



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 14, 2022

Day 8

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)  
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
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Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
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Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),  
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Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)  
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)  
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)  
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)  
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Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
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Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)  
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

### Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Mike Ellis	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Whitney Issik	Associate Minister of Status of Women
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Minister of Community and Social Services
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Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
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Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
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Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard  
Eggen  
Gray  
Hunter  
Phillips  
Rehn  
Singh

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Neudorf  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Barnes  
Bilous  
Frey  
Irwin  
Rosin  
Rowswell  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Walker

### **Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply**

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon  
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery  
Frey  
Milliken  
Rosin  
Stephan  
Yao  
Vacant  
Vacant  
Vacant  
Vacant

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Dang  
Frey  
Gotfried  
Hunter  
Loewen  
Reid  
Sabir  
Smith

### **Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee**

Chair: Mr. Walker  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard  
Carson  
Dreeshen  
Ganley  
Long  
Sabir  
Stephan

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Rutherford  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard  
Ceci  
Dach  
Long  
Loyola  
Rosin  
Shepherd  
Smith  
van Dijken

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard  
Deol  
Goehring  
Gray  
Long  
Neudorf  
Sabir  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

Chair: Mr. Rutherford  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery  
Frey  
Irwin  
Long  
Nielsen  
Rehn  
Rosin  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sweet

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Smith  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Deol  
Ganley  
Gotfried  
Loyola  
Neudorf  
Renaud  
Stephan  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Lovely  
Pancholi  
Renaud  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Singh  
Toor  
Turton  
Walker

### **Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights**

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey  
Ganley  
Hanson  
Milliken  
Nielsen  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach  
Feehan  
Ganley  
Getson  
Guthrie  
Lovely  
Rehn  
Singh  
Turton  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 14, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I would invite you to join in the language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Members, please be seated.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Commonwealth Day

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I would like to note that today is the second Monday in March, which means it is Commonwealth Day. Commonwealth Day is a special occasion as it is on this day that we join parliaments from 54 countries comprising 2.5 billion citizens from around the world in celebration of the great institution of the Commonwealth. Commonwealth Day 2022 is especially significant in that it coincides with the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Today the Queen of Canada has provided the Commonwealth Day message, 2022, which I have taken the liberty of having placed on members' desks. In it Her Majesty renews her long-standing promise of dedication to service of her people, which, of course, includes Canadians and tens of millions of other Commonwealth residents. The Queen of Canada writes about family of nations continuing to be a point of connection, co-operation, and friendship, a place where citizens can come together to pursue common goals and common good, providing everyone the opportunity to serve and benefit and to draw strength and inspiration from what we share. Her Majesty's words are a timely appeal for unity and co-operation during these difficult times plagued by division and strife. Let us all thank Her Majesty for her inspiring words.

God save our most noble and gracious Queen.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today is a very dear friend to all here in the Assembly, the hon. Laila Goodridge, MP for Fort McMurray-Cold Lake, accompanied by her

husband, Niall, and perhaps more importantly their son Eoghan. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Members, joining us in the galleries this afternoon, I'm pleased to introduce Tina Petrow, a councillor from the city of Airdrie, as a guest of the Member for Airdrie-East.

I'm also very pleased and honoured to have a number of Canadian Armed Forces veterans joining us today. On behalf of all members of the Assembly we thank you for your dedicated service to our country: veterans Shaun Arntsen, Mike Rude, Dave Bona, Bruce Given, along with Dene clan mother Noeline Villebrun. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

#### Prenatal Benefit for Women Receiving AISH or Income Support

**Mrs. Allard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and share some good news. Alberta's government is now enhancing its supports for vulnerable pregnant women on AISH and income support with additional monthly support to promote healthy outcomes for both mother and child. The new prenatal benefit, which pregnant women on AISH and income support can access at the beginning of their second trimester, will provide eligible clients with \$100 per month until the baby is born, for a total of \$600. This is in addition to the current one-time prenatal benefit of \$256 for these expectant mothers at 36 weeks. These benefits will continue and are intended to support new parents with the cost of preparing for their child.

At \$856 we now have one of the highest prenatal benefits in the country. As a mother of three myself I wholly support this. Women with limited resources and income often face several additional challenges during pregnancy. This new benefit will provide these mothers with more funds to put towards their health and wellness. Research shows providing early support in a woman's pregnancy can result in healthier pregnancies and better long-term outcomes for both mother and baby. The province's children and young people are Alberta's most valuable resource, Mr. Speaker. When they thrive, this province thrives.

Alberta's government continues to support women's social and economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in Alberta are second in the nation with a 60.6 per cent employment rate while unemployment across the province has dropped to its lowest rate since before the pandemic. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? It means we're well on our way to leading the nation. Alberta's government also successfully negotiated a plan that will see licensed daycare fees drop by an average of 50 per cent for Alberta families. I'm proud to be part of a government, this government, that not only recognizes the importance of supporting Alberta families but is acting on our promises to the province's women and children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Utility Costs

**Mr. Dach:** Mr. Speaker, did anything stand out in your utility bills this month? For far too many Albertans there was a nasty shock in the mail when they opened their bills: price of car insurance, up; electricity bill, up; gas bill, up. I've been hearing from Albertans

around the clock who are faced with these skyrocketing rates and who don't know how they'll pay their bills as well as buy their groceries. The silence of the UCP government members speaks worlds about their position on this crisis they're allowing to grow. While the government members are silent, other Albertans are far from surprised. They are angry. They are scared. They are frustrated. All Albertans are raising their concerns about these increasing prices. Business owners, families, students, single parents: all of them were abandoned, left with little to no answer by their government.

What does the UCP government do to attend to rising utility bills? They blame others for their mistakes. They introduced a rebate program that won't start until next fall and which is triggered at such a high price that no Albertan will qualify, and for those facing a \$700 or more utility bill, the UCP is offering a \$50 cheque. These Albertans will not pay their bills with 50 bucks and empty promises, Mr. Speaker. These Albertans are facing massive debts if they do not get the support needed to pay these cost increases. Albertan businesses might be forced to shut their doors due to these overwhelming bills. That includes small bus lines serving rural Alberta. The UCP is not providing the solutions that people need. They offer only excuses and half measures. They won't even put a Band-Aid on a gaping wound they've inflicted on Albertan families.

To anyone facing these outrageous bills, the NDP caucus is hearing your concerns. Albertans are looking for leadership they can trust. They are tired of constantly being let down and betrayed by this government, who refuses to help those in need, and while 2023 is still far away, it's coming fast. For those members opposite who want to keep their jobs, they need to start offering solutions instead of silence. Trust takes years to build, a moment to break, and forever to repair.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is next.

1:40

### United States Oil Imports

**Mrs. Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the attacks and invasions that Russia has been imposing on Ukraine, no country in good conscience should be supporting oil from them. As our Premier has stated, "Every barrel of Russian oil sold in the world today is filled with Ukrainian blood."

Mr. Speaker, by putting a stop to the Keystone pipeline, Joe Biden has shown unfair criticism to Canada's natural resources and therefore increased his country's reliance on Russian oil. Not only did this decision backfire and put America in an energy crisis, but it helped fund Russia's invasion and attacks on Ukraine. Now that U.S. President Joe Biden has finally banned all oil imports from Russia, America is in need of more oil supply while Alberta, being the third-largest oil reserve on the planet as well as being right next door to the United States – naturally, we should be the solution to this energy crisis. The U.S. needs to stop trying to import oil from other dictatorships such as Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. These countries are not the solution.

After what has just happened, you would think that our national leaders would want to change direction on importing oil from unstable dictator regimes and turn toward more stable and secure options such as Alberta. [A baby cried in the gallery] Alberta oil is reliable and responsibly produced. These other countries – Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran – are not the safest, certainly not the most reliable resources to be importing oil from. The real question is: why isn't Justin Trudeau calling up U.S. President Joe Biden and making a deal to increase oil production and strengthen energy security in North America? As long as these two leaders

keep putting billions of dollars into importing oil from unsecure dictatorships, North America is going to continue to struggle with their energy policy.

It is time to stop taking away energy investment from Canada and putting it in the hands of some of the world's worst administrations. Alberta oil is safe. Alberta oil is ethically sourced. Alberta oil, Mr. Speaker, is a solution.

**The Speaker:** Don't worry, Eoghan. Sometimes the members make me cry, too.

### Broadband Strategy

**Mr. Carson:** Following the last election, the UCP promised to deliver Albertans a broadband strategy. After years of promises they failed to deliver anything of the sort, so we in the NDP released our own broadband strategy last November. Our report was the result of consultations with Albertans, organizations, and Internet providers on how we can connect every single Albertan to high-speed, affordable Internet and build a more resilient and diversified economy. We know how important this is to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, so we were happy to see the UCP finally release their own broadband strategy earlier this month.

While the UCP's plan borrows a lot of the same ideas from our proposal, it also falls short in several areas. First of all, it relies on the federal government to deliver funding through an application-based system that, by definition, picks winners and losers. In contrast, our plan would deliver funding through a competitive market-based system that guarantees we are getting the most value for taxpayer dollars. Despite hearing throughout consultations that easier and quicker access to infrastructure will be needed to build broadband, there's no mention of that in the UCP's so-called plan.

With the UCP's plan lacking details and ceding control to the federal government, this could lead to even more delays under this government. In fact, the government has made four broadband announcements since last summer but have not yet connected a single house in the process. As a result, we are already seeing delays. Just a few months ago the Service Alberta minister said that Albertans would be connected by '23-24. Now they've already pushed that back to '26-27, Mr. Speaker.

It's time for this government to stop with the self-congratulatory press releases, stop the delays, and finally deliver high-speed Internet to all Albertans. If they're looking for ideas on how to achieve this, I would be happy to share a copy of our plan with them, or they can visit [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Front-line Health Care Workers

**Mr. Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past two months I have been observing first-hand the incredible job our front-line health care workers do day after day as they cared for my dad. I cannot express it in enough words, my gratitude for our valiant medical staff working in Livingstone-Macleod and throughout Alberta. The steadfast dedication and unwavering courage that our fantastic paramedics, nurses, doctors, and support staff have shown over the past two years have been nothing short of remarkable.

It's not like their jobs were easy before the pandemic. They work in one of the most demanding and stressful industries imaginable, and even the minor decisions they make could mean life or death. This stress can be harmful to mental health, so I hope our health care workers take some time to care for themselves and utilize the resources available to help them. I am hopeful that this will improve

with the supporting health in first responders grant program, for one instance.

Despite the stresses that you face on a regular basis, the pandemic has added many more difficulties. Extra processes were put into place to keep you and your patients safe. These consumed more of your time out of a busy health care worker's day already. Labour shortages and sick co-workers also added to the strain and the stress. These extra processes and staffing difficulties are important to recognize because they disrupt the essential routines, but these folks continue to push through. You've seen the impacts of the virus each and every day affecting those in your community, and still you come into work determined to do your part to make the situation better. This is truly heroic.

One of the things that my dad taught me is that it's better to give than to receive, but when you do receive, always say thank you. So to my dad's nurses, his LPNs, his physiotherapists, his physicians, the food service and janitorial folks, and all who serve in these roles and many others in our health care system: from the bottom of my heart, thank you, thank you, thank you. You have all been incredible on the front lines, bringing care to our families and to our communities. From everyone here in Alberta's Legislative Assembly: we say thank you.

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

#### Front-line Health Care Workers

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." That's Maya Angelou. This government tried for so long to pretend that they actually supported our front-line health heroes, the people who administered the life-saving vaccines, who did the swabs, ran the tests, did the contact tracing, supported those who were sick or who lost loved ones, and so much more. These people did so much to get us through multiple waves of this pandemic. They are heroes. They deserve respect and our gratitude. On this side of the House we offer our deep and unqualified thanks to each and every front-line worker who stepped up and worked themselves to exhaustion for their neighbours, families, communities. On behalf of the Official Opposition, thank you. The province owes you a debt we can never possibly repay.

Their thanks from this government, this Premier, and this Health minister? Immediate wage cuts: for pharmacists, a 5 per cent cut in pay; for pharmacy technicians, nearly 11 per cent; respiratory therapists, 8 per cent; health information management professionals, 7 per cent; social workers, 11 per cent; and speech language pathologists, an 8.7 per cent cut. A significant number of these workers, Mr. Speaker, are women. A slap in the face to these dedicated public servants.

But it shows us once again what the true colours are of the UCP. We all remember, on the eve of the UCP's best summer ever, how the Premier immediately launched a plan to slash the pay of nurses, the same nurses who then went back into hospitals under pressure, facing harassment and threats, saved countless lives, and prevented the total collapse of our health care system. And now, just like then, the UCP is turning on health care workers again. This Premier claims to support these workers. He claims to respect them and be thankful to them, but those are hollow words. It astonishes me that he can say it with a straight face. Health care workers know that they can't trust this government, who uses one hand to pat them on the back while the other reaches into their wallets. These heroes deserve better, Mr. Speaker. Shame on this government.

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

#### Emergency Medical Services

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today and in the recent past there is and has been a historic increase in calls being placed to emergency services in Alberta. In turn, there has been a significant amount of pressure placed on emergency services and their abilities to dispatch first responders such as EMS to Albertans.

Therefore, the Alberta government has engaged in meaningful dialogue with Alberta Health Services and has now dedicated \$64 million to increase access to emergency medical services to all communities across Alberta. This new funding will aid in the increase of ground and air EMS services, extend ground ambulance contracts to assist in interfacility operations and transfers, and an increase in funding to address the hours of work initiative that aims to address EMS crew fatigue. This new funding for emergency medical services will assist in creating the necessary infrastructure needed to ensure effective emergency response across our province. It is an honour to mention and thank the tireless efforts put in day to day by our provincial heroes that work in the emergency medical services, Mr. Speaker.

Every day, come wind, rain, or snow, Albertans can depend on EMS to come to their aid in their most desperate hour. The tasking work of emergency services has a large toll on mental health and strains the personal life of emergency response staff, and their work cannot go unrecognized. Mr. Speaker, through you to all emergency services personnel across Alberta who have previously served Albertans or currently serve in emergency response teams, sincerest thanks.

Thank you so very much.

1:50

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Health Care and Social Service Worker Wages

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic we have all relied on front-line caregiving Albertans like social workers, pharmacy techs, and respiratory therapists. But what's the UCP's thank you to those workers? Wage cuts and rollbacks. This as the Finance minister secretly signs off on raises for AIMCo executives of 20 to 40 per cent. Why does this Premier believe executives earning healthy six-figure salaries deserve a raise but respiratory therapists helping folks breathe deserve a rollback?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. First, I want to start off by thanking all health care workers for the tremendous work that they've been doing, particularly over the last two years and managing through the pandemic. As the members opposite know, AHS and HSAA are in the stages of bargaining. The current agreement expired on March 31, 2020, and they began bargaining last October after a mutually agreed upon suspension. The two sides tabled opening positions recently. The employer has tabled a set of specific offers based on their analysis, on the conditions, and so has the union. This is bargaining.

**Ms Notley:** Well, where were those bargainers when they sat down with the executives at AIMCo, Mr. Speaker? Let's take a closer look: speech language pathologists, 9 per cent cut; AIMCo executives, 29 per cent raise; pharmacy techs, 11 per cent cut; AIMCo managers, 27 per cent raise; social workers, 11 per cent cut;

AIMCo directors, 20 per cent raise. Why is this Premier giving AIMCo executives cushy double-digit raises while respiratory therapists keeping people alive have to give back 8 per cent? What is wrong with you?

**Mr. Copping:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, these are initial positions in bargaining. As the hon. member knows, bargaining positions are put on the table, and as the hon. member also knows, through this exact same process AHS was able to reach an agreement with UNA, which was ratified at a significant percentage rate. For example, the HSAA has put a request on the table for a 15 per cent increase over four years. Again, these are opening positions. I am hopeful that the parties will be able to negotiate through this and reach a fair agreement, just like was done with UNA.

**Ms Notley:** Alberta nurses got nothing close to the 20 per cent that these folks gave to AIMCo executives. Now, to all the Albertans watching at home, this is exactly why you can't trust the UCP government. At a time when so many people are struggling, this Premier takes the opportunity to give big raises to executive money managers while cutting the wages of essential front-line workers in health care and social services. The people who administer our medication when we're sick, who help us breathe when our lungs are full, who coax speech out of autistic children: those are the people they want to cut. Why doesn't this Premier start dealing with all Albertans fairly?

**Mr. Copping:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be clear. Our government is investing in health care. We added \$600 million to the budget this year. There's another \$600 million the year after, the year after that. A total of \$1.8 billion we're investing in health care on the expense side, \$3.5 billion on the capital side, and we are hiring. The numbers in AHS are going up. AHS staff are targeted to increase by more than 3 per cent in '22-23, from 81,600 to 84,400. We have more doctors. We have more nurses. We have more paramedics. We are focused on increasing our staff. We are focusing on increasing our investment in health care, and we'll deliver.

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

**Ms Notley:** And AIMCo executives have 30 per cent more money.

### Utility and Insurance Costs

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP raised the cost of living with their bracket creep policies and their steep hikes to school fees, to car insurance, tuition, and more. Meanwhile Corrina is a single mom. Her Enmax bill was \$800 in one month. She begged for relief, and all she was offered was the chance to make installation payments going forward. That means another \$100 to \$200 on a bill she still can't pay. Why doesn't the Premier realize that for Albertans like Corrina his \$50 rebate just doesn't cut it?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP got exactly what they wanted. They were successful in making everything more expensive for all Albertans, because that's the goal of the carbon tax. Drive up the cost of heating so you can't afford to heat your home. Drive up the cost of gas so people can't afford to drive their cars. We actually are perplexed on this side of the House why they would bring in a carbon tax and then drive up the price of everything only to then throw up their hands and say: why are the prices going up?

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that last week that member was perplexed about the cost of energy at the time.

But I also heard from people like Liz in Calgary. She said that she was appalled at the increase in her bill in insurance, but she was even more concerned about her 73-year-old neighbour who was forced to cancel her car insurance and her home insurance because she couldn't afford them. If hail strikes her home, she can't make a claim. Why is the Premier allowing massive insurance premiums at a time when Albertans are struggling? Why doesn't he start actually standing up for Albertans instead of big insurance companies?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, this side of the House will not be lectured by that member, who, when she was Premier, told Albertans to take the bus when they started to complain about the drastic increases to the costs of their daily lives from her job-killing carbon tax. She stood side by side with Justin Trudeau and continues to this day. Will that member finally stand up and apologize to Albertans for the devastation that she's caused this province?

**Ms Notley:** The member wants me to answer questions, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to trade places. I'm sure many people would like to see that happen, too.

Meanwhile Angela wrote to me, and she said, quote: it was already difficult to pay for necessities, but now I'm solely dependent on the food bank. That's hard to hear. Experts have said that the UCP's paltry rebate programs won't do enough to help Albertans like Angela. Why doesn't the Premier go back to the drawing board and put some thought into consequential relief for low- and middle-income families? If he's really here for families, why won't he just walk the talk finally?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP chased \$100 billion out of this province when they were in office. They brought in the biggest job-killing, investment-scaring-away tax in this province's history, the carbon tax, and they succeeded in making everything more expensive. Well, we are bringing in short-term programs to provide relief to Albertans, things like the natural gas rebate, that would prevent a European-style energy crisis. We're bringing in an electricity rebate, and don't forget the 13-cent-a-litre gas tax that we are going to get rid of. We will protect Albertans from the NDP.

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

### Utility Costs

**Member Ceci:** Over the weekend I joined Pat MacIntyre, owner of the Ironwood Stage & Grill in my beautiful constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, to raise concerns about skyrocketing utility prices. Pat thinks the UCP's fake natural gas rebate and the \$50 electricity rebate are a joke. He said that that tiny amount of money would barely cover a case of beer and does nothing for utility costs that are now over \$3,000 a month. Pat said, quote: at the end of the day, we're struggling to make ends meet, keep payroll going, and keep everyone employed. Why is this Premier failing Alberta businesses so badly with his phony utility rebate?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, we are equally frustrated by the higher cost of electricity, but you know what's not helpful? It's not helpful when the Member for Calgary-Mountain View stands outside of a restaurant this weekend and proceeds to give everybody the wrong price of electricity. That's right. The hon. member told Albertans it was 50 to 100 per cent higher than the true cost. She was quoted as saying 15 cents. In fact, it's 10 and a half unless you have a contract. Then it's 7 and a half. I have to ask the question: do they truly not know the cost of electricity?



**Member Ceci:** We capped it at 6.8. I remember that.

Businesses like the Ironwood have also suffered greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They've endured through repeated shutdowns with little or no warning from this Premier. COVID support funding from this government was often too little, came far too late. Businesses that are actually staying open and serving patrons are drowning in thousands of dollars of debt from skyrocketing utility bills. Will the Premier admit that he has failed small businesses repeatedly over the past two years, will he admit he is failing them now again, and will he apologize and step up to the plate and do something today?

2:00

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, isn't it a good thing the NDP weren't in office for the last three years? It would have devastated businesses across Alberta, but instead right now in Alberta we're forecasted to lead the country again in growth: in the last year 130,000 jobs created, in the first two months this year 15,000 jobs created. The NDP plan would have been simply just to grow the size of government, hire more people in the government in an unsustainable way. We balanced the budget, and businesses are coming back.

**Member Ceci:** There may be job growth now, but this government has put so many people out of work, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Official Opposition and the Energy critic from Calgary-Mountain View asked the associate minister of energy if he could tell the House what the current rate of electricity is and how it's compared to the rate under the NDP – 6.8 cents, remember? – and the minister stood up, shrugged, and didn't have an answer. He didn't have a clue last week. Let's see if the Premier knows exactly. What is the rate of energy for families in Alberta now, Mr. Premier?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, I have said in this Chamber many times that the NDP refuse to be encumbered by the truth, and this is one more example. First, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View tells Albertans that the price of electricity is 50 to 100 per cent higher than it really is. Well, when the hon. member is not embarrassing herself misquoting the true price of electricity, they're also telling Albertans that they're only getting a \$50 rebate on their electricity bill when the hon. member knows it's \$150. It's just one more example of the NDP not being encumbered by the truth.

### Government Policies and Cost of Living

**Member Irwin:** While this Premier boasts about this province having its swagger back, Albertans are struggling with skyrocketing bills, and nearly 10,000 full-time jobs were lost last month. This is the second month in a row that Alberta has lost full-time jobs, and not a single word of acknowledgement or sympathy from this government or this Premier. Will the Premier put down his celebratory champagne – maybe his whisky, too – and show some real empathy for Albertans by apologizing to those who lost their jobs or saw their pay cut while he partied?

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, it is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit of this province, the rebound that this province has seen, going from an \$18 billion forecasted deficit to balancing the books this year. That's not because of government. The NDP would have grown government. It's because of entrepreneurs: 130,000 jobs created last year and also 15,000 new jobs created this year alone, close to 150,000 jobs since the beginning of 2021. That's a record we'll stand behind.

**Member Irwin:** At the same time that this Premier is allowing nearly 10,000 full-time jobs to vanish, he's also doing absolutely

nothing to address the very real concerns of the people we represent. Eliza is one of my constituents. She works hard in the construction industry, but, like so many Albertans, she can't get ahead. She just got a rent increase. The reason given: skyrocketing utility rates. This Premier is hammering Albertans at a time when they can least afford it, thanks to his failure to take meaningful action on utility rates. Why isn't this government listening to people like Eliza? Why, at every opportunity, do they put profits before people?

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

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is taking utility rates very, very seriously, working towards rebates to be able to help Albertans. But the number one thing that we can do to help with utility rates and the cost-of-living increase in our province is to call on Justin Trudeau and the NDP's close allies in Ottawa, the federal Liberal government, to scrap their carbon tax once and for all. So, again, Mr. Speaker, through you, to them: will the NDP finally stand up for Albertans and tell the federal government to get rid of their ridiculous job-killing carbon tax?

**Member Irwin:** Well, if this minister wants to ask those questions, I suggest he call an election, because this government clearly doesn't care about the loss of nearly 10,000 full-time jobs in February, just like this Premier clearly doesn't care about the impact of the pernicious inflation tax that he is using to take a billion dollars more in income taxes. This comes at the exact same time that this government is doubling down on their policies of higher utility bills, insurance bills, school fees, park fees, higher tuition. The list goes on. Can this Premier please tell me how he can boast about his bad-news budget for working Albertans? Is making struggling Albertans pay more to get less really a fair . . .

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

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Mr. Speaker, this side of the aisle is proud of the fact that Alberta's budget is balanced. We're proud of that fact, and you know why our budget is balanced? It's the entrepreneurial spirit of this province. Alberta is more diversified than ever when you look at manufacturing, when you look at logistics, when you look at the technology and innovation space, film and television. Oh, and I haven't even gotten to the industry the NDP don't even like, the oil and gas industry. Big rebounds are coming. Alberta is back. We're proud of that record.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

### Security Infrastructure Program

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend we learned that the government is more than doubling its commitment to protecting places of worship from hate crimes and vandalism through the Alberta security infrastructure program. This is good news for groups at risk, who only want to live, raise their families, and worship in peace. To the Minister of Justice: how much funding has already been given out by Alberta under this program, and when can we expect the next round of applications to be submitted?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, through you, to the hon. member, thank you to him for his advocacy on this issue, for speaking with me about this as well as the previous Minister of Justice about this issue. Thank you for that tireless advocacy.

While we don't want to be too specific on the number of organizations so that we can protect the information of vulnerable Albertans and vulnerable applicants, more than 110 applicants were approved for funding so far. That's over \$1.2 million in grants that have already been approved through the Alberta security infrastructure program. We look forward to opening up the next set of applications this spring.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that many places of worship know the pain of being targeted by hate-motivated violence and given that many of the victims of these attacks are new Canadians who speak English as a second language, can the Minister of Justice please explain what kind of organizations are eligible to apply for funding?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a great question. It was one that was asked a few times on the weekend, when both I and the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism and the Premier announced this at a church, actually, that was firebombed this summer. The grant applications are open to registered nonprofit agencies who operate a facility that belongs to or is primarily used by communities at risk of hate-motivated crimes or incidents. That could include facilities like places of worship, temples, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, churches, or private educational institutions if they have a diverse student body, or other facilities that . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that more faith-based groups and organizations will now be able to qualify for the Alberta security infrastructure program and given that there are specific criteria for the kinds of improvements the government is seeking to assist with, again to the Minister of Justice: what infrastructure upgrades would qualify for the improvements under this program?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far, through the emergency Alberta security infrastructure program, to just use those as an example, those have been used for security measures such as hiring security guards, security system installations, surveillance cameras, motion detectors, window guards, tempered glass windows, and fencing. Those are some of the examples through the emergency program that have already been approved. Our commitment is to stand up to intolerance, to keep all Albertans safe, and to forcefully prosecute hate crimes, and that remains as strong a commitment as ever.

### Coal Development Policies

**Mr. Schmidt:** Albertans don't want to see coal mining in the Rocky Mountains. Indigenous leaders, municipal leaders, ranchers, environmentalists, country music stars, and thousands of Albertans with signs on their lawns and stickers on their bumpers have been very clear that they are not happy that this government rescinded protections for these distinctly Albertan landscapes. To ensure that they're protected, our leader will be introducing a bill to ensure their viability for generations to come. The UCP claim they want to protect our mountains, but we can't trust them to keep their word.

Will the minister put her money where her mouth is and vote to pass this bill?

2:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've done; we've protected the eastern slopes. We've fixed the NDP loophole so that they can't do a workaround on the 1976 coal policy. We've fully reinstated the 1976 coal policy, we've extended it to include categories 1 to 4, we've hard-wired those restrictions into the AER, and that's where it will remain. Land-use planning will be done, and those restrictions will be incorporated into land-use planning.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Given that the coal policy was rescinded by this government quietly on the Friday before a long weekend and given that a ministerial order, which for some reason the government has decided is adequate in this scenario, can also be removed just as easily and given that this government has given Albertans no indication that they're against open-pit coal mining in the Rockies and no indication that they're serious about putting our drinking water ahead of coal exploration, will the minister get serious for a moment and vote to enshrine these protections in legislation, not these half measures that she's put in place, that can be removed with the stroke of a pen?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's already done, and in fact we've hard-wired those rules into the AER, and they will be incorporated into land-use planning, which is legislation. We did exactly what Albertans asked us to do. We are protecting the eastern slopes. We have removed the NDP loophole. The NDP did a complete workaround on the 1976 coal policy when they told a proponent to go ahead and develop a mine and ignore the '76 coal policy. We're protecting . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Given that the Coal Policy Committee's report clearly shows that Albertans overwhelmingly oppose coal mining in the eastern slopes and given that their justified and loud opposition started because this government tried to remove these protections when they didn't think Albertans were paying attention and given that it's clear that Albertans can't trust this government to not try and pull the same move again, will the minister promise today that there will not be a single piece of additional coal mined in the Rockies while she's minister, and if she won't, will she urge the Premier to call an election so that we can finish the job?

**Mrs. Savage:** Mr. Speaker, we have fully protected the eastern slopes, and we've hard-wired those restrictions into the AER. Nobody is going to touch those. Nobody is going to remove them. Nobody is going to remove that ministerial order. The '76 coal policy has not only been fully reinstated; it's been extended, and nobody is going to touch that. Land-use planning will be completed. That's the appropriate process, it's the appropriate legislation, it's the framework, and we're protecting it in legislation under appropriate land-use framing.

### School Construction Capital Plan and Edmonton

**Ms Hoffman:** Our space crunch has heightened; it means larger class sizes, it means long bus ride times, it means more schools having to go through a lottery process, and it means greater

uncertainty: those are the words of the Edmonton public chair, Trisha Estabrooks. The UCP abandoned Edmonton families in this budget. Students for years to come will be impacted by the decisions that this government has made rather than stepping up and the Education minister doing her job. Rather than looking at her notes and telling everyone how many schools the NDP built in Edmonton, will the minister at least look in the camera and apologize to the families that she failed in this budget?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to address the question by the member opposite. The member opposite knows full well that school authorities put forward their capital plan each and every year, and they prioritize what is important to them. In Edmonton public they actually prioritized the top two schools, that didn't need to be replaced, where they had 69 per cent utilization, and they also didn't have any health and safety issues. We have about 400 asks a year. These didn't rise to the top of the list.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that there were five projects in the year 1 needs assessment and given that the minister has refused, to date, to come and tour those schools that she says are in just great shape, will the minister come to tour Delton, to tour Spruce Avenue? Will she ride the bus that the kids in south Edmonton have to take to get to the closest high school? Will she ride the bus that the kids in northeast Edmonton have to take to get to the closest middle school? Mr. Speaker, will the minister at least apologize to the families that she's clearly ignoring here in Edmonton public?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record I just want to share that Edmonton public has received many schools over the last little while: 2016, five schools completed; 2017, 10 schools completed; 2018, three schools completed; 2019, two schools completed; 2020, three schools completed; and as of August 2021 there are currently six projects under way right now; 131,746 spaces when their projected enrolment for Edmonton public is 107,000 students, 20,000-plus student spaces more.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that both the Premier and the Education minister have claimed to support school choice and given that if that were true, they would have funded construction or modernization, anything for public students going to school right here in Edmonton, the fastest growing school division in the country – but instead the budget does nothing to address the shortages for Edmonton public or put even a dollar into francophone school construction anywhere in the province either – and given that many Edmonton students are in overcrowded classrooms with long bus rides, will the UCP do the right thing and fund public and francophone school construction here in Edmonton, or will they admit that this is one of the reasons why Albertans just can't trust them?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Education.

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The francophone school community has had six projects given over the last couple of years that they are working through right now and that are coming online. Edmonton public, as I said, has 131,746 student spaces. That doesn't even include the 23 modulars that we allocated to them when, in fact, their projected enrolment for '22-23 is 107,000 students. We continue to follow the prioritizations of school

authorities. When they prioritize those projects, they get to the top of the list. Unfortunately, they didn't prioritize in high enrolment areas.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

### Northern Development

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to community and northern development, one of the top priorities for folks in Central Peace is seniors' housing. It is vital that local seniors be able to remain in the communities they helped build. Communities greatly benefit when seniors remain engaged and active. We need them volunteering, we need their knowledge, we need their perspective, and we need them to share the benefit of their experiences. We need families connected. My understanding is that along with the seniors' project in Spirit River, DeBolt and Fox Creek are also in the approval process. To the minister: can you confirm for us that these other projects are upcoming and share your perspective on why these projects are important?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

**Ms Pon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for asking some very important questions. As seniors helped us to build this great province as it is today, it is critical that they can remain in the community of their choice. Aging well in the community is very important. We will continue to support seniors to do that. This is why I'm so pleased to share with the House that these projects are approved and that we are working with the community on these projects and their announcement.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Minister. Given that to enhance northern development, Grande Prairie Regional College has been seeking to become a true polytechnic for many years and given that that approval was announced last week – and this is good news because it means new spaces, new programs, and new opportunities for students of all ages in the Peace Country – and given that I attended the convocation last week in my constituency at the Fairview campus and that I can't say enough positive things about the good people who work and study there, to the minister: can you tell us how the creation of Northwestern Polytechnic will benefit community and northern development in Fairview and all across northern Alberta?

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

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The transition of Grande Prairie Regional College to Northwestern Polytechnic, of course, just finalized last week, and I had the honour and privilege of being there in person for that with students, staff, and faculty, which was great to see. The move to a polytechnic will allow the institution to continue to maintain trades programming and apprenticeship education, which is vital to the local community. It'll also give them a greater ability to offer more applied degrees to help ensure that students in the community can get access to the programs that they need right in their own communities and, as well, help to strengthen a focus on technology.

**Mr. Loewen:** Given that when it comes to community and northern development, there is some bad news as well – and that is that the community of McLennan recently learned that ATB is closing its local branch, leaving residents with no bank – and given that this community is the hub for the local region and is home to the local hospital and businesses that provide important services and given

that services like ATB help attract people to communities and that closing it can have the opposite effect, to the Finance minister: does your government understand the realities faced on a daily basis by rural Albertans and that northern development means not reducing important services?

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

2:20

**Mr. Schweitzer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank that member for the thoughtful series of questions that he's asked here today. When it comes to ATB Financial, obviously it's a Crown corporation with a presence across our province. Its history actually goes back to the Peace Country, way back into the 1930s, and the need for banking across Alberta. We'll continue to work with them on the quality services that they provide, but it also highlights our investment in rural broadband. More and more banking services are going online, and we have to make sure as well that every single Albertan has access to broadband. That's why our historic partnership, that should attract over a billion dollars in investment in rural broadband, is important.

### South Edmonton Hospital Construction Funding

**Member Loyola:** P3s have been a disaster in Alberta, but this UCP government appears committed to repeating mistakes. A market-sounding package for the \$2 billion south Edmonton hospital is literally begging for a P3 option. Alberta taxpayers: they'll be paying the price. The government is openly admitting that price isn't the key consideration. Instead, they'll score a winning bid in whatever fashion best doles out billions to UCP insiders. To the Minister of Infrastructure. Albertans don't trust this government. Is he really asking taxpayers to blindly trust this government with another P3 gamble, this time with health care?

**Mr. Panda:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted the UCP campaign platform, which mentioned about building capital projects utilizing alternate financing, including P3s, and that's what we are going to look at. During that process we assess value for money for taxpayer investment. If there is a case for a P3 delivery option, we'll proceed, including the Edmonton hospital.

**Member Loyola:** Given that the last time Alberta went down the P3 road to building schools, the Auditor General gave them an F and given that the Auditor General warned Albertans that these P3 projects lacked transparency – good news for UCP insiders, bad news for Alberta taxpayers – and given that in the past the private-sector P3 model nickelled and dimed the taxpayer, to the minister: did this government learn nothing from the 2013 P3 disaster, and why is this government so committed to making another disaster, this time out of the south Edmonton hospital?

**Mr. Panda:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows well that in the past P3 delivery methods, in fact, Albertan taxpayers saved millions of dollars. The Auditor General, in fact, validated the process of assessing value for taxpayers. We are going to continue that. Whether it is schools or hospitals, whatever is a taxpayer-funded project, we're going to look at P3 options.

**Member Loyola:** Heaven help us.

Given that the last time Alberta went down the P3 path for major government projects, it turned into a tire fire for taxpayers and given that the government of Alberta commissioned a Deloitte study that literally called the P3 model a mess and given that we are talking

about \$2 billion of taxpayer money and that the only key message of this UCP government is, "Trust us; we're great and competent managers," to the minister. The government must realize that Albertans don't trust them and that they don't trust P3s. One more: why go down this failed path again and leave taxpayers holding the bag?

**Mr. Panda:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted our policy. That's why they elected us to the office on that platform. The only people that don't like it are the NDP, because of their ideology. Attracting private investments into Alberta's economy is a good thing. P3s are attracting private investments. That will provide more taxpayer dollars for more infrastructure, vital infrastructure, hundreds of projects in construction right now, including 66 schools.

### Poverty Reduction Strategy

**Ms Renaud:** Mr. Speaker, my first question to the Minister of Community and Social Services today is a simple one: how many Albertans are living in poverty today?

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, our government is continually committed to supporting our most vulnerable Albertans. As we released in Budget 2022, an additional \$12 million has been added to the AISH program. Last Thursday the Premier and I announced additional benefits for pregnant women who are on income support and AISH. We're on top of that.

**Ms Renaud:** Given that the number of Albertans living in poverty is 400,000 and given that that number has increased significantly under this UCP government and given that the cost of everything is going up under these guys, from property taxes, to utilities, car insurance, school fees, tuition, and on and on and on, and given that this minister doesn't seem to have a clue and doesn't even know basic facts about the poverty problem, is the problem that he just doesn't care?

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, what the opposition doesn't have a clue on is that you have to create wealth first before you have money to take care of people. I'm proud that with this government we've got investment coming in. We maintained our core social safety net programs, and we increased the AISH budget. That speaks louder than political cheap shots. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Ms Renaud:** Given that Alberta's NDP called for AISH to be restored, given that we called for the seniors' benefit to be brought back, given that the mayors of countless cities and towns are seeking more funding to stem growing homelessness, and given that not one of these critical calls was addressed by this UCP budget, my question is this: what exactly was the minister doing during budget deliberations? Sleeping? Why won't he wake up and realize that children are going to school hungry and . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, we spent three hours answering every question from the opposition. I still don't know what question she's raising today. What we're doing is that not only do we provide the social safety net for Albertans by maintaining our core services; on top of that, we provide an additional \$34 million for employment support services. We've taken every first opportunity to empower Albertans who are vulnerable and get them to work so that they can reach their full potential.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a question.

### Energy Industry Update

**Mr. Gottfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Energy security matters, but receiving that energy from ethical sources should defy often rampant hypocrisy. Thankfully, Alberta is a global leader in environmental, social, and governance initiatives amongst energy producers. Unfortunately, it seems that many jurisdictions and even political leaders in our own country prefer to source their oil and gas from despotic regimes infamously renowned for authoritarian leadership and human rights abuses. To the Minister of Energy: what is our government doing to encourage our neighbours, friends, fellow Canadians, and U.S. allies to look for more ethical sources for their energy needs?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I just recently returned from a trip to Houston, Texas, to attend the CERA conference, where that was exactly the discussion in all the sessions and in the corridors, a discussion and a conversation about energy security, a conversation that's been missing in energy policy for a very long time. I was able to convey the clear message that Alberta can be the solution. We can be the solution in the short term and the long term. In the short term we can provide an additional 200,000 to 400,000 barrels a day of oil to the United States. In the longer term, with building more infrastructure, we can be the supplier of choice.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Thank you, Minister, through the Speaker, for your response. Given that energy revenues should go towards powering people's homes and lives, not funding wars and destroying them, and given that revenue generated through purchasing foreign oil supports numerous countries engaged in domestic human rights abuses and despicable military aggression against sovereign nations, to the minister: what is our government doing today to encourage domestic oil and gas production and consumption, directly creating jobs, generating wealth, and supporting social programs for all Canadians?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused steadfastly on increasing cross-border trade with the United States. That includes getting more conventional oil, more heavy oil, and more synthetic crude across the border to each and every market in the Midwest, on the west coast, on the Gulf coast. The Gulf coast: that takes a heavier blend; they're looking for Alberta oil. The only replacement for that is Venezuelan oil, Mexican oil. We have the supply in Alberta. We just have to be able to get it across the border, and that's what we're doing.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Gottfried:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given the unfortunate impact of geopolitical strife and supply chain disruption on North American energy supplies and global pricing and given the impact on economic stability and consumer affordability, particularly in fuels and utilities, once again to the Minister of Energy: as per your recent CERAWeek conference attendance and what I'm sure were conversations with government and industry leaders, do you see a renewed focus and conversation

on North American energy security and sustainability now and into the future?

2:30

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, energy security has entered clearly into the North American energy dialogue. The other message that we heard very clearly at CERAWeek is that governments need to start treating our oil and gas reserves as a strategic asset – a strategic asset – not a liability. Our energy production is something we should be proud of and support and not demonize, and that has gone on for too long in western democracies. As a result, it's shifted production and wealth and emissions over to places like Russia.

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

### Agriculture in 2022

**Ms Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, producers and ranchers have overcome a lot of challenges in the past year. The recent drought was one of the worst on record. The COVID-19 pandemic has sprung much uncertainty through the entire supply chain, which was also disrupted by the floods in B.C. and now the invasion of Ukraine. Farmers are recovering from the losses of the last year and are paying skyrocketing prices in fertilizer and feed. There is no need to put more cost pressures on producers right now; however, the UCP are increasing crop, hail, and livestock premiums by \$37 million. How can the UCP justify taking \$37 million away from farmers after they've done so much?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister of agriculture and forestry.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say that the member opposite is not wrong. It's been a heck of a year for our ag community. The drought has been terribly difficult for both farmers and cattle producers. What she doesn't know is that the changes to our insurance program reflect the need to replace the fund, and they also reflect the change in commodity prices. The compensation levels have increased greatly. This may be the most expensive crop ever put in the ground in the prairie provinces, but it'll also have the most upside for Canadian farmers.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm very aware of the commodity prices and given that the UCP has refused to do the work necessary to obtain the tens of millions of dollars available from the federal government through signing on to the interim deal for AgriStability even though producers overwhelmingly agreed on the need to sign it and given that some farmers don't have the upfront capital to purchase seed, fertilizer for this upcoming season, why in the world is the UCP jacking up premiums for farmers by tens of millions of dollars while leaving available federal money untouched? Why is the budget being balanced on the backs of farmers?

**Mr. Horner:** That's certainly not the case. We're very proud of the business risk management suite that's offered through the Canadian agricultural partnership, part of which is the AgriStability program. The AgriStability program has a very low uptake. Around 20 per cent of producers are enrolled in the program, and an even smaller amount are able to trigger the program. The consensus we have from the prairie provinces is that we need to make the program work better for more people before we throw more money at it, and if we

did throw more money at it, the money would come from another part of the suite. It would be taken from a program that . . .

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

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that fertilizer prices have already skyrocketed and that they could go up even more due to the sanctions towards Russia – many producers have already paid more than they were expecting for fertilizer, and some simply can't afford it – and given that Ukraine is the fifth-largest exporter of wheat in the world and there is uncertainty of what will happen to the wheat market and given that I recognize that those changes from the global conflict are out of control for the UCP but that jacking up premiums for the people who feed our province and our communities around the world isn't, will anyone on that side of the House who believes that farmers and ranchers deserve to be paid more . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

**Mr. Horner:** These insurance programs follow actuarial principles. That's how insurance programs work. We can't just bust out our crayons and make it what we want to make it. The fertilizer prices: we're lucky in western Canada. Two-thirds of the nitrogen-based fertilizers are made right here in Alberta. It's globally priced at the New Orleans port. It's a huge advantage to us. The fertilizer companies would come here and build more if it wasn't for the carbon tax that you and the federal NDP are propping up with the federal government. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### Child Care Funding

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, over \$3.8 billion in federal child care funding should mean that low-income Alberta families are seeing the greatest reduction in their child care fees – after all, the minister herself has said that these are the families most in need – yet a study by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care shows that low-income families are seeing the least benefit from the UCP's funding model. In Calgary fees for families making \$40,000 per year are only going down 13 per cent, far from the 50 per cent reduction that the UCP promised. Can the Minister of Children's Services answer why low-income families are such a low priority for her?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I just want to remind this House that that \$3.8 billion investment in child care over the next five years, fighting hard for a made-in-Alberta plan, is excellent news for parents right across this province. I do want to point out that one of the tenets of that plan, as put forward by the federal government, is to reduce child care fees for all families. Instead of picking and choosing certain centres or parents who got to be part of that plan, unlike the members opposite, we aimed to not only reduce fees for all parents by 50 per cent but then add additional subsidy for low- and middle-income families.

**Ms Pancholi:** Given that low-income families paid zero dollars per month under our plan and given that, in fact, child care operators and parents are reporting to the ministry that some low-income families are actually paying more for child care fees than they were before, like the parent in Bonnyville paying \$30 more per month and the parents in Jasper and Edmonton paying \$150 more per month than they were before, and given that during estimates the

minister said that these claims were "misinformation" and accused the opposition of playing politics for asking about it, yet during that same meeting several child care providers e-mailed me to say that they've raised these very concerns with the ministry and received no response, perhaps the minister would like to respond to these parents now to explain why they're paying more for child care.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I did encourage the member opposite to put politics aside and raise issues when they come to her office because we are happy to help. My officials did confirm that we have not yet found an example where a family is paying more. Sometimes that's because when you roll out a new program, there are some things to work out on the back end, and we happily help operators to make sure that this works with parents.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about this rollout. Please let me quote from one parent named Jacqueline, which I'm going to have to do in my next response.

**Ms Pancholi:** Sounds like the minister has some e-mails to check.

Given that Albertans across the province are deeply concerned about the rising costs of living, their ability to make ends meet, and given that low-income Albertans are feeling the impacts of increasing utility costs, insurance costs, and so much more under the UCP and given that it's clear that the UCP is not prioritizing affordability for Albertans, particularly not low-income Albertans, since the minister doesn't seem to even believe these families or child care operators, can she provide advice to them on what they should cut to afford their increase in child care fees? Groceries, heat, transportation to and from work: which is it, Minister?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, I did ask her to pass on the names of those parents and those operators so that we could look into it – we've reached out to the ministry to ask them to look and make sure that we have contacted at least all of these operators who have reached out to us – but she hasn't reached out to me yet. I do encourage her to do that. We are reducing fees, on average, by half for parents right across this province, with many low-income families already paying far lower than \$10 a day and, in fact, many vulnerable teen parents also accessing child care for zero dollars a day.

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

### Utility and Fuel Costs

**Mr. Milliken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have endured a tough couple of years. COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have taken a toll on our daily lives. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has caused fuel prices to soar in recent weeks. The rising costs of necessities like food and fuel have put economic pressure on individuals and families across the province. I hear about gas prices in Calgary-Currie all the time now. To the Minister of Energy: what measures are being implemented to reduce the price Albertans are paying at the pump?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. Savage:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last week the Minister of Finance announced that as of April 1 we will stop collecting the provincial fuel tax, and that will drop the price of gasoline and diesel by 13.6

cents per litre. Stopping the collection of that provincial fuel tax keeps more money in the pockets of Albertans. This is especially important at a time when costs for everyday goods are going up. The one thing that could be added to that, that would improve the affordability of fuel, is reducing the federal carbon tax that's going up to 50 bucks and then \$170. That's got to be . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Milliken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of electricity has continued to rise in recent months, mainly due to the failed policies of previous provincial governments, and given that our UCP government is taking action to provide relief on electricity prices, to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: what measures are being implemented to help Albertans who have faced and continue to face high utility bills?

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. The number one issue on Albertans' minds right now is the cost of living. Despite that, the NDP Energy critic can't even tell us the cost of energy in this province. You know, the NDP brought this same attention to detail with them when they came to government in 2015. It's why they spent \$7.5 billion on infrastructure when our economy couldn't support it. It's the same reason they cost Albertans a billion dollars, because they forgot to read the fine print on the PPAs. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Milliken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the provincial UCP relief measures, like help at the gas pumps and the electricity rebate, are helping Albertans through a tough time when almost everything seems to be getting more expensive and further given that the factors driving up prices are external or baked in by past governments and, of course, the Trudeau Liberals and their job-killing carbon tax, to the same associate minister: to the best of your knowledge, how long can Albertans expect the UCP relief measures to be in place?

**The Speaker:** The associate minister.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. You know, we're frustrated, obviously, by the higher cost of electricity, which is why we are providing all Albertans, small businesses, farms with a \$150 rebate to provide relief on their electricity. We've put in a similar program for natural gas to prevent Albertans from having to suffer through a European-style energy crisis. We will continue to do everything that we can to keep the NDP away from the electricity grid because that is the number one thing that we can do to keep prices down. We will modernize the grid, and we will NDP-proof the grid. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

## Members' Statements

(continued)

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

## Calgary Beltline Area Protests

**Member Ceci:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have the right to protest. They also have the right to live free from intimidation. They have the right to be able to get to and from their home safely. They have the right to run their businesses and for their customers to access those businesses. They have the right to drive on streets and walk on sidewalks. Over the past several months – months – thousands of my constituents have lost those rights. The protests in Calgary's Beltline area have gotten out of hand. They are being conducted without permits and, seemingly, without a cause. We need real leadership to resolve this matter.

The UCP Minister of Justice brushed off questions about these protests over the weekend. He deferred the matter back to the city of Calgary. That's really cute – isn't it? – coming from this government, the same government that is actively stripping away powers from municipalities when it suits their political need. Now they dump the responsibility back on to municipalities when they don't have the backbone to stand up and do what's right. This is shameful leadership. It's incompetent, and it's indicative of a government that only cares about themselves, a government being led by a Premier that only makes decisions these days to appease those attending his April 9 leadership vote.

The vast majority of my constituents clearly don't support this Premier, but that doesn't mean their concerns aren't equally valid. Mr. Speaker, 17th Avenue S.W. is the boundary between Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-Elbow. I'm here today calling on this government to get involved in restoring some law and order to Calgary's Beltline, and for the MLA for Calgary-Elbow to also get involved. The situation is out of control. This UCP absentee government is part of the problem. They need to step up, do their jobs, and be part of the solution.

Thank you.

## Federal Emergencies Act

**Mr. van Dijken:** Mr. Speaker, the invasion and war on Ukraine is highly despotic. Nations around the globe are condemning the actions taken by Russia and are standing in solidarity with Ukraine. I am proud of our nation and province for supporting and standing with Ukraine. Our Prime Minister has specifically spoken against the antidemocratic actions of Russia. He's quoted in Global News saying, "Democracy is always stronger than authoritarianism." I would agree, but it is the Prime Minister's own actions, with the invocation of the Emergencies Act on peaceful protesters just four weeks ago, that highlight the hypocrisy in his claim.

The authoritarian way Prime Minister Trudeau acted to deal with a parking problem in our nation's capital shows how out of touch he is with the statements he claims to believe. If our Prime Minister is going to speak of democracy, he must practise what he preaches on all levels in every circumstance. Democracy must be unwavering. We must be consistent in our support of individual rights and freedoms. Ideals and principles of democracy should remain strong no matter the gravity of the situation.

The parking problem in Ottawa did not require the extreme powers granted through the Emergencies Act and sets a bad precedent going forward. Justin Trudeau exercised extreme authoritarian powers and overreach through enforcing the Emergencies Act onto the citizens of Canada. Instead of working with Canadians, ensuring that they were heard, the Prime Minister verbally attacked protesters with name-calling and doubled down by invoking the Emergencies Act. These are not actions of a leader who supports democracy.

Mr. Speaker, for Justin Trudeau to defend democracy around the globe, he must be upholding democracy in our own nation without

hypocrisy. I will always stand in defence of democracy and believe leaders must be firm in their stance and in their actions to support individual rights and freedoms within the countries they lead and around the globe.

### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The Leader of the Opposition.

#### Bill 201 Eastern Slopes Protection Act

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce the bill, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

Albertans are overwhelmingly opposed to coal mining in the eastern slopes. The government's own coal committee, coal report, and public consultation concluded what Albertans knew already. An unprecedented number of Indigenous leaders, municipal leaders, ranchers, environmentalists, country music stars, and just a vast majority of Albertans overall have said: do not mine the eastern slopes. Don't lop off their tops, don't strip-mine them, don't threaten our sensitive and increasingly scarce waters with selenium and other contaminants.

Albertans said this when the UCP first rescinded the 1976 coal policy and again last spring when I first introduced this act, and they've been consistent. Now, the Minister of Energy will say that she's listened to Albertans and put an order in place, but this order can be rescinded without notice to Albertans and without consultation. It also allows several new mining projects to advance. Albertans want more than this minister saying, "Trust me," Mr. Speaker; they want a guarantee of transparent legislative oversight. This bill will protect sensitive lands. It will uphold Indigenous treaty rights, it will cancel all coal exploration, it will ban coal mining in categories 1 and 2, and it will prohibit in 3 and 4. It is my sincere hope . . .

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, as I did on two occasions last week for the government and reminded them that first reading of an introduction of a bill is not debatable, I would suggest that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is making lots of statements of opinion, not describing what the bill may or may not do. I encourage her to expediate this introduction as I like to play it fair for both sides of the Assembly.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will simply conclude by saying that it is my sincere hope that if the Minister of Energy and the UCP are truly listening, if their plans really are to protect our Rocky Mountains, then they should embrace the chance to say so through legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The Leader of the Official Opposition has risen.

2:50

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is identical to Bill 214 from the previous session and has already been through the committee process and

approved, I ask for the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 74.11 and for Bill 201 therefore to proceed immediately to second reading. May I speak briefly to this request? Oh.

[Unanimous consent denied]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of an article I referenced in debate, which highlights that on top of the high utility bills, the bracket creep, the insurance taxes, the COVID ridership drop, and no support from the province, now high fuel prices in Alberta are forcing reduction in intercity bus service and increasing ticket prices and threatening the survival of rural bus lines.

### 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. Shandro, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, the Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2020-21; pursuant to the Statutes Repeal Act the 2022 list of legislation.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College & Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2020-21 and the Alberta College of Paramedics annual report 2020-21.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

### Orders of the Day

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 8(1.1) provides for the Assembly to proceed to Motions Other than Government Motions earlier than 5 p.m. if no other items of private members' business remain on the Order Paper for that day. If the motion is called early, the Assembly proceeds to government business after the vote on the motion unless the Assembly agrees to proceed to the next motion in accordance with Standing Order 8(1.2).

### Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie – I'm sorry. Were you rising?

**Mr. Schow:** No, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

### Antimalarial Treatments

502. Mr. Guthrie moved:

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

- (a) support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, sold under the brand name Lariam;
- (b) work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments; and
- (c) express support for Canadian veterans suffering with the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder resulting from the use of mefloquine.



**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, because it's important that we use accurate terminology, I've worked with a colleague to put forward an amendment to this motion to make a correction. I'm hoping for a little bit of patience here from my fellow members to establish this change, and then I'll save my speech until after that member has introduced the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for bringing forward this important motion today, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to it in urging our government to press the federal government to stop administering the use of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, also known as Lariam, to the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Speaker, quinolines are neurotoxic drugs, including mefloquine, and mefloquine first started being prescribed to the Canadian Armed Forces in 1992. Service members did not have a choice in taking this drug as they did not know the side effects that it would cause, and at the time it did not seem that anyone did. Mefloquine seemed more efficient at the time and cheaper to its counterparts since it only had to be taken once a week compared to every day.

Mr. Speaker, soldiers were being deployed to areas that were high risk for malaria, and of course malaria is a serious parasite-caused disease. The parasite spreads between humans via mosquitoes, and of course it's simple when a mosquito can move the parasite from one person to another quite easily. Malaria symptoms usually take anywhere between seven to 30 days to appear, but in some cases it can take up to an entire year for someone to start showing signs. Symptoms are a flu-like illness, high fever, shaking, chills. Those who contract malaria usually become very, very sick, and it can even be fatal.

Mr. Speaker, we can see the need for an antimalaria drug to keep our soldiers as safe as possible and prevent them from contracting malaria. However, with the benefit of time we now know that mefloquine has proven not to be the answer, that it can cause a debilitating neurological disease known as quinism.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to propose the following amendment. Do you want me to read it now?

**The Speaker:** If you can just help us by passing it through to the page, then they can deliver it, and then after I get a copy, if you'll proceed. I've paused the timer for you.

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

Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, you have eight minutes remaining.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 be amended in clause (c) by striking out "posttraumatic stress disorder" and substituting "quinism."

I'll continue on. Neuropsychiatric quinism, or just quinism, is a lasting disorder that results from chronic encephalopathy and brain stem dysfunction caused by quinoline toxicity of the central nervous system. This is caused by quinoline drugs, including quinacrine, chloroquine, and mefloquine. Some of the quinism side effects include dizziness, vertigo, visual disorders, lasting tinnitus. Additional side effects include hallucinations and nightmares, aggressive behaviour, anxiety, paranoia, insomnia, psychotic behaviour, debilitating cognitive dysfunction, and thoughts of suicide.

Among military veterans, many of whom were prescribed quinoline antimalarials during combat deployments, the lasting symptoms of neuropsychiatric quinism are often mistaken for those of posttraumatic stress disorder. Many of these veterans are being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder when, in fact, it is quinism, which could have been avoided had they not been prescribed mefloquine.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers and our veterans have put their lives on the line and have done so much to serve our country. The last thing we want is for them to suffer the horrifying side effects of a drug that we are prescribing them. Since malaria is a very serious, potentially life-threatening disease, the use of a medication to prevent it is critical, and our government needs to work with the federal government as well as other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments. We need to stop giving our soldiers this drug.

While many may think that the chances of having serious side effects from the prescribed drugs are rare, Mr. Speaker, and that there are many other drugs that also have side effects on the label that most consumers don't experience, we need to recognize that the military, the Armed Forces, is a unique population in a unique situation. They are put into vulnerable environments that could increase their risk factor, predisposing them to the side effects of mefloquine. In fact, more recent research confirms that nearly 1 in 7 of those who have been exposed to mefloquine experience nightmares or other abnormal dreams, and further more than 1 in 5 of those who complain of nightmares report that the symptom has lasted more than three years.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I'd like to share the devastating story of a former Canadian soldier who had suffered immensely from the effects of quinism. Richard Schumann said that ever since he was a little boy, it was his dream to join the military. While learning more about mefloquine, I came across Richard's story. In 2005 Schumann was on a mission in Afghanistan and was ordered to take mefloquine. Almost as soon as he began, side effects from the drug caused him to have terrifyingly vivid dreams. In one of these instances Schumann was dreaming that he was attempting suicide. Well, little did he know, he was acting out his dream in real life. Thankfully, Schumann's fire team partner, who was close by, had heard the sound of Schumann cocking his firearm in time to wake him up and stop him. There he was with a round chambered and on the edge of his bed with his gun, potentially ready to take his own life, all while dreaming. Richard Schumann goes on to say that it wasn't the Taliban that was going to kill him. Rather, he almost killed himself, and he attributes this to the drug that the government forced him to take.

This is not right. This is unfair and wrong. These veterans did not choose to have these side effects. They did not choose to have to deal with the consequences for the rest of their life of being forced to take an antimalaria drug. Mr. Speaker, not only does the federal government need to put an end to the administering of mefloquine and find a better solution to protect our soldiers against malaria; they need to provide support to our veterans who have health issues, who have been dealing with these serious side effects relating to mefloquine.

3:00

In the United States Veterans Affairs accepts the link between quinism and mefloquine. Veterans in the United States are being treated on a case-by-case basis. In Canada Veterans Affairs has not even accepted that quinism is caused by mefloquine. Mr. Speaker, our veterans deserve better.

Just last week we debated Motion 501. We heard the devastating stories of consequences that dangerous and illegal drugs can cause.

Just as we need to keep in mind the possible dangerous outcomes that other such drugs, even prescribed, can cause as well, we need to keep in mind the serious side effects that these drugs can cause, especially in the case of mefloquine. These consequences and side effects prevent the victim from being able to live a normal life.

Mr. Speaker, I hope, with the support of this House, to see action taken from our government to pursue and pressure the federal government to stop giving mefloquine to our soldiers, to provide support for those suffering from quinism, and do all we can to keep our Canadian Armed Forces safe. They deserve it.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, as the member moved an amendment, it's reasonable to allow the mover of the motion to reply. I will go to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, followed by a member of the opposition should they choose to provide some additional comment.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to the amendment on Motion 502. We wanted to be precise with the wording, so thank you for the procedural understanding. I'd like to also thank members of the House and all Canadian Forces members who have served Canada in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994, at the age of 17, a young man named Shaun Arntsen joined the Canadian military, ready to do whatever it took to protect our country. It's incredibly admirable for anyone to join the forces and to do it knowing full well that one day they may pay the ultimate price. Shaun and many other soldiers did this for love, honour, and respect of Canada. In February 2002, after eight years of service, Shaun was deployed to Afghanistan, where, upon arrival, he and his fellow soldiers were directed to take a weekly dose of an antimalarial drug called mefloquine.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There were no warnings about the drug or its side effects. He was ordered to take it, and he did. There was no option. It was mandatory, but like many he served with, they trusted that the drug was safe, and as he would tell you, they had much more urgent and fierce things to worry about serving in a war zone with an enemy trying to kill you. An antimalarial drug was the last of his worries.

That said, the effects of the drug were immediate. It began with insomnia. If you did sleep: vivid night terrors, anxiety, and mood swings. But, for Shaun, were these the effects of mefloquine or the intense conditions in which he was living? From his perspective at the time, it was hard to know what to attribute these symptoms to. Other soldiers were experiencing similar things, some much worse, including paranoia, hallucinations, panic attacks, and suicidal thoughts.

Shaun left the Canadian Forces after serving 10 years. He took 33 doses of mefloquine, and his life, and many others before and after him, was changed forever. You see, Mr. Speaker, Canadian soldiers were used as part of a clinical trial. Mefloquine's first use by CAF, Canadian Armed Forces, was by troops deployed in Somalia in 1992, where industrial quantities of the drug mefloquine were supplied. Unfortunately, CAF did not participate in the safe monitoring study since guidelines were not compatible with operational requirements, the benefit for the east African and future operations being that the drug was prescribed once per week, which was preferred to the daily dose treatment available at the time.

Canadian Forces members were compelled to take the prescription to protect against malaria, but it was administered without documenting the informed consent of their soldiers and without systematic monitoring of the side effects. It was clear to

many that the behaviour of some military personnel was suspicious, and questions about its relationship to mefloquine were raised. That said, in 1993, under the brand name Lariam, the product was approved by Health Canada for general public use. Since then various medical practitioners have warned of the side effects, and research began into the consequences of its consumption.

In June of 2019 Chair Neil Ellis released a report from the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled *Effects of Mefloquine Use among Canadian Veterans*. In that report renowned expert Dr. Remington Nevin provided a diagnosis of mefloquine toxicity syndrome, renamed quinism, to establish a term for the adverse effects of the drug. His work is the first to recognize the long-term detrimental impact of mefloquine, but many others have since followed in this field of research.

Dr. Nevin has raised concerns about outcomes such as depression, tinnitus, dizziness, and vertigo, and these may continue for months, years, and even permanent damage as a result of mefloquine's use. He states that a patient must discontinue use if signs of anxiety, depression, or confusion occur and that Lariam's continued use could potentially lead to more serious events such as the development of psychiatric and neurologic symptoms leading to potential long-term disability.

In 2013 the U.S. army banned mefloquine for use by its special forces. In autumn of 2016 the U.K. military followed suit, as did Australia after a parliamentary inquiry revealed that mefloquine can cause permanent side effects and brain damage. From that Australian inquiry, recommendations were made, with 14 ailments outlined to have a connection to soldiers and their medical conditions, including cataracts, anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, seizures, heart block, hearing loss, schizophrenia, suicide, and many other severe responses. Still, the side effects are downplayed, but fortunately the drug's use has decreased significantly because of its reputation.

In 2017 the Canadian Armed Forces stated that mefloquine will now only be recommended for use if a CAF member requests it. Now, the reduction of this prescription is a very good development, but it doesn't deal with 25 years of mefloquine's ordered use by Canadian troops. In the United States personnel are treated and compensated on a case-by-case basis, but in Canada the government has not directly addressed issues associated with mefloquine. In fact, they avoid mentioning the drug by name. The chief medical officer at Veterans Affairs Canada stated that compensation is not based on cause but based on a diagnosed medical condition. It was stated that to receive a disability award, all veterans require is a record of having been deployed and a confirmed diagnosis by their treating physician. The problem is that damages are not well studied nor well known to physicians.

Additionally, those that suffer may suffer alone, and if they are diagnosed, they are typically misdiagnosed with PTSD and receive treatment that has no benefit to them since quinism affects the brain in a completely different fashion. To be effective, sufferers require appropriate supports that are designed specifically to deal with their symptoms. The purpose of this motion is to increase awareness but also for government to recognize mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, as a valid injury and to support research into its adverse effects and to find suitable treatments. As recommended in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs report, a systematic screening program for military personnel and veterans who may be experiencing the long-term effects of mefloquine toxicity should be conducted and, in my opinion, done so by these established experts.

Unfortunately, Canadian veterans are not feeling the love. In 2018 a class action suit was dismissed for delay. Since then a mass tort was initiated by CAF members and veterans so that veterans could claim damages against the Canadian government to get the required help that they need. Since then I understand that the federal

government launched proceedings against the mefloquine manufacturer yet at the same time, wishing to absolve themselves of their responsibility, brought forward a motion to stay this mass tort. Madam Speaker, if veterans are not going to get the support from the Trudeau government, then Alberta should begin an advocacy campaign to show our dedication to those who served and still serve and to recognize quinism as a neurological disorder requiring our aid for treatment research.

3:10

Right here in Alberta, Madam Speaker, we have expertise. We have a renowned physician at the University of Alberta working with this very issue. Dr. Keith Zukiwski has 20 years of experience in quantitative EEG brain mapping, and he is currently accepting veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces to help determine the cause of their symptoms. With various types of brain-focused treatments such as neurofeedback Dr. Zukiwski and others look to target areas of the brain to improve and normalize function with the goal of reducing or eliminating debilitating symptoms. It would be wonderful if our government could support this research.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to bring forward this important motion, and I look forward to hearing from my colleagues to advance this debate with the ultimate goal of helping our constituents and all Canadian veterans who gave so much to us in the line of duty.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Standing ovation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to also begin by expressing my appreciation to the members of the Armed Forces who are here today as well as everyone who serves our country so nobly. Also, I want to thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane as well as the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing forward both the motion as well as the amendment for our consideration here today. I really love days where we can give each other advanced notice and come together. This is something that our side of the House is very excited to come together, working with the government private members who brought this work forward today.

I want to say that any time we have an opportunity to stand in support of the folks who support us each and every day as Canadians, I think, is a good day. I regularly reflect upon the service of two of my grandparents many years prior to my birth and how when people enlist and they are part of serving their country, they need to be able to trust that those who are in positions to make decisions on their behalf are taking the best information into consideration. They need to be able to trust, whether that's somebody who's sending them into a battle or somebody who's prescribing medication for them. I can't state enough how grateful I am to the members of our Armed Forces who've made and continue to make significant sacrifices for our country to protect the lives of people throughout the world. We are grateful, and we know that for many these acts of service can frequently have long-term, lasting impacts, including quinism and PTSD.

On this side of the House we believe it's important to support and address mental health issues. I'm sure that the members who brought this forward today do as well. We've consistently called for increased access to mental health supports for all Albertans, and we want those to be made available cost free. In 2016 a member of our caucus, my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs, introduced and we passed the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Day bill, which I think was a step in the right direction.

I think today is a further step in the right direction. The Canadian Forces' rates of PTSD have doubled in just the course of 10 years, and I think it's important that we talk about the causes of these impacts, including causes that many researchers have shown can be correlated to medications that have been prescribed to those who've enlisted. Doing so will assist in developing treatment for those who've been negatively impacted and who are living with quinism, I believe, and conversations like the debate we're having today, I think, are one very small piece.

I really appreciate that the motion sort of has three parts. The first one, of course, is supporting research into the adverse effects; the second one is calling on partners to do something about it; and the third one is specifically, as amended, the naming of quinism. Thank you to my colleagues for doing that and for parceling it in sort of three very clear ways. When we talk about neurological diseases and disorders and mental health issues, we normalize these discussions and it works to remove stigma for all, a stigma that through the work of advocates and survivors and so many who are living with these illnesses, I think, gives us a better understanding as a society. So this motion, I believe, will assist with that as well as members in the Armed Forces who've been personally impacted by quinism, of course, to see themselves reflected in this Chamber.

The loved ones will know that we as representatives of Albertans, we as members of this Assembly are listening, that it is a big part of our job to be able to reach across the aisle and find opportunities for common ground to hear the concerns and to find ways as elected representatives to work to represent all. Again, my gratitude to the individuals who are present here today, those who are enlisting at home and abroad, of course, and to the member for using this time. It's not every private member who gets an opportunity to bring forward a motion or a bill. There's literally a lottery, and only a few of us ever have an opportunity to do it. I want to thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for choosing an issue that I think we can all get onside with and be able to do something to make a difference for Albertans who've enlisted.

Thank you so much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other speakers on the motion on the amendment?

Seeing none, let's vote on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my friend the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for introducing this important motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for proposing the amendment we just voted on. Malaria is a potentially life-threatening and parasitic disease present in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world, and it's a real risk to individuals that travel to endemic areas. Preventing malaria relies on a number of tactics, including utilizing repellent and nets to avoid being bitten by infected mosquitoes and taking malaria medication to eliminate parasites that enter the body through bites.

Mefloquine was first created in the early 1970s by researchers affiliated with the United States military's Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and was popularly marketed under the brand Lariam. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces that were deployed to regions with high malaria infections between 1992 and 2002 were given mefloquine. This controversial medication has now been shown to potentially cause serious side effects, including anxiety, depression, hallucinations, paranoia as well as nervous system issues like vertigo, seizures, tinnitus, and insomnia. Also known as neuropsychiatric quinism, mefloquine-related chronic

symptoms may mimic several psychiatric and neurological disorders, including PTSD.

Decades ago early precicensed studies on mefloquine were conducted predominantly among male prisoners, military personnel, and in third-world country populations. Although vertigo and nausea were commonly reported in these early trials, at the time the drug was presented as free of severe psychiatric side effects. Since mefloquine was viewed as a miracle drug at its discovery, initial reports of severe psychiatric symptoms, including amnesia, confusion, and psychosis, were frequently dismissed as coincidental. Later on these symptoms would be blamed on the stresses of overseas travel, recreational drug use, or pre-existing mental illness.

Despite continued reports of severe psychiatric side effects, it was only in 2001 that mefloquine's psychotropic effects became more widely known. In addition, later trials showed that specific neuropsychiatric symptoms such as nightmares, anxiety, and psychosis during use are at least 100 times more common than previously reported. More recently reports of suicide, suicide ideation, and acts of violence tied to the drug's use have heightened concerns.

In October 2016 many veterans made complaints to the Canadian government, stating that they believed they were suffering from health problems related to mefloquine, that they were required to take during missions. Despite these complaints and concerns, the Canadian Forces continued to offer mefloquine as the first option for specific deployments until a Surgeon General Task Force report was released in 2017. It is worth noting that mefloquine was not pulled from the Armed Forces' malaria prevention; instead, it is viewed as a less preferred agent.

Madam Speaker, learning about the risk factors of medications years after initial usage is unfortunately not a novel phenomenon, but since the task force's report many studies have examined the long-term effects of mefloquine in veterans who took the drug. Even though the studies have had mixed results, most of them have highlighted the need for additional research. Aside from further research into mefloquine, now more than ever before, there was a need for supporting Canadian veterans suffering from the effects of quinism.

Additionally, there is a considerable need to explore whether mefloquine-induced quinism has contributed to veterans' PTSD diagnoses. Misdiagnosis of mefloquine toxicity as PTSD without considering the potential confounding effects could result in long-term treatment mismanagement of affected individuals, potentially worsening their symptoms rather than relieving them. We owe it to our veterans to provide them with answers and appropriate additional supports. As their mental health continues to suffer, so does every other part of their lives, and so many of them have lost so much after sacrificing so much for us and our country.

3:20

Madam Speaker, the men and women who enlist to serve our country do receive excellent training, but veterans continue to face considerable challenges transitioning back to life at home, including financial, vocational, emotional, physical, and psychological hardships. Failure to adequately recognize these challenges, including the potential for quinism to cause or exacerbate them, is a disservice to those that served. Many veterans who took mefloquine as part of their mandatory deployment medication feel as though they have been abused, ignored, and abandoned. Unfortunately, their concerns about the drug's long-lasting effects have often been dismissed as trauma-caused issues. In cases where neurological symptoms are present and mefloquine exposure can be confirmed, a correct diagnosis of mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, is critical to determining the most appropriate

and effective treatment. In addition, it is possible to identify symptoms associated with mefloquine toxicity that are not usually present in other common psychological or neurological syndromes experienced by military personnel.

This is why we must work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments. This joint effort needs to ensure that any medications offered are genuinely well tolerated by healthy people and further must determine tolerability under actual conditions of use. Mefloquine was created and approved by the FDA at a time when there was an urgent and immediate need for new antimalarial drugs. Now decades have passed, and this drug, that can cause issues with as little as one dose, continues to be on the market. Medications should help, not harm, so developing and adopting truly safe antimalarial treatments is necessary.

Madam Speaker, in my view, how the situation has been handled and how our veterans have been treated is unacceptable. I would like to again thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for raising this important issue and for putting forward this motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for proposing the amendment we just voted on. I hope that all members of this House will support the amendment and the motion's three important calls to action: to support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, for the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments, and to collectively express our support for Canadian veterans suffering from the effects of quinism resulting from the use of mefloquine.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members to speak to Motion 502 as amended? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for the motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for the amendment. As citizens of Canada we are lucky to live in a place where climatic factors, including rainfall, temperature, and humidity patterns, do not support the anopheles mosquito, which spreads malaria. In Canada, where the average year-round temperature is below 20 degrees, the Plasmodium falciparum parasite causing severe malaria is unable to survive.

We have also been lucky to develop different medications, thanks to innovations in the pharmaceutical sector, to combat this horrible sickness globally, one of them being mefloquine. Just like we trusted science to create this medication, we must follow science in understanding each aspect of mefloquine, both good and bad. Mefloquine is a synthetic derivative of quinoline, which science has proven to be a highly effective drug against the malaria parasite. For that, we are grateful.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, there is more to this story. Mefloquine is a pharmacological name of an ingredient in a medication pharmaceutically known as Lariam. This medication was trialed in 1975 as the need became apparent that a new malarial drug would be needed in the aftermath of the antimalarial therapy chloroquine becoming less effective against the parasite in such areas as sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. With the waning effectiveness of chloroquine, Lariam stepped up to the plate and was used both within prophylactic capacity and treatment during infection.

However, while this drug proved effective in many senses, it had some serious side effects. One of these detrimental effects, widely noted since the mid-1990s, was its ability to cause neurotoxicity,

highlighted by several observed neuropsychiatric events postuse. Such events have been identified by prominent health institutions, one being the WHO's Uppsala Monitoring Centre, an independent drug safety monitoring organization. In addition to this, well-known health institutions such as the FDA and the previously known Committee on Safety of Medicines, now better known as the Commission on Human Medicines, have issued warnings to their doctors to caution their patients about such neuropsychiatric events. But that is not where the buck stops, Madam Speaker. Several studies indicate that mefloquine toxicity, or what's commonly known as quinism, results in a flurry of additional side effects ranging from insomnia, anxiety, depression, vertigo, visual impairment, among a long list.

However, the big question is: why are we relaying all this information here today? Well, first and foremost, the FDA has acknowledged symptoms of vertigo, dizziness, to be directly caused by mefloquine. The FDA also requires documentation of medication, including mefloquine, to state that such symptoms may continue for several years and may be permanent. In addition, symptoms like anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, or depression may render long-term psychotic behaviour continuing for months and years.

Secondly but most importantly, Madam Speaker, our brethren in the uniform, our veterans, have reported suffering from such side effects from mefloquine, which they were ordered to take during their deployment to malaria-affected states. In an article titled *Treated Like Lab Rats: Malaria Drug's Dark Side Effects Haunt Canadian Vets*, the CBC documents that several of our soldiers, including one veteran named Greg Janes, stated that they were not told the side effects of the medication. Janes even referred to the weekly dosage of mefloquine on Tuesdays as psycho Tuesday due to the sheer severity of the side effects. The Canadian Auditor General condemned Lariam's prescription containing mefloquine at the time as an abuse of protocol. Our soldiers were forced to take this medication for Somalia in 1992 and 1993 and did so with Lariam, still unlicensed in Canada.

Madam Speaker, this speech is more than just standing with our medically affected vets who put their lives on the line to defend our country; it's a call to action for the Canadian government and the Canadian Armed Forces to partake in a thorough vetting of this medication. The Surgeon General Task Force inquiry report on mefloquine stunningly falls short of evidence-based analysis. In that report it is concluded that no evidence was found to support a causal link of the neurological impacts of mefloquine on long-term medical health. However, the same report also identifies applying strict exclusion criteria to the studies it considers. In fact, the report states that the studies from which they derive their analysis and conclusions are of "low to very low quality." How is anybody expected to take the conclusions drawn from such a report as an objective standard with which key decisions regarding the health of our soldiers are to be made? We can do better, and we must do better.

This is all to say, Madam Speaker, that I cannot sit by silently on the sidelines when I know full well that some of our brethren in uniform are in pain and torment. Greg Janes, who I had earlier referred to, indicated that even more than 23 years later some of his fellow soldiers, including himself, still suffer from nightmares, irritability, and insomnia. Military soldiers are already at the forefront of facing all types of horrific scenarios, placing them at a higher risk of experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder and quinism. Several of Greg Janes' colleagues, himself included, have reported suffering from quinism. Several veterans subject to mefloquine treatment deployed in other areas of the world such as

Rwanda and Afghanistan are undergoing the same unfortunate predicament.

Over the recent years more details of the damaging effects of mefloquine have started to emerge. Now the CDC acknowledges that mefloquine can confound the management and diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder. Health Canada even goes as far as to advise people with schizophrenia, general anxiety, psychosis, and depression to avoid mefloquine.

3:30

As an elected leader I want to take this moment to speak directly to the veterans. Dear veterans, I acknowledge your pain and express my heartfelt sympathy to all you brave men and women. I stand here today and call for both the federal and provincial governments to issue a more in-depth inquiry in the meantime, substituting mefloquine as an antimalarial and providing suitable alternatives.

To all the members of the House, I urge you to support this amendment and motion. We need transparency, informed consent, and extensive drug testing to better protect our soldiers and veterans, who protect our freedoms in this great country.

I yield the floor back to you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to members on both sides speaking to this wonderful motion put forward today. It's with a heavy heart, I know, that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane brought this forward. Again, as one of the other members mentioned, as a private member to get a motion is kind of a big deal. You know, some folks hunt. It's like getting that moose draw that you've had to wait around for a while. The fact that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane brought this forward is quite admirable. He's a man of his word, a man who made a commitment a while ago, when we first went to this thing – it actually was the first event.

It was the first event that came across my desk when I was newly elected, to attend an event called Walk for Veterans. It was Chance Burles that was at the top of the letterhead. It was the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont and myself and one of the parliamentary members. Dane Lloyd is his name. I think I can say that in here. We were the only ones that attended this event. It was kind of neat to go there and talk to folks. A gentleman by the name of Mr. Kennedy was one of my constituents. It was at that point that myself and I believe my colleagues really heard about the mefloquine injuries, the things that had taken place, quite frankly, the sheer horror stories that this caused.

You know, they put so much on the line, our members that join to serve. They give up rights and freedoms that most citizens don't realize that they have. Quite frankly, to be treated like this is reprehensible. The fact that they go through – they walk through hell in a number of circumstances to do the right thing so that we can enjoy the rights and freedoms we have. It was something. I really appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane getting his one shot as a motion. It took us three years to get here. Hats off to you, sir, for doing that.

I'm going to read the motion just to make sure that everyone at home knows that I can read, number one, and, number two, so that I'm not rambling too much. I am getting to that age where I need to have my reading spectacles on, Madam Speaker, so please don't laugh, because I feel awkward enough as it is most days.

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

- (a) support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, sold under the brand name Lariam;

- (b) work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments; and
- (c) express support for Canadian veterans suffering with the effects of [quinism] resulting from the use of mefloquine.

With that, let's talk about some of the things that these poor folks had to undergo. Again, it was issued. They didn't really have a choice in this. A bunch of other countries now have pulled it off the shelves. They don't issue it to their soldiers anymore. They've recognized the issues and the damages. Our country has yet to do this, hence the reason why we need to encourage that and, as Alberta, to step forward once again to lead the charge on that.

Here from *W5* – and I'm not going to get into all the technical data, because other folks have done that way more eloquently than I have, but let's just talk about real people and real things – are some of the feelings that were expressed by some of the soldiers: that they had been poisoned, that the government had poisoned a generation of their own soldiers. They believed that it led to extreme rage, left their lives in shambles. There are 900 Canadian vets who have signed up for legal action on this for a drug that nearly killed them. They felt like guinea pigs.

Soldiers had nicknames for the days of the week when they were administered this. We were told by some of the folks at that Walk for Veterans that typically they weren't deployed on the same day. They were given a couple of days after they had had their treatment. When you have days that are called, like, Manic Monday, Terror Tuesday, Wacky Wednesday, and Fearful Friday, it's not laughable. These folks were experiencing dreams so violent and haunting that it caused troops to lash out, night terrors, rage, paranoia, psychosis, searing stomach pains. They were never told by their superiors of the side effects. They didn't know that these could have long-lasting harms that would follow them around.

This came out in 1984, and it's been issued to our troops since '91. Dr. Remington Nevin is a world expert on mefloquine toxicity from Johns Hopkins University. He calls it the horror movie pill. Let's let that sink in. A medical professional with that type of background is literally talking about the effects that it has on people as a horror movie pill.

Roméo Dallaire is the highest ranking soldier to sign on to this with legal action. He felt memory loss, stomach cramps. It impacted and affected his operational ability. Our government so far – our Canadian government, that is – isn't stepping up, quite frankly, Madam Speaker; hence the reason for this motion, to compel them.

If there's something that we can do in Alberta – the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane had stated that we have a U of A doc. He's in this area. He's willing to do it, work on brain mapping. At that event and a subsequent one that the MLA for Airdrie-Cochrane and I also attended in downtown Edmonton – it was the year after, I believe – I heard some of the stories and about some of the comrades that had been lost, not from direct combat action but afterwards, when these folks are reaching out to each other to check up on each other, folks that are suffering from these long-lasting ramifications, to make sure that your buddy is okay. I'd overheard that a couple of times. They had grave concerns – they hadn't heard from a member down in southern Alberta – and were trying to be there, and I've seen that comradery.

These guys and members of the community step up for each other. There was one member from my community who was knitting blankets and quilts to give to these soldiers to let them know that people still care about them, that when they were in tight spots and they were suffering and they couldn't reach out to fellow comrades, this blanket was wrapping around them to make sure that they knew that they weren't forgotten about and that they had some support there. It kind of tugs at the heartstrings.

Australia pulled it. They don't even use it for second-line defence anymore. The U.S. has used it as a drug of last resort since 2013. It's only to be used if there are no contraindications. Ireland has taken it completely off the market. In Canada: well, it's still available for the general public. If you go under the brand name Lariam and you happen to be going travelling and you go to one of those jurisdictions or those regions, you just might be taking the same thing that, in that one doctor's statement, is the horror movie pill. It's not only just our soldiers – not to say "just." They were the ones that had no choice. People at home: how often do they go and read the back of the labels?

The labels, Madam Speaker, on some of these drugs – let's see. Here you go: depression, generalized anxiety disorder, psychosis, schizophrenia, major psychiatric disorders, convulsions. How close do you read the fine print? If you're going over for a nice vacation, maybe you give this to your kids. Maybe you take it a little longer than you should. That's not quite the vacation I'd be signing up for or having anybody else sign up for, especially with these long-lasting effects.

It was first used over in Somalia. I'm not going to go into the events there out of respect for our soldiers who served, but talking to the guys at that walk leads me a lot to believe that maybe things would have been different if our soldiers weren't receiving those medications. Maybe things would have turned out differently. It really hearkens to the question: maybe our government had something to do with that.

With that, I'm not going to take up much more time on this. Looking at the number of reports that have taken place, you know, there was a Surgeon General Task Force report on mefloquine saying that

military personnel [are] a unique population with specific risk factors that might predispose them to adverse effects potentially associated with mefloquine, e.g., neuropsychiatric harms.

So if you and I happen to be – I'm not saying that you and I are going, but if you and I, Madam Speaker, as an example, were going on a trip and were heading somewhere for a good time, it's a heck of a lot different than being deployed and put into stressful circumstances and to have this additional stuff added to you, especially with the frequency and the time that they're in field and that it's not supposed to be taken any more than eight days and that these folks are deployed for a heck of a lot longer than that, eight months at least, depending on the circumstance, maybe even longer.

3:40

It hearkens to the question that when all these experts are doing these things, speaking out against it, when we have witnesses and testimonies right here in your face – and if you want to, watch that *W5*. There were two episodes on it. If it doesn't bring a tear to your eye or it doesn't make you think, then you haven't watched it. I don't think there's anybody in this Chamber or out in the general public that can't put themselves in that circumstance or doesn't know someone in their area or their family that may have been exposed to that. Maybe it will help you understand a little bit more what's happening to these folks.

In 1998, as part of a series of Parliamentary questions regarding mefloquine use in the [Canadian Forces], the following question, labelled as Q-138, was asked:

Of those members of the Canadian Forces who were administered mefloquine since 1992, how many have attempted suicide or committed suicide; in what year; in Canada or abroad; and if abroad, name the country.

The question was never answered.

The methodology consisted of a crude listing of the attempted and completed suicides reported to the military police.

Again, we can administer these things, but we don't track them in the proper way, and we don't even know the cause or effect or harm.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Motion 502 as amended?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane to close out debate.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Over the course of this afternoon's debate we heard about the detrimental effects of mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, as it relates to Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans. One of those veterans, whose story was discussed earlier, Shaun Arntsen, wanted me to make clear that quinism is not something that is exclusive to the military. In Canada Lariam became available for public use in 1993. Citizens here as well as around the world used it for the intended purpose, but they may have no idea about the impact that this drug has played in their lives.

Madam Speaker, in 2002 on a camping trip to central America my wife, two friends, and I were prescribed Lariam to prevent malaria. All four of us developed insomnia and during intermittent periods of sleep experienced very vivid dreams. When awake, it felt as though you were in a high state of anxiety, like you had just drank an entire pot of coffee, and you felt that way all the time. Now, as we all know, our body requires sleep, so when deprived of it, of this necessity, it begins to take its toll on our body and on our mind. For us, something didn't feel right. Something was off. So after only a few weeks of taking mefloquine, my wife and I decided to discontinue its use, and we did not finish the prescription.

For myself, in a matter of a few weeks I felt back to normal, but that was not the case for my wife, Tracy. She felt jittery, high strung, and anxious for months after. Within two weeks of arriving home, she went to our family physician to learn that she had suddenly developed an arrhythmia. This was obviously shocking for a healthy woman in her 30s with no history of heart problems. Now, fortunately, as the effect of the drug dissipated, the arrhythmia went away, but for years she had periods of sleep apnea, unexplained dizziness, and bouts of vertigo that created a lot of stress for her. As a byproduct of this anxiety, my wife developed thyroid disease, for which she takes daily medication and will for the rest of her life. Now, can all of this be attributed to the use of mefloquine? Well, quite frankly, I'm not certain, but that's the very reason we require government support to conduct the necessary research to help veterans and constituents who are suffering.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank all my colleagues for their efforts here today, and I'd like to thank all veterans, those currently serving in the forces today, and all those who lost their lives in service to our country. Thank you in advance for your support of Motion 502.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 as amended carried unanimously]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 4

#### Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs to move second reading of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

These amendments to the Municipal Government Act, or MGA, are needed in order to achieve clarity of public health policy for Albertans across the province. As we're all aware, Alberta's government removed many restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last several weeks. Alberta Health has been taking a thoughtful, methodical approach to both the implementation of public health restrictions and to the removal.

As Albertans have grappled with COVID-19, the Premier and Minister of Health have spoken at great length and with informed expertise about what it means for Alberta to move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, and I'll try not to emulate their words today. What I will say is that I believe it is clearly in the best interests of all Albertans and all Alberta municipalities to have a clear and consistent set of public health requirements in place as we continue to manage COVID-19 and move past the pandemic. With this objective in mind, we are proposing to amend the MGA to ensure that municipal bylaws align with a provincial approach to public health issues. The overall approach will be to grant the Minister of Municipal Affairs with appropriate oversight and approval of municipal bylaws related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The changes to the MGA are extremely narrow and strictly focused on management of a public health crisis that is properly within the government of Alberta's jurisdiction. If the amendments pass, municipal bylaws requiring masks to prevent the spread of communicable diseases or relating to COVID-19 vaccines will need to be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The proposed changes would also require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with Alberta's chief medical officer of health to approve the bylaw. For example, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing masking bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores or retail businesses. Local governments would continue to have the authority to implement masking bylaws for the operation of municipal buildings such as recreation centres, public transit, and municipal buildings. These changes would have no impact on the day-to-day operation of Alberta municipalities. Since most municipalities already comply with public health requirements for COVID-19, these changes will have zero effect on them.

Specifically, a new section, section 7.1, will be added to the MGA that will accomplish several things. First, section 7.1 will specify that a municipality cannot pass a bylaw about masking to prevent communicable disease or proof of vaccination requirements unless the bylaw has been approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs after consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Upon the coming into force, the new section will also repeal any of these types of bylaws that are currently in place. It's also important to know that the section states that enforcement efforts made while the masking or vaccination bylaw was in effect are still valid. This means that prior enforcement activities will continue to be valid even though the bylaw will be repealed when this legislation comes into force. Finally, the new section specifies that this exception does not apply to bylaws that focus on property owned or leased and operated by a municipality.

Our government is well aware that there are some Albertans who have some concerns with these proposed amendments. I would like to take a moment to address some of them. First, some people will say that the proposed government is overreaching its jurisdiction and that the proposed amendments create a precedent whereby the government can impose its judgment on any municipal bylaw. To that point, I would note the narrow scope of the amendments, which

are clearly designed and limited to address public health measures related to COVID-19. The government is not interested in infringing on municipal jurisdictions any more than is absolutely necessary to ensure consistent public health policy, which is most certainly within the province's jurisdiction.

3:50

As for precedent, I would note that there are many other instances in Alberta law where ministerial approval of a municipal bylaw is required. For example, the Municipal Government Act does not allow municipalities to pass bylaws to close roads within their jurisdiction without approval from the Minister of Transportation. All we are doing here is ensuring proper provincial oversight of public health policy, which is clearly the responsibility of the provincial government.

Second, some people will say that the government previously allowed or required municipalities to create their own bylaws in order to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. It's true that Alberta's government has allowed flexibility for municipalities to develop and implement their own public health measures when appropriate in response to COVID-19, but that was during the middle of the pandemic, when Alberta did not have such a robust vaccination rate and it made sense for local governments to take local measures under certain circumstances. Those circumstances have changed. As the Premier and Minister of Health have said, Alberta has a high rate of vaccination among adults, and there is no public health rationale for continuing certain restrictions such as masking requirements in indoor public spaces.

Of course, Albertans may continue to wear masks for personal health risks at any time that they wish, and this choice must be respected. But there are no longer sufficient grounds for the provincial government to require masking as public health policy; therefore, there are no grounds for municipal governments to do so either. The proposed amendments will create consistency for Albertans on this point.

Finally, some people will say that Alberta's government has not consulted with Alberta municipalities about the proposed amendments. Well, Alberta's government engages with municipalities a great deal on a great number of policy initiatives. It was just not necessary for the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. As soon as the public health data allowed for the easing of restrictions, Alberta's government acted in the interests of Albertans because that's what we were elected to do.

Individual Albertans and Alberta businesses should have their option of whether or not to wear masks or to require their customers to wear masks, and the proposed amendments to the MGA will ensure that they have that choice. The approach we are recommending will restrict the ability of municipalities to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province. Our goal is to ensure Alberta has one clear policy as we move together toward a path towards normal. Albertans and Alberta municipalities deserve a clear, consistent, and unified approach that the proposed amendments to the Municipal Government Act will provide.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you to the associate minister for the second reading introduction. I appreciate that. I did have some concerns, though, with some of the things that I heard the associate minister speak to. For clarification's sake, every municipality in Alberta is now following what is in Bill 4. The city of Edmonton rescinded their mask and vaccine passport bylaw last week. So it's not that most are following it; everyone is following it. I guess the first question I would have is: if everyone is doing what Bill 4 identifies,

why are we even spending time here today going forward with this bill? Why isn't this bill removed from the Order Paper, and why don't we spend time on other things that are important for this province?

The other thing that was mentioned by the associate minister, before I get into talking about the bill itself, was the narrow scope and how the province was surgical in its efforts to get into the MGA and, you know, to amend it with this Bill 4. I guess I would wonder: if it was clear, if it was narrow, why didn't they take time to talk about it with municipalities through their organizations like RMA and AM? If it's that clear and if it's that necessary, why not take the opportunity to discuss it? It doesn't prohibit them from talking about negotiating and being involved with representatives of municipalities, but they chose not to do that.

Further, the associate minister said, you know, that consultations weren't necessary. Well, that perhaps depends on whose ox is being gored, because municipalities believe it was necessary for consultations. It's all fine for the associate minister to stand up in defence of the government and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and say: we thought it over; we're going to do a little thing; it's not going to be a problem. That's not what we're hearing from municipalities. For instance, the president of the Alberta Municipalities says: I believe in a collaborative approach to government, and I believe this is the exact opposite. She goes on to say: it sets a precedent for future legislation changes when all of a sudden a municipality and the government of Alberta disagree, and that's a precedent we don't appreciate. Again, it's depending on your point of view, and the point of view, obviously, of the government is, "No biggie; we're doing what we were elected to do or we're doing to make things clear for all municipalities" when they're hearing back from municipalities, through their representatives, that what they're doing is frankly not appreciated.

[Mrs. Aheer in the chair]

Another quote from President Heron: Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation, was changed. End quote. I just want to put those things on the table first to say that the point of view from the associate minister and others that I've heard, particularly the minister, is that it's not a big deal. "We did something that we're able to do; we're sticking to our lane; municipalities have to stick to their lane" even though when you look at the bill, it speaks to the kinds of responsibilities municipalities have. "A council may pass bylaws for municipal purposes respecting the following matters," and letter (a) is: "the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people and property." So municipalities were within their rights to do what they were doing. That was Edmonton, for instance, and Calgary and others that had masking bylaws and vaccine passports required or checking vaccines for people going into establishments both city and private. They were within their rights to do those things.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This government, this Premier, asked municipalities, back several months ago, over a year ago, to do these things. You know, "You have the power to do it," and they did. Now the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the associate minister are changing that power, and they're doing so without the involvement. That's another day and another reason why Albertans really can't trust this Premier and his government to act in their best interest. Municipalities are finding that out, Madam Speaker. As I said, last year the Premier abdicated responsibility for public health decisions, and he said that those decisions – and this is a direct quote – are best taken locally. And we know that municipalities did that. He encouraged



municipalities to implement their own health measures due to the diverse needs across this province, and we saw that take place. Now this government is directly contradicting what they originally asked municipalities to do, and they're contradicting themselves by taking decision-making power away from municipalities in Bill 4 and the locally elected leaders that were exercising those powers.

4:00

As I mentioned, with section 8 – no, not section 8; section 7 in the MGA, those powers currently exist under municipal authority, but the Premier is directly targeting them for his own political reasons, we believe on this side, attempting to save his own skin from the leadership review that is coming up in Red Deer on April 9.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The actions of the Premier – and I put this in my speech that I did on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Opposition to Alberta Municipalities last week. I believe that the Premier believes another fight with another group will improve his leadership odds, make him look like, you know, a tough leader who can get his way, whether it's with municipalities, whether it's fighting with doctors and nurses and teachers and unions. I could go on, apparently. We have seen this repeated over and over and over again, unfortunately.

The repetition provides Albertans with an opportunity to see through this for what it is: a cynical ploy to, again, improve leadership possibilities. We've seen this since the election of the UCP in May 2019. This was a government that claimed, Mr. Speaker, to be a grassroots government, to listen to the grassroots and to do the things that the grassroots were asking. The Premier even signed a grassroots guarantee, but the locally elected leaders now, not only in the city of Edmonton but all locally elected leaders, are being minimized and put off to the side with regard to something they hold very dearly, and that's the Municipal Government Act. It's an enabling piece of legislation that we should rightly be proud of in this province. It's a significant piece of legislation, and as some of the people I talked to at last week's Alberta Municipalities conference mentioned, you know, it's not something to be trifled with; if you're going to open it up, for goodness' sake, involve us.

The interference with local decision-making, imposing a top-down governance style is something that's very, very problematic. On this side of the House we respect local democracy. They are legitimate local governments across this province. Counties, summer villages, cities, towns: they are a legitimate, democratically elected order of government. They are not a lesser order of government. They are an order of government, Mr. Speaker.

What they get from the other side is not respect for who they are. They get told – and the Member for Lac Ste. Anne- . . .

**Member Irwin:** Parkland.

**Member Ceci:** Parkland. Thank you very much.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has said that, you know, local governments are children of the province. I can tell you that that phrase, that idea went over like a lead balloon at Alberta Municipalities, and it's going to go over the same way at RMA. They are not children of the province. That Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland went on to say that, you know – and I think he was directing this at one municipality in particular – if they don't get in line, like children, they deserve to be spanked to put them in line. Again, Mr. Speaker, that's not respectful, not appropriate, not the kinds of words one expects from a member in this House. We don't believe that local leaders and our communities are simply children

of the province. We don't believe that they need a spanking if they set up bylaws that they have the power to do under the MGA.

If we're going to succeed as a province, we need to work in partnership with each other. That's how we'll get over the huge challenges in this province. Picking fights with fellow Albertans who are democratically elected is not the way to do this. This legislation is nothing less and nothing more than a deeply cynical ploy to divide Albertans and to crush local democracy, starting with the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a few minutes to go over some of the things I heard the minister say to the Alberta Municipalities conference when he made a speech. He talked about how this bill and its actions were, quote, a slight diminishment of local power.

It goes back to what the associate minister was saying, you know, that they feel like they were narrow in scope, and they're just making things consistent around the province, that they have the flexibility to do this, that there is nothing prohibiting them from doing it. So when the minister says that this is a slight diminishment of local powers, I just know that he's talking from his perspective, not from the perspective of democratically elected local governments around the province. They don't believe it's a slight diminishment when you change the MGA without involving them.

In fact, it's been raised by people at local government, you know: if they can change this, is this the thin edge of the wedge? Will they not involve us in talks about future changes? Will they change the MGA without our involvement in the future? I have to say to that: probably. They did it this time. What's to stop them from doing it in the future?

If you believe in a collaborative approach, Mr. Speaker, then that means talking to the stakeholders that you have empowered, that are involved, said that the work they do is important. It means engaging with them and coming up with a solution, not keeping it quiet, not saying nothing about something you're planning to introduce and then essentially they have to eat it because they don't have the power like we do here, like the government does when they have a majority, to push through bills that they want to push through.

I don't know if I read this statement. I'll do it now. Perhaps I have. I don't think I have. It is again from the president of Alberta Municipalities. We'll see what the president of RMA thinks about all of this in the next day or two, Mr. Speaker, because that's when their conference is taking place. The president of AM said to the media last week: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – I did say this last part – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation.

You have to wonder: why didn't the government consult? I mean, they had time. Somebody could have picked up the phone. There's lots of staff, hundreds of staff in Municipal Affairs. They could have picked up the phone, but instead they're acting unilaterally and picking fights with municipalities. You have to wonder what other measures this government is considering with municipalities, to change the MGA. I don't know. We'll have to see. Those obviously are some of the concerns this side has with this bill and the actions of this government.

4:10

We heard from the associate minister with regard to some of the aspects or changes to the MGA that'll take place. Ministerial approval is necessary for any alteration of the MGA once this is passed. The minister has to be involved and, he says, with the backup of the CMOH at that time. This repeals existing bylaws. There are no existing bylaws in the province at this point in time.

We know that Edmonton was the only city with bylaws in place, and those were repealed last Tuesday.

Private properties can still require vaccine checks and proof and masking. That's not going to be changed by this. If a venue, for instance, like a theatre wants to continue with masks in place, like the one I went to a couple of Saturdays ago in Calgary – there were masks in place, and people had to show their proof of vaccine. There was 50 per cent occupancy by that theatre's desires. They can still do that with this bylaw. That's a good thing, that the government isn't railroading private properties in that case. Local governments can still, on their own property, in their own facilities, require masking bylaws.

Mr. Speaker, this is another day, as I said, yet another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier or his UCP government. Last year the Premier abdicated responsibility; now he is taking responsibility away from municipalities without their consent. I think that's wrong, and Bill 4 should be dropped.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, second reading of Bill 4. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider it a privilege to be in this House every time we're in session and every time we have a sitting. I count it a privilege to be able to speak to Bill 4 today, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I think I can speak for probably everybody in the province, at least in this Legislature and probably in every level of government across the country, when I say that the last two and a half years have been difficult on everybody as we've tried to deal with this pandemic, this COVID. You know, it has been an issue of discussion, I think, probably at every kitchen table and in every Legislature, whether it's municipal or provincial or federal.

It has not always been easy. It's not been easy because in a lot of ways we're dealing with some really important principles in how we try to live our lives and how governments address our lives. We're dealing with principles that go down to some really basic freedoms. How can we best protect our society? We're trying to balance freedom to be able to make our own choices and to be able to make our own decisions, especially those on health issues, versus the control that we need to try and protect those in our society that are vulnerable, those that could be severely affected by the COVID pandemic and by the virus.

I think all of us have had to grow and to consider this attempt to balance the ideas of freedom and control.

For myself, I don't know how other people have sort of arrived at trying to figure out when we should and when we shouldn't, but I know that in my own life as the MLA and in listening to my constituents and dealing with the phone calls and dealing with the conversations in the grocery store or on the street or dealing with the e-mails, I've come down to two or three things that have sort of guided my way of thinking, principles that I've used to guide myself when we try to balance this issue of freedom versus control.

The first is that I think we have a duty as citizens and as legislators to ensure that the vulnerable are protected. That's a given, and I don't think I've met anybody in my constituency, when I've had a conversation with them, that would disagree with me on the need for our society to organize ourselves in such a way and to have legislation and regulation that would allow us to protect the citizens of this province.

The second one is that I think that in almost every case, when we talk about it, we need to live in a society where we also protect the livelihoods of the citizens of this province.

The third one, that has grown over the last two and a half years, has been that we really do need to protect the liberties of the citizens of this province. As we've been dealing with COVID, we've tried to bring forward legislation that has protected the vulnerable, protected the livelihoods of our citizens, and protected the liberties of our citizens. I know that there's been disagreement on that at times, and I think that we're now at the point, after two and a half years, where we need to chart a course towards a post-COVID world, a world where we now are moving beyond the need for restrictions. It's now time for individual Albertans to be able to decide for themselves how best to address COVID and their health issues surrounding that virus. I believe the emphasis now needs to switch from the need for societal control more towards one that allows for individual freedom of choice as they make their decisions about how best to protect themselves and to live in a world where there's going to be COVID.

Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022, addresses this issue of moving the province from a focus on the need to protect the vulnerable and to have control to the need to transition to a post-COVID Alberta where our traditional freedoms are restored. It does so by addressing masking and vaccination mandates and clarifying the roles of the province and the municipalities.

As we have addressed COVID over the last two and a half years, Albertans and all levels of government have struggled to figure out just how best to safeguard the vulnerable while protecting our freedoms and our capacity to make choices in this society. Masking was one policy direction that was pursued, and proof of vaccination was another. We've had to deal with these and try to figure out where that balance lies.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that a mandatory masking policy restricted individual choice and that a proof of vaccination policy, you know, did impact people's individual and personal liberty. When trying to make a decision about these kinds of issues where there's individual choice or societal control, often the best decisions are decisions that provide and put forward the least amount of personal restrictions and provide the most amount of personal freedom and where the decision is made at the most local level. Often people most affected by a public policy are the people that should probably be deciding on the implementation of that policy. If it's going to be affecting them most importantly, then they should be the ones and probably are the ones that are making those decisions about whether they're going to have that placed upon them.

Now, during COVID that was often best done at the municipal level as they could monitor the local conditions and the need for restrictions to protect the local population that was vulnerable. By allowing local municipal decision-making, the vulnerable could be protected where and when necessary while those parts of the province not yet affected by an increased case level of COVID could remain free of masking restrictions or free to be able to make more personal choices.

4:20

But when it became clear that COVID had spread across the province to the point where the province needed to step in with provincial mask mandates or with other restrictions, you know, it became obvious that we needed to do something in order to protect the vulnerable at a provincial level, so the government took on that responsibility.

Today the province can and has started to remove those restrictions because it's safe to do so, and that's what the science is telling us. Bill 4 addresses this reality by reinforcing and by clarifying the need for each level of government to remain within

their lanes and to remain within the capacity to develop policy that is going to be best for the province and allow us to move forward together as a province.

Mr. Speaker, Canada – I'm going to use this example – is a federal union where the power to govern is divided between different levels of government. The Constitution Act outlines in section 91 and in section 92 the powers of the federal government and the powers of the provincial government. The federal government can, within our Constitution, make a law in areas where the provinces are restricted from being able to make and pass law. We do this for a number of reasons. We're the second-largest country in the world; we have a relatively small population of about 35 million, 37 million people. We want to be able to have a federal system of government because it allows provinces to be able to make decisions about more local issues at the provincial level, and in the federal government we have a national government that can now make decisions on law that are going to be best for the nation as a whole.

The federal government makes laws in areas like defence, our borders, foreign treaties, monetary and fiscal policy, the environment because these are areas in which the nation as a whole is going to be impacted and where we need a national government making those kinds of decisions. Section 92 outlines the provincial powers, things like health care, education, natural resources, et cetera. We set our country up this way because we recognize that the local decisions need to be dealt with at the local level and that national issues need to be dealt with at the national level. This principle is called subsidiarity. It is valuable, and it's important, and it has ensured that this nation functions relatively smoothly and in the interests of the people.

Our country functions best when the federal government drives in its lane and the provincial governments pass legislation that stays in their lane. Now, we would not function nearly as well if a province had the capacity to declare war or to print money or set interest rates. Now, our national prosperity and our national freedom are best addressed when each level of government makes laws that constitutionally it has the right to pass and enforce.

Bill 4 speaks to this issue provincially. The municipal level of government is founded upon a provincial piece of legislation called the Municipal Government Act. [interjection] No. Thank you. The province is responsible for public health, and they can, in addressing a public health issue, decide if subsidiarity needs to be followed or if a province-wide piece of legislation is necessary. Bill 4 simply clarifies that on this issue of masking and proof of vaccination, it is best addressed today, at this time, at the provincial level with oversight by the minister. Bill 4 recognizes that it is now time to move forward towards individual freedom, with fewer COVID restrictions, while still protecting the health of Albertans.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, many, many of the people in my constituency have e-mailed my office, they've phoned me, and they've talked to me on the street clearly saying that it is time now – in many cases, they believe, long past time – for this province to have removed restrictions. My constituents don't want a patchwork of restrictions on their freedom to make individual COVID restriction choices depending on where they happen to be in the province at any given moment in time. They are fine if someone wants to wear a mask as an individual choice, and they are supportive of an Albertan who wants to be vaccinated, but they are clear that it is time to move past COVID as a province, and if that means that we need to have provincial legislation that will move us together as one province towards that freedom, they're supportive of it.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 brings clarity, I believe, for Albertans across this province as we move towards a post-COVID society, and it will therefore have my support. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, second reading of Bill 4. Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen. [some applause]

**Ms Renaud:** Feeling love this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise and speak at second reading of Bill 4, which is the municipal government amendment act, 2022, which is really about face masks and proof of COVID-19 vaccination bylaws. You know, this is another day, another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier and this government. It was really alarming to me, and I'd like to go back to talk about some of the things that happened last week and some of the public reporting that all of us, I think, in this House were able to see about what happened at the Alberta Municipalities meeting last week. Unfortunately, we had budget estimates preparation and then estimates themselves, so I was unable to be there to hear the comments live and to see what was happening, but it was incredibly disturbing and alarming to read what happened after the fact.

Now, one of the things that struck me, after some comments were made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, was seeing some of the comments of the mayor of St. Albert, who is also the president of Alberta Municipalities, on social media. I could see, just in the language that she was using, the incredible amount of frustration at the disrespect that was being shown to her as a leader, as a municipal leader, but also to all municipal leaders across the province, not just mayors and reeves and councils. It was actually sort of sad to see that, Mr. Speaker.

I've been very fortunate to work with Mayor Heron and now President Heron for over six years. What I can tell you about this particular mayor is that she is very even. I think she works very hard every day, and I've watched her do it. She works very hard every day to listen, to listen to her constituents, to listen to her councillors, to listen to her colleagues, and she's incredibly measured. I have seen issues in front of her that were very heated, that people clearly had a lot of passion about, one side or the other. This is a leader that maintains focus and that is very even keeled. This is a person that has said repeatedly that she is willing to work with anybody. It doesn't matter sort of what position they have staked out. She's willing to listen, and she's willing to work with people. That doesn't mean she's always going to agree or not, but it means she's willing to listen. Those aren't just empty words, Mr. Speaker, because I've seen her do that. I have seen her do that very thing over the many years that I've been an MLA watching her in public service.

So it was incredibly frustrating to know that one of our colleagues here in this Chamber decided once again to make a statement that was just so inflammatory that it almost begs the question, Mr. Speaker: is that the purpose of the statement? Is it just to make himself feel better or to maybe, you know, create a bit of an audience? I'm not sure what the reasoning was, but the end result was that it was incredibly disrespectful. It sends a disrespectful message to that level of government from all of us in this place. Although we didn't say it – hopefully, most of us don't support it; I know I certainly don't – it's incredibly disrespectful that a Member of the Legislative Assembly would choose to use that language.

4:30

Now, for those of you at home that are paying attention to this bill debate, what I would like to say is that I would like to repeat some of the words that the member chose to use. The MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland said that he's glad the UCP is stripping local

government powers because municipalities are the children of the province and it is time for someone to get spanked. Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty sure that most of us in this place understand how important it is to choose the words that we use carefully. I know that we're repeatedly admonished in here for unparliamentary language, so we learn that language and the words that we use are important. I know in the sector that I used to work in, where people with disabilities are regularly called words that I won't repeat and language is used about them that I won't repeat – I understand the damaging impact or the harm that words and language can cause, so to hear a Member of the Legislative Assembly refer to municipalities as children is disrespectful.

But to take it even a step further and to talk about corporal punishment is just shocking to me. It's absolutely shocking to me that this member would choose to talk about corporal punishment in that way, that it is something that is legitimate and should be used by the provincial government. I thought we were past that, Mr. Speaker. I really thought that in 2022 this was not language that we would use and that this was not even something we would consider. [interjection]

**Ms Pancholi:** Yeah. Thank you to the member. I just wanted to take a moment to intervene on a couple of points. First of all, I'm really glad you brought up the issue of language because that is so incredibly important, and we're seeing the use, I believe, of incredibly inflammatory language and dismissive language towards not just our fellow representatives, right? That's really what municipal elected officials are. They work in partnership with provincial, with their school boards, you know, with the federal elected representatives. It is a partnership to work together, so that language is incredibly dismissive.

I wanted to actually go back because you were speaking about the tone, really, of the mayor of St. Albert, who's somebody that I have not had the opportunity to meet in person, but I have also followed her work. Given the member's role as being the, you know, elected official for St. Albert and having worked with Mayor Heron for as long as you have, I believe that you probably know her in some ways . . . [Ms Pancholi's speaking time expired] I didn't get to my point.

**An Hon. Member:** One minute is not long enough.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. No, one minute is not long enough. I think I understood where the member was going with the question. The point is that Mayor Heron, like so many other municipal leaders, absolutely is the closest to the people. I think back to debate that we've had about different levels of government in this Chamber. I thought we could all agree that municipal governments were so important because they truly were the closest to the people. They had a sense of what was going on in the community far faster, far sooner than we did at a provincial level and then far sooner, far faster than federal politicians did because they're right there on the ground. They're dealing with the potholes and the speed limits and service delivery on a very basic level. These are politicians, these are elected leaders that know more from individual constituents, sadly, I think, than any of us will because that is the function of their role. For this government to just summarily dismiss them, to say that they know better – they know better – than municipal governments is truly insulting.

When I saw the angry response – you know, it was really a passionate response from Mayor Heron, who is someone who is so incredibly even keeled and so focused on listening to as many sides as she can in a debate. To see that anger told me that this was a pervasive problem. I'm quite sure that most municipal leaders right

across this province feel the same way that she does. It's so disrespectful. The fact that none of these members, Mr. Speaker – none of them: not the Premier, nobody on the front bench, none of the backbenchers, not one person – has stood up and said that they condemn the comments made by the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is very, very telling.

Let's talk about the danger of dehumanizing language. This is what we're hearing from this government. Because we've not heard any other members stand up and say that they disagree or they condemn, this leads me to believe that everybody is okay with it on this side, that they're okay with comments made that municipal governments, duly elected Albertans, are like children and deserve to be spanked. Like, come on. We know the dangers of dehumanizing language. It is often justification to treat people differently, and by differently I often mean badly. We have seen this government and their staff go after people on social media, and then we've seen the fallout after. People are threatened. People are harmed. We have seen that language. We have seen what that language does. [interjection]

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member. I wanted to follow up on that because I note that at the Alberta Municipalities we had the Minister of Municipal Affairs stand up and speak and seem to struggle to get any support for his statements. He certainly had that opportunity at that point to condemn the language used by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland right there in front of municipal leaders from across the province. Of course, the Minister of Municipal Affairs did not take that opportunity, which, I agree, tends to imply that he agrees with it.

You know, I wonder what you think that means for relationship building, because we also know that under this government we have seen multiple Municipal Affairs ministers who have struggled to develop that key relationship, and when we have members from the government caucus making statements like that, that have not been condemned by ministers, what does the member believe the impact will be on that ongoing relationship with municipalities and the provincial government? I actually think that's a pretty key part, that relationship building between municipalities and the provincial government. I'd love your thoughts on that.

**Ms Renaud:** Good. Okay. Thank you. Absolutely, I think that it is incredibly important to build solid relationships with municipalities. You know, what is a little bit shocking in all of this is that I guess I believed that this government, this leader of this government would figure out that the vast majority of Albertans and municipal leaders have zero trust in them. Like, none. Zero trust, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] No. Thank you. What leads me to believe that they would actually . . .

**Mr. Orr:** Interjection?

**Ms Renaud:** No. N-o. No.  
What, again . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** No means no.

**Ms Renaud:** No always means no.

Mr. Speaker, going back to this, I want to talk about the fact that I actually believed – and maybe that's just delusional thinking on my part – that this is a government that would recognize that Albertans don't trust them – do not trust them – don't trust what they say, don't trust what they do, don't trust what they say they're going to do, all of it. I actually thought that this would be a government that would start to focus some energy on rebuilding that trust, and the first opportunity that they had to do that, it seems to me, would be at a gathering like Alberta Municipalities to talk

about the way forward, recovery from COVID. That would be: let's work together; let's build a stronger community; let's work together to get to where we want to be. No. Instead, we're right back to insults from backbenchers like the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

I want to go back to the comments that I was making. You know, I can hear some of the chatter across the way when I talk about the dangers of dehumanizing language. I do think it's really important that we talk about this because hateful rhetoric causes problems all over the world. We know this. We know that divisive politics leads to things like violence. We know that language is the seed that starts all of that. We understand that, yet here we are with a government that is unwilling to even say one word about one of their colleagues who has summarily decided that duly elected municipal leaders are like children and deserve to be spanked. That is just incredibly vile. It is so incredibly vile.

You know, I hear members opposite regularly stand up and talk about the dangers of domestic violence, the dangers about harm for children and families and how COVID has caused so much stress, has caused so much damage to our collective mental health and to individual mental health and how important it is that as we recover, we recognize all of these things that have happened over the last two years, that have escalated, that have caused all kinds of trouble. Instead, we have a government that is willing to look the other way when one of the backbenchers throws a little fuel on the fire. Just when we don't need a division between different levels of government, what this UCP government seems really intent on doing is creating as much division as possible.

Now, am I surprised, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely not, because I know what's coming up in April. I know exactly what's coming up in April.

4:40

**An Hon. Member:** What's coming up in April?

**Ms Renaud:** Let me tell you what's coming up in April. There is a review of this Premier's leadership, so whatever is going on with their shenanigans or going on behind the scenes – I think we've seen their behaviour in leadership races before. I think that we can safely assume that there's some stuff going on. But I think what we see on the front is that we see division, and we see a government intent on pointing fingers over there: "Oh, look over here. There's a problem over here. Look over here." Like, that's what they do, Mr. Speaker. We've seen just ineptness. We've seen bills that really don't need to be debated in this place because they're essentially useless at this point. We have seen rhetoric, divisive language again, again, and again. Why is that? This isn't about good governance. This isn't about good leadership. This isn't about building a stronger Alberta. This is about saving some political bacon. That's what this is about. [interjection]

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member. I'm not sure how much time we have left, but I'd like to just build on that if I may, ask the member to share her comments about what this is really about and the breaking of trust, because we've certainly heard from this Premier – at times, when it suits the Premier, it appears that he's willing to lean on and, in fact, download responsibilities onto municipalities, school boards, locally elected bodies and then, when it serves his purpose, rein them in to look tough, perhaps for an upcoming leadership review in April. Then, of course, we get a totally different side of the Premier. It seems to me that we've seen this flip-flopping back and forth a number of times during COVID in particular but on a number of issues, which I think leads to some Albertans' mistrust of any decisions that this Premier makes

because it's always about serving political interests. I'd like to hear the member's thoughts as to how this current flip-flopping – and we know this is an about-face from two months ago – leads to that mistrust.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you for that. That's a great question, and it has been political flip-flopping. We've seen so many examples of it over the last couple of years. We've seen this UCP government push the decisions, difficult political decisions sometimes, onto groups that are not themselves, whether that is school boards, whether that is municipalities, and they'll say: "Well, it's not us. It is not us. We are not responsible for this. It is the municipality. It is the school board." Yet when it suits them for whatever reason, whether it's to save their political bacon or not, they're quite happy to impose rules on other people, in this case municipalities. This is all about self-serving governance.

You know, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but when I think about the kind of governance that I want for Alberta, I want honesty, transparency. I want a government focused on Albertans. I want a government that can work with other levels of government as opposed to trying to throw bombs at them. That's the kind of Alberta I want. That's the kind of governance I want. That's the future that I'm working for, and that is not what we see here today. We have not seen examples of it. I keep hoping that something is going to get better, and it just keeps getting worse.

Today the fact that we are spending precious time – we have very little time to debate bills in this place, particularly to deal with private members' business. Anyways, this isn't that. What is incredibly frustrating is that we are now forced to do this when it is essentially useless. It is useless. We know that all municipalities – there are no longer any bylaws that are going to be taken care of, but that doesn't seem to matter. I find it incredibly sad, a government so willing to pass the buck to municipalities when it suits them and then inflict all kinds of harm by reducing the revenue they receive, increasing the costs that they download – it just goes on and on and on – and then literally treat them horribly and allow members to say really derogatory things about them and then nobody says anything to correct the record. Nobody.

So you let it stand. You're complicit. To say that somebody needs to be spanked is just gross. It is truly gross, and it would be lovely if somebody would stand up and condemn those comments and then put on the record that municipal leaders should be respected. We should work with them, not call them names and inflict harm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Culture.

**Mr. Orr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. You know, I find it entirely one sided, what I've been listening to from the other side here. All through the COVID pandemic many, many, many rural municipalities requested that the province would adopt a regional process, would allow them to have a different policy than the major cities. Throughout that process the province continually said no to them. So if we want to be fair, if we want to treat municipalities with equality and work for unity, let's not forget that part of the process. They were told the same thing that the city of Edmonton was told here: it's a provincial jurisdiction; it's a provincial authority. [interjection] No. Thank you.

I would like to include that, you know, I think the NDP need to quit trying to make conflict out of something that isn't conflicted. I notice that even the city of Edmonton has moved on. I was at the Alberta Municipalities. The mayor of Edmonton – and I respect him for it – sitting at the table with the Premier, was not wearing a mask. He's accepted it. He's moved on.

I would also say that, quite frankly, they should also know that there's more than one side to this story. I had one of the mayors from my riding phone me explicitly to tell me thank you for putting the city in its place.

While the NDP want to make a big deal out of this, there needs to be fairness and equality to all municipalities and respect for all municipalities within the limits of the legislation.

There are two sides to this story. Very clearly, the NDP don't want to accept that. I think it's just time that they need to accept it. We should move on. There are people in Alberta who just simply don't agree with them.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to our colleagues, for the opportunity to engage in debate on what the government has deemed their number 4 top priority this session. Number 1 was, of course, around giving recognition to local folks and honouring the Queen, and there are a couple of others. But this is, like, the first few days of legislation. The government comes in here to try to bring in a bill – you know, they have a massive majority; they will probably be able to ram this through – to take away powers from municipal partners.

I really appreciate the revisionist history that we keep hearing from folks on the other side. For the longest time the government refused to show any kind of leadership on public health, which is, of course, a provincial responsibility – public health is – and downloaded local decisions around how to respond to the public health crisis that we were facing onto individual municipalities, including county councils as well as cities and towns. The same government that's here today with this bill felt just fine delegating or being derelict in their responsibility and counting on local leaders from a variety of different communities, including school boards as another order of government.

I want to be very intentional. When I say, "Order of government," I do that because I know that some people, particularly on the other side, talk about levels, saying that there's one level and then another level and another level, which implies – which was actually articulated by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland – that this government believes there is a hierarchy. They do. They believe they are the subjects of Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals, by inflection upon what they have just said, to draw that continuing connection.

4:50

I have to say that it continues to be the height of hypocrisy for the government to change the argument at a whim at any point in time because they happen to read a poll that they agree with at that moment in time. You know, leadership is about stepping up when times are tough as well as taking credit when times are less tough, but it seems to be that this government has no interest in being there and that Albertans very clearly can't trust them to be there when times are tough. And when times are good, they continue to make times tougher on ordinary families.

So while we could be here debating a bill that actually returned a rate cap for electricity, that found ways to make power bills more affordable, the government seems very keen to try to blame today's bills on decisions that prior governments made instead of the government today and the minister today stepping up and bringing a bill into this House to actually do something to make electricity costs more affordable for ordinary families. And then they seem so intent in question period to try to play word salad, to try to say: oh, well, you say that it's \$50, but it's \$150. You know, like, that does

not pass the nod test for any ordinary person who's struggling to pay a bill that has doubled over the last few months. Many constituents in Edmonton-Glenora and in all parts of this province are raising significant concerns about the lack of affordability, and one of those areas is around power prices.

For the minister responsible to come into this House and say, "Well, people have individual responsibility; they could sign up for a fixed-rate plan" is kind of like last year, when the government said, "Well, individual mayors and reeves and county councillors and municipal councillors can make their own decisions about how to protect their citizens." [interjection] I'm very happy to give way to my colleague.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you for the chance to actually make the intervention on this. It's not surprising to see the government start in this House by bringing in Motion 10 and condemning the federal government in a passion. Their views weren't really different not long ago, three weeks ago. Now they have brought this bill in to take the capacity and the powers away from the elected municipal governments. I just wanted to raise a question. If the member can really expand on why this government is showing the hypocrisy and flip-flopping on this issue. Are they trying to divert attention from people's anger? As I see in communities, people are so angry on the rising cost of utility bills.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much to my colleague for highlighting yet again the lack of trust between what this government is choosing to prioritize and what ordinary families are facing in terms of their immediate pressures. Of course, yes, as was mentioned, utility bills, specifically power bills, are a very big one. Another very big one for a lot of families is the cost at the grocery store. I know many families who say to me: you know, we used to be able to spend . . .

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

#### Point of Order Relevance

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to call a point of order under 23(b)(i). I think there's been a lot of discussion so far today that has gone well beyond the scope of this bill, and I would like to see the member actually get focused on the bill and not relitigating question period or electricity prices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just because we are at second reading, because we are talking about a bill that has really raised a lot of issues of trust in government – I've certainly heard that quite a bit in the responses so far – I don't think this is a point of order. I think that the member is trying to connect these related thoughts at second reading. I look forward to your ruling.

**The Speaker:** This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

#### Debate Continued

**Ms Hoffman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the Member for Calgary-Klein doesn't want me to talk about electricity prices, but that is a significant issue for a lot of Albertans. There, of course, is a relationship to the Municipal Government Act here. We

have a government that's choosing to bring forward amendments to this because they want to, you know, swing a big hammer and claim that they are in the best position to be able to make decisions around individual municipalities' behaviours around bylaws.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But they refuse to do anything to protect individual consumers from the significant price gouging that they are facing as a result of the current government lifting the rate cap and really only caring about profit margins for corporations, not about bank balances for ordinary families that are struggling to make ends meet.

Absolutely, Bill 4, which is an amendment to the Municipal Government Act, could have been prioritized on focusing on finding ways to make life more affordable for ordinary families. Instead, what the government has done is try to create an opportunity for them to force a massive wedge and to create a greater sense of frustration for municipalities and other orders of government. Instead of coming to this place and working to make life better, working to make life more affordable, working to make sure that we are providing quality public health care, something that should be an objective for multiple governments – obviously, there's a federal role under the Canada Health Act but also the provincial government, being responsible for the delivery of health care – and then, of course, working with local partners on the actual administration of that, the government tries to come in here and swing a big hammer and talk about scolding children and spanking them. That is the underlying tone of this legislation as opposed to one of finding common ground and one of finding ways to address the most pressing issues facing Alberta families right now.

Of course, one of those significant issues is around affordability and, specifically, power bills. That is one of the reasons why, instead of bringing in this municipal government amendment act, an act to essentially do what's already been done and try to create a political wedge... [interjection] Happy to cede way to my colleague and give way for his comments.

Thank you.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Member, for the opportunity once again. You talked about the member for Lac Ste. Anne. Is that how we say it?

**Ms Hoffman:** Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Deol:** Parkland. Yes. Thank you.

With the way he described his level of understanding of democracy and the level of institutions and their contributions in a democratic society, I would ask the member to expand on: how concerning is it that none of the government members really differentiated from that statement from the member, not in the House, not publicly, not in the media, and not even during the debate? I would ask the member if she can just really expand on this, how this is really concerning for democracy in this province.

Thank you.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you to my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows. If I'm to think back on my educational training, specifically on opportunities where we were focusing on how to prevent bullying and how to create safe and inclusive school environments, one of the biggest lessons that I remember aspiring teachers being taught was that your silence signals your consent. If you see somebody doing something wrong, if you see somebody behaving in a wrong fashion, whether it's in school, whether it's in the community, whether it's in the Legislature, and you sit back and

you say nothing, you are implying that you consent to that behaviour, that you think that that behaviour is okay.

It really doubles down when somebody uses threatening language towards another elected official – threatening, physical language towards another elected official – and says that they deserve to be spanked. Madam Speaker, it is the height of disrespect, of arrogance, of bullying, and of consenting to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland's language and therefore his intent behind that language. This UCP government is implying and saying, by saying nothing, that they are absolutely fine with the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland threatening physical violence towards other orders of government and, therefore, elected officials. It is...

**An Hon. Member:** Shameful.

**Ms Hoffman:** It is shameful, and it is disrespectful. It does not belong among adult discourse, let alone among the discourse of elected officials. Adults shouldn't speak that way about or to one another. They just shouldn't.

I remember when I was a young child going to school and my dad was my principal. I remember snooping through his desk after school one day, when he was trying to keep me busy while he was working, and finding in the back of one of his drawers the strap. I remember having a conversation with him – we certainly didn't have corporal punishment in our household, and there was a symbol of it in the desk at the school – about why it was that that was there. Because the government hadn't acted yet to end corporal punishment, it was left to individual school divisions. It was. It was really left to individual school divisions to step up, one after another, and say that that behaviour – it is not positive role modelling, when a child is acting up, to hit them. It is not telling them that that's the way that you behave in a civilized society. I will say that the behaviour and the language from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is not positive role modelling. If he wants to say...

5:00

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I'm just going to take the opportunity to maybe refocus your remarks back on the bill instead of members of this Assembly. There's certainly been an adequate amount of time given in that regard. I would just ask that you focus your remarks so that you can stay on this bill and keep order and decorum in this House.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thanks, Madam Speaker. So when members are speaking to legislation and they say things that are highly offensive and disrespectful and threaten violence towards one another, I think that as members of the Assembly, as it relates directly to legislation and the opportunity we have to model good behaviour – and I appreciate your guidance. It should be followed.

I also want to say that other orders of government include school divisions, and while this is specifically about municipal governments, I want to talk about the way that the government has been treating other orders of government, whether it be the federal government, whether it be municipal governments, or whether it be school boards. There is definitely – and I get it. The Premier was very successful in the last election campaign in fighting against the federal government as his primary message to voters – right? – and creating conflict between the provincial and the federal government. I totally get it. He was absolutely given a mandate at that time to fight the federal government on some issues.

He did not say that he was going to fight with municipalities. In fact, the UCP said that they were going to respect the big-city charters, the charters that had been reached with the cities of

Edmonton and Calgary, and then very quickly after the election broke that promise and rescinded that legislation. That was probably the first example where we could have anticipated that we would see further behaviours along this path.

Then the current government decided, again in relationship to municipalities, to not pay their taxes fully – right? – the grants in place of taxes. They just said: “Well, we’ll just cut those grants in half. So be it.” Could you imagine if a regular ratepayer decided that they wanted to cut how much they were paying in tax unilaterally, with just: “I’m only going to pay half my property tax this year. I know the government is jacking up my educational property taxes, but I’m only going to pay half of what it was last year. I’m not going to actually pay what the assessment is for this year.” That simply wouldn’t pass, and that’s because, through you, Madam Speaker, through the Municipal Government Act we have a delineation of authority and powers, and it should be up to every order of government to respect the orders and powers of other orders of government.

When I think about the complete lack of respect shown to democratically elected school boards in the province of Alberta when they are given the task of creating, for example, their capital plans and submitting their needs assessment for what they believe is necessary to provide a quality education to the students registered in that school district – it flows from legislation very much modelled on the Municipal Government Act. It flows from the School Act – right? – and the Education Act to be able to guide the local, elected, closest to the ground on those specific issues politicians in working with administration to create a nonbiased, evidence-based submission. Of course, what we’ve seen under the current government is a complete refusal to fund the vast majority of those projects that were submitted based on a needs assessment and criteria that the government helps work to set and establish when they’re communicating to their partners, what should be their partners, local school authorities.

For example, again in the city of Edmonton we’ve seen a refusal to fund any public school projects at all. I am relieved that there are at least two for the Catholic school board, but that certainly isn’t anywhere near enough projects for a city growing at our rate. With the Edmonton public school board seeing their enrolment grow at the highest rate right now in the country, for the province that says that they honour choice to refuse to actually give that same level of appreciation, respect, and capacity to a board seeing such growth pressures I think again speaks to this current provincial UCP government’s complete lack of respect for local government.

Again, here through the municipal government amendment act we have yet another piece of legislation that speaks exactly to how the UCP can’t be trusted to keep their word, full stop. [interjection] To my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie, please. Or Edmonton-Meadows, rather. My apologies.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Member, once again for the opportunity to raise my concern. In the last year the Premier basically abdicated his responsibility. He was looking at the municipalities and said that public health decisions – and I’ll quote: these decisions are best taken locally. That was the Premier’s view. The Premier encouraged municipalities to implement their own health measures due to diverse needs across the province. But a year later, when the Premier is taking a 180-degree turn, it seems to be more to do with UCP politics instead of really serving Albertans or for the sake of the safety of everyday Albertans. I would appreciate it if the member can expand on this, taking a U-turn from what the Premier believed in last year and what he is doing now.

Thank you.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much to the member for the question. Certainly, one of the things that I look at regularly – and I’m sure many Albertans do – is modelling and data and tracking trends, and I think that we were all hopeful a few weeks ago that we would see a significant decline in the rate of infections and spread. We have seen a bit of a decline, but I will say that the rate isn’t anywhere near as rapid a pace as the increase was that led to the current rates.

Thank you to the member for highlighting the discrepancy between the Premier’s words and actions during this public health crisis over time. Some people have said that they are concerned – and I would love to have clarification from the government if that’s not the case – that one of the reasons why the provincial government has decided to push a one-size-fits-all model is because they don’t want there to be regional differences between the data to show that the government could have done more to protect citizens if there are huge spikes in some parts of the province and not in others, because, of course, if you uniform behaviour, then you can’t have local analysis based on intermunicipal jurisdictional behaviours and how that impacts the data.

I know that the government has made a number of decisions to try to make it more and more difficult for people to have the information; for example, how difficult it is right now to actually get a PCR test when at the very beginning, when cases were a fraction of what they are today, we were all able to get PCR tests if we had any concerns, whether we were a close contact or not, whether we were symptomatic or not. The government at that time, about 20 months ago, decided that they wanted to have Albertans have as much individual information as possible with their own personal health, and at that time one of the arguments was that individual Albertans can make decisions about how to support themselves, support their families, support their communities, and protect one another.

This government has worked so aggressively to try to reduce the amount of information that individuals have and therefore their ability to make informed individual decisions, right? You hear it from comments like the one just given from the Minister of Culture, where he doesn’t hear what municipal leaders are saying generally; he notices whether or not they’re wearing masks, right? That’s the comment, that because the mayor of Edmonton took off his mask when he sat down with him, he respects him. Like, the language and the duality of saying, “It’s about individual choice and individual responsibility” but then saying, “I respect somebody because of their behaviour and how they interacted with me given the fact that we said that it’s individual choice and responsibility, and therefore he chose to follow my lead” just isn’t respectful of the role of individuals. Again, it’s individuals who comprise local municipal governments.

We are debating Bill 4, the municipal government amendment act. I have to say that the fact that the government continues to try to stay on a path of division . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon to join debate and talk about legislation that’s been brought forward to the House. Always excited to talk about what the legislation says, what the legislation doesn’t say but, more importantly, what is being said about that legislation that’s tabled before us and how it governs debate. As you can imagine, throughout the debate this afternoon I’ve been taking notes and listening very, very carefully to what everybody is saying, and I hate to say this. As usual, what I’m finding is that what’s being said



about the legislation isn't quite lining up, which – I hate to say it – tends to be not only a consistent but a persistent problem by the government.

5:10

I think that what I will start my comments with on Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 – it appears to me that this piece of legislation is a solution that is frantically looking for a problem to try to solve. Now, you're probably wondering why I'm saying that, Madam Speaker. One of the comments that I heard just a little bit earlier from the Minister of Culture was talking about how it seems that the municipalities have moved on. Well, if that is indeed true, if the municipalities have moved on, why hasn't the government? Why hasn't the government moved on? That means: why are we busy with Bill 4 if the municipalities have moved on? That part of it isn't quite lining up.

Some of the other things that I heard – and I appreciate the minister of gas bringing forward the comments from the Minister of Municipal Affairs to open up a debate. One of the things that concerned me on that was, you know, hearing that – and I'm paraphrasing here; I'm sure it's not exactly accurate – the government is not interested in infringing on municipalities unless absolutely necessary. I always love these little catch-all phrases that get put in all over the place and things because it allows for that one little moment in time where, if you really do want to infringe on them, then all you have to do is come up with a reason for it to be necessary. I'm curious, you know: who decides what's necessary in terms of infringing upon those? [interjection] I see my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, and I'm happy to let her intervene for a moment.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member. I want to follow up on what I believe you were just about to comment on, which was, you know: what really is the precedent that this is setting, right? I think that's what we were hearing very much from the president of the Alberta Municipalities and from many other local councillors. The provincial government has decided that when it sees fit, without consulting with municipalities, without actually speaking to the diversity of people around the province who may have different views on this but particularly the local councillors who are on the ground and understand what's happening in their communities – does this not now open up the potential that any time they want to, the provincial government or this provincial government, let's be clear, will intervene and amend the act and that even when it's no longer necessary, for example like right now, they're flexing their power to sort of show, "We will always impose our views upon your local constituents"? That is a precedent that I think is deeply concerning to all of us. I'd love to hear the member's comments on that.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Just a quick intervention that even interventions are to be directed through the chair.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll make sure to direct the answer through the chair as well. No. Thank you for that, and, yeah, you did. You kind of read my mind as to where I was going around that because, you know, I'm sure, just like the government caucus members who attended the Alberta Municipalities and were chatting with the municipal leaders – I, of course, did so as well, and that was one of the things that came up in conversation. I mean, their president, the one that municipalities have duly elected, had said: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal

piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. Again, things aren't adding up. I'm hearing: well, we're consulting with municipalities. The president just said that you weren't on this. So which is it? Are you consulting, or aren't you consulting? Are you making it up, or what's going on here?

When I had the opportunity to speak with municipal leaders, that was one of the things they kind of pointed out: "Okay; we understand you're maybe doing it for this, but then what's next? Are you willing to take it further, or is this just, really, kind of the end of it?" Like I said, going back to the opening comments of second reading in this debate, when we heard that the government is not interested in infringing on municipalities unless it becomes necessary, again I'll reiterate: who decides what is necessary, and how far are you willing to go? Again, it's that little bit of troubling piece of information.

When I think of that, also one of the comments brought up in the opening part was around how this bill is very limited in scope. Of course, I'm always one to go through the language and see, again, what it's saying, what it isn't saying, things like that. When I hear about this, limited in scope, I can't help but have to direct people to page 2 of Bill 4, right at the top. Of course, it starts over here on page 1, "an individual to wear a face mask," but it goes on to say, you know, "the spread of COVID-19." Now, here's the catch-all phrase that everybody just loves to throw in there as their little rip cord, their chance to hit the ejection seat and get out of what they're saying, "... or any other communicable disease, as defined in the Public Health Act."

So really what you're saying is that this isn't just about COVID-19. This is about whatever else that shows up in the Public Health Act as a communicable disease, and if you decide that it's necessary, you will overrule municipalities. Again, it's that standard, catch-all phrase that just allows you the chance to get out of things. I hate to say it. When you say that it's very limited in scope, the language in the legislation says otherwise. Again, it's always that head-butting of things. I think the concern that we're hearing from municipal leaders – and I'm sure we're probably going to hear the same from the rural Alberta municipalities as well, from their leaders – is: what's next? What else could come up?

My colleagues have certainly gone on at length about some comments that were made about municipalities. I'm just going to leave it at: that is unprofessional. These are duly elected leaders by the people of Alberta, the same ones that elect all of us. To come up with comments like that is simply unprofessional, and you need to do better, not to mention any of the other stuff.

You know, my good friend from Calgary-Buffalo, who is also the critic for Municipal Affairs, when he was talking a little bit about how this was supposedly a government that was built by the grassroots, run by the grassroots, things like that – I couldn't help but catch that comment a little bit earlier. I hate to say it, but your actions over the past couple of years clearly have said otherwise. It sounds like the grassroots just got – you know when you're mowing your lawn, Madam Speaker, and you catch a dip in the lawn, and the lawn mower falls down and just shaves that grass, like, right off down to the dirt? It seems like that's kind of what's happened with your grassroots. You've kind of shaved it right off, and it's right down to the dirt. These heavy-handed approaches, like we're seeing here in Bill 4, speak something different than what you're saying is actually going on.

You know, when it comes to trying to build the province of Alberta, when you're trying to create a strong team, fighting with your partners does not make that job any easier, and if anything, for every step that you try to take forward, you end up taking two steps back. Again, kind of going back to the unprofessional comments that I was talking about a little bit earlier, if you want to be able to

build that relationship with municipal leaders so that they trust you, you have to be involved with them as partners, not just seeing them as some lower level of government. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:20

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Member. You've touched on so many things, and one of the things that just spurred me to jump up there was your comment about lack of trust. It seems to me – maybe it's the former social studies and English teacher in me – that we can see a theme arising of lack of trust in this government, and I think you and I and any of our colleagues on this side of the House who've been talking to Albertans are hearing that a lot as well, right? While Albertans are struggling with so many things – paying their bills is an example – they've got a government that they simply can't trust to do the right thing to address these issues. I would love for the Member for Edmonton-Decore to just talk a little bit more about this and expand a little bit on the lack of trust that Albertans are expressing in this government. This bill, Bill 4, is just one of countless examples, in fact, that we're seeing from this government. If I had more time – well, it's true that I'll be able to speak to this bill shortly to just talk about some of these grave examples of mistrust in this government.

Thank you.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yeah. Thank you for that question. Again, it's funny how it always comes back to legislation presented: what does it say, what doesn't it say, and what are you saying about that? You know, I always see the government standing up and saying how they're trying to make the lives of Albertans better, trying to make it more affordable. If you're trying to make it better, then why would you bring forward, say, for instance, legislation that would change who's controlling their pensions, just as one example? Or perhaps you start to bring forward red tape legislation that reduces an Albertan's ability to be as safe as possible in the workplace. I'm referring to changes around health and safety committees. We've certainly had this argument before, how, like I said, the worker at the ice cream plant can't tell the worker how to work safely at the milk plant.

You see these examples of, you know, things being said to make their lives more affordable, yet it's becoming more expensive. I mean, a quick example of that, Madam Speaker, would be all of a sudden charging them to go to a park that they've never had to be charged before to attend. To more directly answer that question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, it's those kinds of things that people see, and it doesn't add up to them. So you start to see this distrust.

I mean, for that matter, Madam Speaker, I could go all the way back to the very beginning of the 30th Legislature, you know, even before that, when the Premier promised Albertans that he would disclose his donor list from the leadership. That hasn't happened. That shakes trust in people. You've promised to do that. You said, "I will disclose this," and then you don't, and then you wonder why people distrust you.

Here you have a bill that is interfering with municipal leaders' abilities to make local decisions in their area. You're starting to interfere with that. I should point out something that I know this government has been very vocal and disdaining about, what they feel has been an infringement from the federal government on their ability to be able to do things. Yet all of a sudden now it's rolling downhill, and you have the province doing that to municipalities. Again, I will point out that it's that case of trust where you have these elected representatives, as I mentioned, who said: well, it's funny; I didn't hear anything until the bill hit the table. That shakes

trust. Then you have a situation where it's very, very hard to work with these democratically elected individuals in order to move the lives of Albertans forward in a positive and growing way.

I guess, as I was saying a little bit earlier, in order to do that, the last thing you want to be doing is starting to pick fights. We've seen this throughout the last several years, where the government seems content on picking fights with, well, quite frankly, just about everybody. It's getting hard-pressed to be able to find somebody that they're not picking a fight with. You know, we saw the government picking fights with doctors, and we saw them picking fights with nurses, and then we saw them picking fights with chiropractors and physiotherapists around removing their ability to order diagnostic imaging so that their patients could get timely and effective care. So it's not surprising that even when I'm in my chiropractor's office, I hear from residents that are saying: this wasn't what I signed up for. These are your supporters telling me: this isn't what I signed up for.

Now they have something like Bill 4, that's interfering with the ability of these municipal leaders, voted for by these individuals, all of our individuals, saying: well, we don't like that decision. We're surprised, as we've heard in some of the comments during opening and a couple of other times, you know: how far else will this end up going? What's the next thing that's going to come up? Yet there seems to be almost some surprise as to why that thinking is there. I mean, this isn't original thinking on my part; this is just what I've heard from people and from leaders. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you to the member. I'm curious. I find it kind of interesting, because I know the member referenced the fact, you know, of hearing from local municipal leaders. I'm certain every member in this – well, I know that every member in this Assembly, of course, represents areas that also have local representation, and therefore they must also be hearing from local councillors on these issues. I'm wondering, through you, Madam Speaker, whether or not the member could speak to perhaps his surprise that none of the government members are standing up and speaking out against what is clearly a limit on local authority. I seem to recall that that seems to be a primary tenet of much of traditional conservative ideology – it certainly has been abandoned wholeheartedly by this government, this idea of support for the grassroots and the local representatives – yet we're hearing no members of the government caucus stand up and speak for the rights of local representatives.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Yeah. Thanks for that question. I mean, I guess I'm sounding like a broken record here a little bit, Madam Speaker, but again referencing just one example that we all know – it's public; it's out there – the president of Alberta Municipalities: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. So what is it? Is she accurate, or did you not hear it, or something else? There's at least one example out there. I know there are more. I was in the room. I heard it for myself. It's kind of like when our offices, our e-mails get bombarded from, you know, all kinds of different areas of the province and we're all CCed on things. I find it very, very difficult to believe that not one single member of the government or government caucus has heard from a municipal leader that Bill 4 is not a great idea. If indeed they're all happy go lucky and heading off into the future, why aren't you guys, then?

5:30

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this bill on behalf of my constituents, Bill 4, Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I will say at the beginning of my comments that I do strongly oppose this bill.

This is another day and yet another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier and they cannot trust this UCP government. The reasons are obvious. It was not long ago, just last year, when Albertans were expecting leadership from this Premier on very similar issues that the Premier and the UCP government are claiming to address under this bill, the safety of our constituents and the safety of Albertans. That was then. The Premier said that public health decisions are best taken locally, the Premier encouraging municipalities to step up to implement their own health measures due to the diverse needs across the province. Those were the Premier's exact words and the reasoning the Premier was giving behind his statement. A year after, the government is totally and directly contradicting themselves from that exact view by taking decision-making powers away from municipalities and locally elected leaders.

Local municipal leaders are, similarly, elected by their constituents, as we are in the provincial Legislature, for their mandates. It was more disturbing to see the way the government House member tried to express his feelings or tried to support the bill, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland constituency, saying that municipalities are children, not elected governments but children, of the provincial government and that they deserve to be spanked.

Many read this statement – and I was looking for the information where I would encourage the member to really go back and look at this. He really needs to develop his understanding on what he was proposing. An article published in the *Atlantic*: How Spanking Affects Later Relationships by James Hamblin. I'll just read a small excerpt of the article.

For years, the American Academy of Pediatrics has been warning against spanking, and many countries have laws against it. A 2007 UN convention has said corporal punishment violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects children from "all forms of physical or mental violence," and should be banned in all contexts. Psychologist Alan Kazdin, the director of the Yale Parenting Center and former president of the American Psychological Association, has admonished that spanking is "a horrible thing that does not work." It predicts later academic and health problems: Adults who were spanked as children "regularly die at a younger age of cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses."

This is the article. It goes on and on. They do also study around this issue, how it contributes to family violence and child human rights.

I'm so surprised the member did not only jump to explain his view and explain this very piece of legislation we are discussing in this House, but none of the government House members just, you know, differed from that member's view even through second reading of this bill as well. [interjection] Oh, thank you. I'll give way in the intervention to the hon. member for the north Edmonton constituency.

**Member Irwin:** Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Deol:** Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Thank you.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you. It is a long riding name.

Yeah. You know, I just wanted to jump up on the Member for Edmonton-Meadows' concerns about, which many of us have raised today, the incredibly disrespectful – "disrespectful" doesn't even seem like a strong enough word – comments from Lac Ste.

Anne-Parkland. While we've heard a bit of heckling from the other side, we've not, as that member said, had any of them stand up and either defend or apologize for those remarks. Always the optimist, I'm hopeful that someone from that side will stand up and join debate. They're so passionate about this bill; it's strange that they're oddly silent about it. I would just love the member to speak a little bit more about the just absolute lack of respect from that member and what message comments like those send to Albertans. Yeah, as he was . . . [Member Irwin's speaking time expired]

Yeah. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I'll take this opportunity for my own intervention before this debate starts to become about a member in this House and not the bill at hand. I can appreciate and I hope that every member in this House appreciates the wide latitude which has been given in that regard, but those are the cautions that I have for you while you continue your debate.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for giving me the opportunity to expand on some of the information as I was already actually focusing on these very disturbing views. It's very, you know, sad, I would say, to see, when we are discussing a very important piece of legislation, how that is going to affect the democratic powers of the elected governments, the members of this House, the government members, tried to explain it to very – I don't know. I'm struggling to find a reasonable word for that.

I know Madam Speaker has warned us to stick to the purview of this bill, but I respectfully, through Madam Speaker, wanted to say that we absolutely do not have intentions to bring, you know, how to say – to divert from the intentions and the proposals of this bill that we are discussing in the House, but those comments are seriously troubling. I've seen that the government House members participated in the debate on this bill – we are debating this bill in second reading – but it's very troubling to see that I'm not seeing any member coming up with the improved level of understanding of what this bill exactly is proposing, how this bill is going to affect the governing of the local governments and the relationship between the provincial government and the local governments. Instead, the member stood in public and made comments in public. As of today it still seems like the government House members support those views if they do not deflect, if they do not differentiate from that member's view, and that is very, very troubling for me.

5:40

You know, I never claim, myself, to be a hundred per cent; it's a learning curve. We all learn something new every day. The views that were expressed by this House member are very sad for not only government members but all House members if we do not really, you know, come, stand up, and condemn those views and ask the members to go back and please help yourself and get some better understanding of the views he proposed when he was supporting this bill.

I will try to stay on the bill, what exactly this bill is proposing. These powers this bill is trying to weigh currently exist under municipal authorities, but now the Premier is directly targeting them first. That is obvious. This is happening due to a clear political reason. We all know that April 9 was not the date; April 9 was really decided under pressure and what's happening within the governing party, and this bill specifically is introduced in this House to continue to help gain support for the Premier's coming meeting. We have seen the pattern. We have seen the information for the past many months that is continued on the decline, that every single

information keeps coming: the Premier is struggling to get Albertans' trust, the way he dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic for the past two years, and the way he's still dealing the Alberta Health orders and the way . . . [interjection] I will give it to my hon. member for – I will say the constituency this time.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Just really quickly, hon. member, there is no need for you to remember the other member's riding name. You can just simply make way.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just remembered. I was going to say – thank you for your help, anyway.

**The Deputy Speaker:** It will be easier.

**Member Irwin:** Well, it is Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I will say it proudly every time until he masters it. [interjection] Again, I'm hopeful that Cardston-Siksika will stand up and join debate if he's so very passionate over there heckling me. Again, it's very odd to hear such silence from this government when they claim to be passionate about this bill, apparently, so hopefully they will stand up and join debate.

What was I even talking about now? Yes. The member mentioned trust. As I shared with the Member for Edmonton-Decore, there seems to be a theme emerging here with this government, and it's about lack of trust. We're hearing that. We are all, believe it or not, out on the doors and talking to folks across Alberta, not just in our own ridings. I've been in a few of your ridings, in fact, and people are talking about the lack of trust in this incompetent government. I would love for the Member for Edmonton-Meadows to talk a little bit more about just how the actions outlined here in Bill 4 lead to further mistrust in this government.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Member, once again, and thank you, Madam Speaker, for your help. You know, I know it's not mandatory to remember your colleague's riding, but I think this is good practice, to remember your fellow colleague's riding if you can. I will just keep working on it.

I just wanted to read this statement, views coming from Alberta Municipalities' president Cathy Heron, what she said to the media: we're concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. This is a key word; I will repeat it again: Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. Why didn't the government consult, pick up the phone instead of picking fights? What other measures is this government considering in their war with the municipalities?

We have seen this pattern since the UCP government took office in 2019. I wanted to reframe to say why government could learn from their own things, why this government even ended up having three different municipal ministers in three years. There is miscommunication. There is a disconnect. What the Premier said during the election – this is the Premier who signed the grassroots guarantee. He may be the only political leader – I don't know of any political leader in the history of, you know, provincial elections or the province's political history that has signed the grassroots guarantee in their campaign by promising Albertans how he will always respect their fundamental rights, and now under this very Premier and the UCP government municipalities actually witnessed attack after attack, attack after attack.

When it comes to taxes, you know, they forced municipalities to raise property taxes in many ways to even keep their services ongoing, and a number of municipalities stood up and said, like, that it's not even possible for themselves. The way this provincial government has been dealing and treating those municipalities, to keep the municipal status,

the municipalities are forced to increase taxes in billions of dollars, and the students in municipalities are facing skyrocketing tuition fees and increased interest rates. The student debt in this province is going to be historic under this UCP government.

We have seen in this budget, that is still under discussion, that's still going to be voted on, that government did not even deliver near, not even close to, not even 5 per cent of what the municipalities were asking this government to support in order to have their projects going, in order to have those municipal governments able to serve their own constituents under the mandate they were elected on. We have seen the municipalities lose 33 per cent on MSI, and we have seen the municipalities come in with added telephone user fees, and that was the government that promised they will – actually, I think they are doing it. They said that they will treat municipalities differently, but hopefully that didn't mean that government is treating differently – I'm sure that it didn't mean, but now truly the actions speak louder than . . .

5:50

**The Deputy Speaker:** The bell is not working, but your time is up, hon. member. A glitch.

The hon. Member – this is why I get you guys not to remember the names – for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues who have taken the time to speak at second reading of Bill 4, municipal government amendment act. I'd also like to note the quiet response and lack of advocacy for this bill from the government members.

In fact, that's actually what I'd like to target my comments to today because I think that when I look at Bill 4, which is designed to basically revoke the powers of municipalities to make decisions on public health for their own constituents, what's remarkable about this action at this time in particular is that once again, I believe, not only are the Premier but also his caucus members hoping that the hypocrisy and flip-flopping that they have taken will not be noticed. They're hoping perhaps that Albertans will have forgotten – in fact, I'm going to bet that they're counting on Albertans forgetting – about the way they've handled COVID from the very beginning when it comes to the next election. I think that's the only way that they can hope for re-election, that Albertans will completely have amnesia and forget how they've conducted themselves, but many Albertans, most Albertans, especially those who have had, unfortunately, the tragedy of having lost a member of their family to COVID or someone in their community or a colleague, certainly won't forget.

One of the things that I remember and many Albertans will remember is that during the second wave of the pandemic, in late 2020, this Premier was the last Premier of any province of Canada to bring in a provincial mask mandate despite the fact that every other province was doing it and that public health officials were calling for it and doctors were calling for it. This Premier stood his ground and dug in his heels and refused to bring in a provincial mask mandate well past the time when everybody knew that it was absolutely required to get those numbers under control, and the basis for that argument was because of the local interests of local communities. He said: municipalities across the province were affected differently, and they should be allowed to make those decisions. He was very clear on abdicating his responsibility to lead during a public health crisis by putting that down onto local municipalities. In fact, he said: this is a very, very big and diverse province, and every local municipality should be making that decision on their own. That was his rationale for doing that.

Now here we are, two years later, and all of a sudden the Premier – we're not surprised at this point that the Premier changes his mind

depending on the way the political winds are blowing – doesn't care about local municipalities.

But what I am surprised about, Madam Speaker, is that there were a number of MLAs in the government caucus who signed letters, who spoke to the importance of: "Let's not have province-wide health requirements because certain regions were affected differently. My constituency was affected differently. Make sure those rules don't apply to me because it's different out here in rural Alberta. It's different out here in my community." They resisted. They signed letters. They spoke out. There was all the knifing each other that was happening – it's still happening to this day in this caucus – from government members who were insisting upon defending the rights of their local municipalities and regions to make their own decisions.

But now all of a sudden those same MLAs are quiet. Now all of a sudden they don't seem to have an issue with the Premier imposing his views on their local constituents. What's remarkably clear is that principles do not guide the decision-making of this government. They do not only not decide the decision-making; they don't even guide the day-to-day actions of the caucus members on that side. They seem to be guided just by their own political interest at the time. When it suits their purpose, local decision-making is the number one issue that drove them into politics. I seem to remember the Member for Peace River saying that local decision-making was so important, yet silence from the government caucus in defending local decision-making right now. In fact, they seem to be very happily throwing their local municipal councillors, their city councillors under the bus and saying: you're children.

Now, let me be clear. I don't know why the members on that side can't seem to do it, but I completely renounce the statements made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I don't actually even think that needs to be discussed anymore. It's so abhorrent a statement that we should all be able to say that. We on this side of the House have no problem saying that. It seems to be a problem for the government members.

When I think about this government's position now, that apparently we need all this consistency, the Premier says – I had to take phone calls and conversations. I know many of my colleagues had to do that with school board officials, for example, who were left hung out to dry during successive waves of this pandemic by this government, who refused to provide any clear direction on how they should handle things. They were left on their own – how many school years? At least two school years began with almost no supports from this government.

I remember school board trustees saying to me that they were having to field questions from parents about: "Should we wear masks? Should we not wear masks?" And they were saying: "I'm a school board trustee. I was elected to implement local education programs that meet the needs of my constituents, and I can't get an answer from this government." They did, though. They did their best. They managed the interests of their students, of their teachers, of their parents, and they tried to guide a way for the community that they served through the pandemic. Now this government is saying: oh, well, we don't trust local decision-making.

This is very clear, Madam Speaker, that this bill is only about politics. It's only about the leadership review of the Premier. Once again, just like every other decision that has been made by this government through this pandemic, it has not been driven by evidence. It has not been driven by data. It hasn't been driven by consultation with those who are most affected and those who are most knowledgeable. It's been driven by politics, which is why the trust is broken, which is why when this Premier stood up and said he was going to be listening to . . . [interjection] No, thank you.

**Mr. Schow:** I'm trying to participate.

**Ms Pancholi:** No means no. I know that's a difficult concept for the male members of that caucus to understand. [interjections]

## Speaker's Ruling Language Creating Disorder

**The Deputy Speaker:** You have to withdraw.

**Ms Pancholi:** I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** And apologize.

**Ms Pancholi:** No. I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, perhaps we're maybe halfway there. We could make it all the way there and continue on with debate, or we will debate a point of order.

**Ms Pancholi:** I apologize and withdraw for the sentiments of the members across the way. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** So concluded. Hon. member, please proceed with your remarks.

## Debate Continued

**Ms Pancholi:** As I was saying . . . [interjections]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, only the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor. That should be the voice that I hear in the debate. If you have something to say about the rules and the debate in this House, you may stand on your feet and call a point of order, and we can have . . . [interjections] Order. If members wish to have conversations with one another, perhaps this Assembly is not the place to do it. The member has apologized and withdrawn her remarks, and it has been accepted. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor and a very short time left.

Please proceed.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, I sincerely hope that the members of the government caucus will stand up for what I believe they claimed are principles that they have and stand up for local decision-making. If that were the case, these government members should have no problem standing up and saying that they reject this government bill. Instead, we can't even hear them actually defend this bill. Instead, they're willing to throw local decision-makers under the bus to make public health decisions in the abdication of responsibility that they've shown throughout successive waves of this pandemic. They've downloaded that onto school boards. They've downloaded onto municipalities.

Now they stand up and they say that those members of local government cannot be trusted. That is insulting not only to those officials, who have been managing through a very difficult pandemic, but it's insulting to Albertans to think that once again this government cannot be trusted. They cannot be trusted. They don't mean what they say, and they don't say what they mean. They only say what they need to say to win leadership reviews, local nomination races maybe, the things that they need to do, that they think they need to say to get re-elected, but they don't run on principle. That is what we have all been suffering through over the last few months of this pandemic, Madam Speaker. I look forward to an opportunity where Albertans are treated with the respect that they deserve by a government that actually runs on principles.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the clock strikes 6. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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