’ll just emphasize this again: vulnerable youth who have overcome or are still trying to heal from difficult childhoods who our provincial government has committed to support, much like we as parents have committed to support our own children, often beyond the age of 18, something I’m looking forward to. These youth are now considered adults, but we know that they need extended supports to ensure their safety and success as they integrate into their communities as independent adults.

Now, I know that most members on both sides of the of the aisle can agree that we’re morally obligated as a province to ensure that these youth can integrate and have a smooth transition into adulthood and that they should have every opportunity to have a strong foundation. I know that a lot of us here are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I want us to think about the youth that we love in our lives, the futures that we envision for them, and how these positive futures should also be within reach for youth aging out of care. Every Albertan has the right to a dignified life.

5:50

So what have the outcomes been since this government decided to lower the maximum age to receive TAP? A sharp increase in deaths, homelessness, and increased substance use: youth aging out of care are 200 times more likely to experience homelessness, and cutting support at the age of 22 puts them at risk when they need stability the most. If ever a safety net were needed, it is now, when rents are at an all-time high, when we’re seeing record numbers of homelessness, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood pointed out earlier, and at a time when my office is inundated by calls for help during an unprecedented affordability crisis.

In response to the arguments made by some of the government members about extending the age of eligibility and how fewer youth would be assisted, youth in care should not be a line item. Their lives should not be subject to the line item. The government cutting them off to make the books look better will cost more in the long term in terms of a response to homelessness, addiction, and overall human potential. I’m pretty sure that’s not what any of us signed up for when we decided to become public servants.

In closing, I just want to say that I urge all members of this House to vote in support of Motion 514 and to ensure a positive future for all Albertans, including youth aging out of care.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Not to belabour the points my colleagues have made before me, but this is a bad decision. It’s a clearly and transparently bad decision. To save a very small amount of money, the government is willing to cut off supports from young people who will – the trajectory of their entire lives will change. And that doesn’t just mean problems for them; it means problems for everyone around them.

This is so typical of the UCP’s approach to these sorts of issues. They are a government that is penny wise and pound stupid. They affect the lives of people in a negative way without considering the ramifications at all. They cut upstream supports, they cut these youth off of their supports, they cut supportive housing, they cut mental health and addictions treatment, and all of this winds up costing us much, much more than it ever would have, and that is just the financial cost. It says nothing of the cost in terms of human potential, in terms of children who could have gone on to be the best version of themselves, but now they won’t.

Those of us who were born in privileged situations where we had loving, supportive parents to take care of us, who continue to take care of us even when we have children of our own: we have had an advantage that I think we need to recognize. We need to recognize that in order to create anything even remotely resembling an equal playing field, that advantage should be extended to as many people as possible. These youth that we are talking about, they didn’t choose to be born into the situations they were born into. They didn’t choose not to have those supportive environments. This was thrust upon them, and they deserve for us, for the government, who is acting as trustee, to do everything we can, just like a parent would for their child, because we are responsible.

These are our children. We owe them better than what we are currently giving them, and we owe ourselves better than what we are currently giving them. When we cut off these upstream supports, when we fail to support people, we see the cost of that in our streets around us every single day, and it hurts every single one of us. Madam Speaker, I would urge every member of this House to really consider this motion and vote in favour.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it is now time for the mover of the motion to close with up to five minutes of debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Your early 20s can be some challenging times for anyone. It might mean moving out of your parents’ home, completing your postsecondary, working towards apprenticeship. You are absolutely learning to spread your metaphorical wings and become a young, independent adult.

I was super happy to hear the Minister of Children and Family Services agreeing with my opening, agreeing with the facts that children and youth who would be served by this motion aren’t your typical Albertans. And, no, they are not Albertans asking for handouts. This motion is not about giving financial supports to people who want to live off the system. These Albertans are ones that we owe better. These children have not had a healthy childhood where they were allowed to fail, learn, and try again. They did not have a stable family or community environment where these standard social resources were available in a consistent manner.

Where the minister and I disagree is that the minister seems to think that what we’re doing is enough. The minister shared success stories, which is absolutely part of the TAP program. However, the elimination of the financial component between 22 and 24 years of age was an error. This has caused harm. Now, while the government has spent their time here speaking to all the good things and claiming that it’s good enough, the numbers say otherwise. We, the

Alberta New Democrats, are well intentioned, and we will fight to stop the harm, correct the error, and follow the evidence and do what is right.

The claim that this motion is unnecessary demonstrates a lack of understanding of the situation. Were the dollars saved from this change worth the lives of the children and youth that were lost? Why are we okay with keeping legislation that we know is not serving the Albertans it's meant to? Under the current ministry we are seeing more and more young adults being presented with bad choices and more and more of our Albertan youth suffering serious injury or death. The numbers don't lie. What do we want the next annual report to share or the one after that? Do we want to break another record, have more Albertans suffer because we don't do the correct thing? Alberta showed record high numbers of deaths or severe injuries in '22-23. This demonstrates that we aren't getting it right, and I hope the minister was being earnest when he indicated that he was committed to getting it right.

The world is a very different place than it was. We have the ability to update, refresh, and provide resources and care to these children and youth that they are owed. Albertans care about children. Vote for this motion and demonstrate that you do, too. This motion, again, proposes an update to legislation to reflect the reality of 2024. We have the ability to change the projection of the lives of children and youth in care for decades to come. By voting for this motion, you are sending a message. Again I'm asking you to consider the message you are sending. I encourage you to vote yes to Motion 514.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it's 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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