



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 21, 2022

Day 12

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)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
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

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Jason Kenney	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
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
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Transportation
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
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

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 21, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd now like to call committee to order.

Hon. members, prior to beginning, the chair will outline the process for this evening. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs of the legislative policy committees to report on their meetings with the various ministries under their mandate. No vote is required when these reports are presented.

Members are reminded that there was an amendment introduced during a legislative policy committee meeting, so the committee will vote on the proposed amendment. The committee will then proceed to the vote on the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly, and the vote on the main estimates will then take place.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3), which provides that after the first division is called during Committee of Supply, the interval between the division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent divisions.

Committee Reports

The Chair: I would now like to call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future to present the committee's report. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2022 to 2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: Ministry of Advanced Education; Ministry of Culture and Status of Women; Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation; Ministry of Labour and Immigration; Ministry of Infrastructure; and Executive Council.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to present the committee's report. The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I'm filling in for the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10), I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2022-2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Children's Services, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, and the Ministry of Service Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report the committee has reviewed the 2022-2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development; Ministry of Energy; Ministry of Environment and Parks; Ministry of Indigenous Relations; Ministry of Municipal Affairs; Ministry of Transportation; and Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

I'd also like to table amendments to the following ministries which were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: Ministry of Energy, one amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Vote on Main Estimates 2022-23

The Chair: The next item of business is the vote on the amendment introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings. The amendment will have been identified as amendment A1. Members should have a copy on their desks.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:34 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Hoffman	Nielsen
Deol	Irwin	Shepherd
Gray		

7:50

Against the motion:

Aheer	Madu	Sawhney
Allard	McIver	Schow
Copping	Nally	Schulz
Frey	Neudorf	Shandro
Gotfried	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Issik	Orr	Turton
Jones	Panda	van Dijken
LaGrange	Savage	Yao

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that these estimates be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters relating to the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly	\$173,455,000
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The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, please say aye.

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Madu	Sawhney
Allard	McIver	Schow
Copping	Nally	Schulz
Frey	Neudorf	Shandro
Gotfried	Nicolaides	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Toews
Issik	Orr	Turton
Jones	Panda	van Dijken
LaGrange	Savage	Yao

Against the motion:

Ceci	Hoffman	Pancholi
Deol	Irwin	Shepherd
Gray	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 8
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[Motion carried]

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I would now like to invite the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund.

Mr. Schow: Well, Madam Chair, you took the words right out of my mouth. I do move that the committee rise and report the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023 have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: support of the Legislative Assembly, \$71,858,000; office of the Auditor General, \$27,455,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$4,019,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$45,224,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$976,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$7,441,000;

office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$15,259,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,223,000.

Government main estimates.

Advanced Education: expense, \$2,545,525,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$980,100,000.

Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: expense, \$639,200,000; capital investment, \$11,096,000; financial transactions, \$1,310,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$2,066,316,000; capital investment, \$7,500,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$3,949,317,000; capital investment, \$547,000.

Culture and Status of Women: expense, \$260,123,000; capital investment, \$2,331,000; financial transactions, \$2,093,000.

Education: expense, \$5,007,471,000; capital investment, \$565,000; financial transactions, \$18,117,000.

Energy: expense, \$551,832,000; capital investment, \$500,000; financial transactions, \$96,970,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$584,695,000; capital investment, \$93,891,000; financial transactions, \$4,019,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$18,680,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Health: expense, \$22,421,131,000; capital investment, \$25,276,000; financial transactions, \$84,976,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$181,394,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$441,442,000; capital investment, \$1,879,397,000; financial transactions, \$25,473,000.

Jobs, Economy and Innovation: expense, \$468,335,000; capital investment, \$2,625,000; financial transactions, \$25,000,000.

8:00

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$1,409,975; capital investment, \$23,207,000.

Labour and Immigration: expense, \$325,057,000; capital investment \$1,050,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense \$980,338,000; capital investment, \$3,009,000; financial transactions, \$4,764,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$665,285,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$19,700,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$675,515,000; capital investment, \$95,334,000; financial transactions, \$5,500,000.

Transportation: expense, \$1,613,985,000; capital investment, \$1,547,799,000; financial transactions, \$126,679,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$218,271,000; capital investment, \$25,000; contingency, \$1,750,000,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022. This being a money

bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The bill requests a total of \$45 billion from the general revenue fund so that the government may meet its funding commitments as laid out in the 2022-23 government estimates.

Additionally, the bill requests a total of \$173 million to cover the Legislative Assembly's expense for the year as detailed in the offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates. The bill also includes \$3.7 billion for capital investment, \$1.4 billion for financial transactions, and \$1.75 billion for contingencies.

I ask all my colleagues in the Assembly to support this bill to move Alberta forward to a brighter and more prosperous future. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

Committee of Supply

(continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Before we commence consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to briefly review the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) applies, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak . . .
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes. Provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 14, approved by the Assembly on March 17, 2022, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates. I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. When passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in voted expense funding and \$1 million in voted capital investment.

These estimates include additional funding to the following offices and government departments: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Children's Services, Culture and Status of Women, Energy, Health, and Municipal Affairs. The funding in Bill 8 will help cover the health care costs of the pandemic, provide aid and equipment to Ukraine, give rebates to Albertans struggling with electricity costs, support child care workers and parents of young children, and build municipal infrastructure.

The supplementary estimates report the additional funding needed for the government's fiscal plan in 2021-22. Some of the items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are offset by savings in other areas, meaning that the overall increase to the deficit forecast for 2021-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million. While these supplementary estimates reflect a modest increase in spending, it's important to note that the government has taken significant steps to get the province's finances back in order.

Our government was elected on a platform committed to responsible fiscal management, and to that end we established three fiscal anchors to inform policy and guide decision-making. The first anchor was getting our per capita spending in line with comparator provinces, and I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight that we've made considerable progress in that regard. In 2019, when we took office, as per the MacKinnon report, we inherited a government that on a per capita basis spent \$10 billion more per year than similar provinces. Moreover, the previous government's operating spending was increasing by 4 per cent per year. Had we stayed on this trajectory, many of the programs and services essential to Albertans would simply have become unsustainable and out of reach.

Over the last three years we've brought that 4 per cent annual operating expense increase down to less than half a per cent per year, and if we exclude health spending increases of nearly 2 per cent, our operating spending has essentially remained flat over the term. As a result, beginning in the next fiscal year our costs to deliver government services will be within the range of comparator provinces. We will no longer be an expensive outlier, and that is tremendous news for our province and the sustainability of the programs and services we provide for all Albertans.

The government also established an anchor, committing to keep Alberta's net debt to GDP ratio below 30 per cent. Abiding by this principle preserves our net financial position or, in other words, ensures a strong balance sheet. Our projections for the net debt to GDP ratio have continually improved over the course of this fiscal year. In Budget 2021 the ratio was estimated to be 24.5 per cent, but with an improving fiscal picture, it's now forecast to be 18.3 per cent at the end of this fiscal year. Alberta has one of the lowest net debt to GDP ratios in the nation, and our responsible fiscal management will maintain that strong position. With increased economic and fiscal capacity and by maintaining fiscal discipline in our spending decisions, our fiscal future as a province is vastly improved, the positive effect of which is significant and tangible for Albertans today and is of exponential value for the Alberta of tomorrow.

The largest supplementary amount in the estimates belongs to Health. An additional \$726 million will help cover the health care costs of the pandemic. This funding will go towards lab testing, contact tracing, rapid test kits, continuing care, acute care, vaccine deployment, and personal protective equipment. While the costs of the pandemic have been greater than anticipated, the government has spared no expense in keeping Albertans safe. I'd like to note that Budget 2022 will provide further funding above and beyond what's in this bill to build the health care system Albertans need by expanding capacity, adding ICU beds, and addressing surgical

backlogs. These are important steps to improve Albertans' health outcomes and make our province and economy more resilient to system-wide challenges.

8:10

The next largest expense in the estimates comes from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The amount of \$231.2 million is related to federal funding under the Canada community-building fund and will be distributed to municipalities.

The supplementary amount for Children's Services is also related to funding from the federal government. The bill includes a total of \$134.7 million for child care subsidies and worker supports under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. The bill also includes a capital investment of \$1 million to provide information technology for child care initiatives, and this is also federally funded.

Aside from helping the province administer federal funding for child care and municipal infrastructure, the bill will also help the provincial government provide \$150 in electricity rebates to over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses. We've heard the concerns of many Albertans facing high electricity bills due to the carbon tax and other factors, and this bill will help the government provide real, tangible relief. The bill includes a supplementary amount of \$96.3 million for the Department of Energy, which will go towards a total of \$300 million for the utility consumer support electricity rebate program.

While Alberta is not immune to the rising cost of living, the government is striving to ensure that this province is a more affordable place to live than virtually any other Canadian jurisdiction. Due in no small part to our competitive business environment, Albertans earn more than Canadians in any other province, and this is true in both the energy and nonenergy sectors. Albertans also have some of the lowest home prices and rents among Canadian urban centres. Our gasoline and diesel prices are the lowest in Canada, owing in part to low fuel tax rates and no provincial sales tax. In fact, we recently announced that starting April 1, we will not collect any fuel tax while overall energy prices remain elevated, which is another measure we're implementing to provide real, tangible relief to Albertans.

Our tax policy continues to ensure that Albertans pay less in overall taxes than any province, with low personal income tax and no provincial sales tax, payroll tax, or health care premiums. We also have the highest basic personal exemption amongst provinces, allowing individuals to earn more before they have to pay any provincial income tax. In fact, Madam Chair, 40 per cent of Albertans do not pay any provincial income tax at all. That, combined with our status as the highest earners, means that the after-tax incomes of Albertans are the highest in Canada.

The last ministry that will receive a supplementary amount is Culture and the Status of Women, and this is another important item as it will allow Alberta to support Ukrainians who are struggling with Russia's invasion of their country. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support for Ukraine, \$10.35 million of which will come from the funding in this bill. This includes \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress to equip 5,000 members of the Ukrainian territorial defence force with defensive equipment, \$5 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation for humanitarian aid, and \$350,000 to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council for co-ordinating the shipment of first aid and defensive equipment to Ukraine.

In addition to the supplementary amounts for the five ministries I mentioned, the last item in the bill is a supplementary amount of \$55,000 for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This amount will cover reasonable increases in staff compensation to

account for the lifting of the salary restraint for non-union employees.

Overall, the amounts in these supplementary estimates are needed to help the government address Albertans' current priorities. As I mentioned, the child care and municipal infrastructure funding in this bill is supported by federal government funding. Also, much of the additional funding in this bill is off-set by savings in other areas, meaning that the overall increase to the deficit forecast for 2021-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million.

Responsible fiscal management, a growing economy, and strong energy prices have helped the government successfully shrink this year's deficit by about 81 per cent since Budget 2021 was first tabled. The government has acted swiftly to adjust the fiscal plan and help address emerging issues like the rising cost of living and the war in Ukraine, and we've done so without losing sight of our commitment to long-term fiscal responsibility.

The Chair: Hon. members, we'll now move to the first 60-minute block with members of the Official Opposition. Would you like to break up your time into 20-minute blocks? Would you like a reminder at 20 minutes? A reminder at 20 minutes? Okay.

The first 20-minute block will go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Ms Pancholi: Yes, I would.

The Chair: Okay. Minister, is that amenable?

Mr. Toews: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take a look at the supplementary supply bill, specifically with respect to the provisions around Children's Services. There appears to be a discrepancy between the supplementary supply estimates and the 2022-23 estimates document. According to both the original 2021 budget estimates and the supplementary supply estimates on page 18, the original amounts for child intervention and early intervention were \$879.8 million and \$96 million respectively. However, in the current Budget 2022 budget documents that were provided at estimates, it actually showed that those line items, line items 2 and 4, were actually \$841.5 million and \$131.8 million respectively.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm that this actually represents a transfer of spending of approximately \$38 million from line 2 to line 4 of the Children's Services budget? Please provide an explanation of what this transfer is for and how it will impact support provided.

The Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Sure. To answer the questions, first I'll provide some context just in terms of what our dollars are about in this supplementary supply vote. What we're looking at, obviously, is \$135.4 million in the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. We know, Madam Chair, that we have talked a lot about this historic child care agreement, which will provide \$3.8 billion over five years for a made-in-Alberta plan to reduce fees, create at least 42,000 spaces right across the province, and help parents get back to work.

The ministry's forecast includes as well \$15 million in reallocated funding to help child care providers with COVID-19 costs and an additional \$134 million in funding for the Canada-

Alberta early learning and child care agreement. This also, Madam Chair, as the Minister of Finance mentioned in his opening remarks, allocated a million dollars for capital IT expenses to begin enhancements and system modernizations to allow us to roll out this plan.

We needed that for a couple of reasons, Madam Chair, but really, when we look at our IT system, we had to accommodate the new affordability grants, that didn't exist before, as well as increased subsidy levels and then the sheer volume of applications we had when it came to our new subsidy model. We also had \$56 million in one-time bilateral workforce funding, again from the federal government. There was no transfer from line 2 to line 4. That's the transfer of supports and financial assistance dollars from program 2 to program 4, early intervention.

I think the member opposite has another question, so I'll allow her to jump in.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Minister. Yeah, I think the minister was just answering that question. It reflects the transfer of funding from the supports and financial assistance agreement program, so the dedicated caseworkers, I'm guessing, moving from child intervention to line 4, youth in transition. I appreciate that clarification. So it's not actually a change in the amount of resources but simply allocating which budget line it's coming from.

I want to move on to the funding that the minister highlighted around additional appropriations to account for the increased child care subsidy and supports and worker supports related to the provision of additional funds under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement – I'll refer to it as the ELCC going forward – and the early learning and child care bilateral agreements.

On page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates there's additional funding of \$134.4 million from the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement and \$56.4 million from the ELCC bilateral agreement. I'd like the minister to just confirm that that means there was a total of \$198 million that is being sought under the supply estimates specifically for federal funding. Can the minister confirm that?

8:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. We do have \$135.4 million in the early learning and child care agreement with the federal government. We will continue to refer to that as the Canada-Alberta ELCC grant because, as the member opposite may know, there are a number of different grants that we have with the federal government. It's important to articulate which one we're discussing. So we do have that. That also, as I said, includes \$1 million for capital. It's split between a number of line items as well. We have \$131.1 million in 3.1, child care subsidy and support; \$3.3 million in 3.2, child care worker supports; and \$1 million in capital IT expenses.

We had \$56 million in one-time early learning and child care. That was ELCC workforce funding, Madam Chair; \$25.8 million of that would be found in line item 3.1, child care subsidy and supports, and \$30.3 million in 3.2, child care worker supports.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the minister. Just to clarify, I believe that that is a confirmation that there was \$198 million that is being sought under the supplementary supply from federal funding from the Canada-Alberta ELCC and the bilateral agreements.

At the March 8 estimates of the consideration of Budget 2022, the Minister of Children's Services and I discussed, of course, those estimates. I asked the minister: how much of the expenditures for

child care in 2021 were provincial dollars? At that time the minister indicated it was \$350 million in 2021, the same as the previous year, and that it would continue at that level for years going forward, as part of the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement is that federal dollars cannot replace provincial dollars. In other words, provincial funding cannot reduce for child care as a result of increased federal funding under these agreements.

If we look at the original estimates on page 17 of the supplementary supply estimates, we see that the original expenditures for child care were, in fact, \$393 million for 2021. Taking into account that \$45 million, which comes in every year under the bilateral agreement, that does mean, as the minister indicated in estimates, that \$350 million of these 2021 dollars were spent from the provincial funding, not federal funding. However, with these new supplementary supply estimates, total expenditures in child care are now \$529 million. If we take away the \$190 million in federal funding under the Canada-Alberta ELCC funding as well as the \$45 million from the bilateral agreement, we're actually left with a provincial spend of \$286 million, not \$350 million. This is what it indicates in the supplementary supply. It says that in 2021 the government of Alberta spent \$286 million of provincial funds on child care, not the \$350 million which was dedicated in this budget for child care. This is about \$60 million below what the minister had indicated in estimates.

Can the Minister of Children's Services please tell this Assembly: in the supplementary supply estimates how much provincial spending has in fact been replaced by federal dollars? It looks like this government is spending approximately \$60 million less in provincial funding than the original stated \$350 million. If that's the case, where is that \$60 million being spent as it's not being spent on child care?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The member opposite is correct in her math around the \$191 million when we're looking at our agreements with the federal government. Now, as the member opposite knows, we do know that child care providers and programs have faced many challenges throughout this pandemic. They've done an amazing job keeping their programs open and making sure that they can continue to support parents. In Budget 2021 the ministry planned for enrolment rates to turn a bit closer to where they were in previous years. We did expect enrolment to go back up to the 80 per cent average, especially once we signed the agreement with the federal government. That is not necessarily what we saw. We are still at about 70 per cent enrolment, which is about 10 per cent less than we had anticipated in December.

I would also point out that we reinvested \$31 million. That was a split between federal and provincial dollars; \$15 million in provincial dollars to help assist with COVID-related costs.

I would point out that while that number is \$55 million lower, it's largely because, again, we had lower than anticipated enrolment. Again, we did anticipate that enrolment to go back up in December-January. I would point out, Madam Chair, that no dollars have been replaced by federal funding. Our ongoing budgets remain at previous years' budgets of \$350 million. This is an agreement that we have with the federal government, and that's a requirement within that agreement.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to ask for clarification, then. Based on the lower enrolments, as the minister indicated, the number I reached was \$60 million. The minister indicated \$55 million less was spent from provincial funding on

child care due to lower enrolments. I guess my question to the minister is: where is that \$55 million? What's being done with it? Where is it being invested? How is it being invested in child care? If it wasn't used to address subsidies because there was lower enrolment or lower child care worker wage top-ups, where is that \$55 million being spent?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, we have very specific line items within our budget and areas in which we redirect dollars. The majority of our dollars go to support subsidies for families under the subsidy program. We also do invest in wage top-ups. Again, as we saw lower than anticipated enrolment, specifically in December, January, February, March, that is where those dollars go, but we're very limited in terms of where we invest those dollars. However, we did redirect provincial dollars. We do have \$295 million in provincial spending. I didn't quite catch the number that the member opposite used, but I do just want to correct that number as well.

Again, we did communicate to programs to make sure that they were aware of all of the benefits and supports that existed. We continued to support the child care sector with \$165 million throughout COVID. Again, the \$31 million in December partially was to help with the transition to the new program. We knew that some programs were finding the transition a little bit challenging and thought that a certain amount per licensed space would help them not only with their administrative costs but to backfill while they were waiting for the federal dollars to roll out. Then, also, we wanted to make sure that they had flexibility in those COVID supports to invest in recruitment and retention. Madam Chair, many operators did invest that in their workforce, whether it was through additional wage top-ups, bonuses, recruitment and retention bonuses, but those are decisions that operators make as well.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm a little puzzled because all of the items that the minister just described are actually federally funded, all of those pieces. In fact, \$15 million of federal funding was directed to COVID supports, we know, as well as that workforce funding, the transitional funding for those programs that were participating in the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement. Those were all federally funded. My question, specifically, for the minister is: where is the \$55 million less that the minister has acknowledged was spent on child care from the provincial budget? Where specifically was that \$55 million invested in child care? If she can break down that \$55 million, that would be appreciated.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to just mostly reiterate what I just shared with the member. Again, you know, it is difficult as we did expect child care enrolment to go up, especially once the agreement with the federal government was made. We did see a slight bump in January, but certainly those numbers are going up all the time. We've also, I think, seen a very positive increase in the number of early childhood educators who are working in this field, and these dollars that are provincially allocated are released specifically within these program areas, earmarked for supporting wage top-ups and subsidy dollars for parents who really need it.

Madam Chair, again, even now I would have anticipated that we would be back up, you know, certainly past 80 per cent, especially

given the exceptional feedback we're hearing about the early learning and child care program. Parents are very happy to see their fees low. They're happy to be taking part in the workforce. We also were very happy to redirect \$15 million, even in December, of provincial funds with that \$31 million in December to support child care. That is part of the \$165 million that were invested in this area throughout the pandemic. This was important. We listened to operators throughout the pandemic. They identified the need for additional supports, and we stepped up to the plate.

8:30

Then, Madam Chair, they identified the need for flexibility in those supports, that they could use them whether that was to support parent fees or to support benefits to educators. So we stepped up and we gave them that flexibility, and now we have an agreement with the federal government that's going to see a billion dollars invested in child care this year. That is very positive. In that budget there is, like I said, a billion dollars. It includes \$350 million of provincial investment, as is our commitment, in the out-years, and that's going to support our child care sector and parents moving forward. I think that, once again, this is very positive. We're hearing lots of great news about it. You know, we did reinvest dollars where they were needed, when they were needed.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. For the record it sounds like there is no accounting for the \$55 million less in provincial spending on child care by the minister. Two very long answers without any explanation as to where \$55 million went. I think that the Assembly and Albertans should be concerned, because the last time that enrolment – the year before, when enrolment was lower and there were lower subsidy rates being used by parents, this minister took \$108 million and handed it out in a one-time payment to parents that did nothing to actually increase child care affordability the following month or to improve quality for child care. It sounds like once again, perhaps – I don't even know if Albertans are going to get a nice paycheque like they did last year from this minister from the surplus budget, but it certainly does not sound like it's being invested in child care, and there's no accountability for it.

With respect to the \$49.3 million reduction due to lower expected enrolment, which is indicated on page 16 of supplementary supply, it seems reasonable, of course, that a 20 per cent reduction in funding could correlate to a 20 per cent reduction in enrolment, which would lead to a decreasing number of workers. If there are fewer children enrolled, of course you need fewer educators. Yet the minister has claimed that the number of workers and educators is actually increasing drastically. She's claimed it's reached up to prepandemic levels. So can the minister explain how the sector can be experiencing at the same time a decrease in the number of children in the system and an increase in the number of staff working in the system? Did the minister make any changes to ratios? Did any of that information get released publicly? And why is there a shortfall and lower than expected participation in the critical worker benefit if educator levels are back up to prepandemic levels?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think that that's actually a good question, because as we see a new program, I think like any new program, it takes a little bit of time to roll that out. Even though we weren't one of the first to sign the agreements with the federal government, we were one of the first two provinces to

roll out affordability dollars to parents. Why? Because every one of us in this room was elected to represent people of Alberta, and certainly what I was hearing from working parents right across this province was that affordability was a concern, especially with uncertainty throughout the pandemic.

Also, however, I would point out that there is lots of hope and optimism. We're seeing more jobs created in Alberta every day. I think it is, too – we're hearing from operators that it takes time to adjust as their programs are going. We're seeing wait-lists in some areas that didn't exist before. I think that's positive. Part of it is also making sure that we have child care spaces in the actual communities where they're needed, Madam Chair, not necessarily – you know, not that I have specific insight, but I think that there were patterns around certain constituencies that the former government created a number of child care spaces in. We need to make sure that we're not overbuilding in certain areas and then leaving some child care deserts behind. You know, we really are accounting for this in the supplementary estimates; the \$49.3 million and the \$5.4 million are in there.

Also, the critical worker benefit ended in September. Early childhood educators didn't reach pre-pandemic numbers until around December, Madam Chair. We did see, and I think we discussed this in estimates as well, another I think it was growth of 500 educators in that one month. That was positive.

Just to talk a little bit more about – I want to break down that \$5.4 million because I think I maybe didn't get a chance to get that specific before. That was where we had dollars that were not used in the critical worker benefit. Again, it was really just because we used our best, educated estimate based on how many educators we thought we would have in the system. We did in fact extend the second phase of the critical worker benefit to other support workers within the child care system because we wanted to get those dollars out the door. That's an area, too: if the member opposite wants to know why the estimate wasn't as accurate, it's because while we do track early childhood educators, given our system for wage top-ups and given the supports that we do provide educators, we don't always know what operators are doing when it comes to other support staff in their operations. Again, that's something that typically we don't have a specific line of sight into, and that's where that additional \$5.4 million came from. Again, that was just due to what we saw in terms of our numbers and the number of staff that were working in the field.

We also did reach out to operators a number of times to make sure that they knew that all of their staff were eligible for this benefit in the phases where they were able to apply and receive the benefit. Again ...

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt; that concludes the first 20-minute block.

Would you like to continue on? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: I would, Madam Chair. Thank you so much. Actually ...

The Chair: Sorry. Would you like to continue to share time with the minister?

Ms Pancholi: Yes.

The Chair: Minister, is that amenable? All right. Please proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Actually, I'll follow up on the response that the minister was just giving with respect to

page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates and the lower than anticipated participation in the critical worker benefit. As we see, it indicates that there's about \$5 million less than anticipated in terms of what was paid out for that critical worker benefit. I wonder if the minister can please indicate how many child care workers or staff, actually both if possible, child care workers and then non child care educators, actually received the critical worker benefit.

As well, if the minister can comment on – as we know, unfortunately, throughout this pandemic there were a number of situations where federal dollars were available to the UCP government to access to support Albertans during the pandemic and the UCP was slow to actually participate in those programs or to take the funding available through the federal government because they were reluctant to match federal funding with their own provincial dollars, and we know that there was a delay in the rollout of the critical worker benefit, particularly as compared to other provinces, by the UCP government. Part of my question to the minister is – I understand that while the ministry cannot track non early childhood educator staff, part of the situation is that we know that last year the sector lost thousands of early childhood educators, and had this program been rolled out earlier, perhaps there would have been more early childhood educators still in the system who would have received this benefit, potentially might have even stayed in the work had they received that critical worker benefit. So how many more child care workers would have received this benefit had the UCP government rolled this critical worker benefit out at the same time as other provinces?

Ms Schulz: Madam Chair, while that is not necessarily specific to my program area when it comes to the critical worker benefit, what I can say is that the positive is that Alberta actually did do something different than other provinces, and we offered it to a wider range of workers in this province. I am very proud that we are one of the few provinces that included child care workers. Why? Because I think that they are exceptionally important. And you know what? When child care program operators reached out to us and said that, you know, they wanted support staff included, I know – I have two young children; they are almost seven and four – that support staff are just as important, so we stepped up to expand that eligibility. We did communicate to programs to make sure that they were aware of the benefit, and all workers who were eligible in this phase in the programs who applied received the benefit. Children's Services sent out a number of e-mails on that front, including things like application forms, and we responded any time there was a question. I know, certainly, a number of them came to my office about eligibility, and we were able to make that work for our very important educators and support staff.

We also talked about that on a number of our town hall calls. You know, I don't have the specific numbers, Madam Chair, but given the numbers around \$1,200 per worker, it would be an equivalent of over 300 support staff, and I think that's probably a fair estimate given the budget we have and the amount that would have gone out for those eligible workers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

8:40

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. To clarify, there were a number of other provinces that also provided critical worker benefits to child care workers and, in fact, did so much earlier than the UCP government did. I just wanted to clarify that for the minister's understanding as well as for the record of the Assembly.

With respect to the supplementary supply, it indicates that there's an increase in \$1 million in capital spending for IT for

child care initiatives and that that, of course, is federally funded, as most of the child care budget is. This amounts to about a \$1 million reduction to the policy, innovation, and Indigenous connections line of the budget. Specifically, this will come out of 5.1, policy, or 5.2, Indigenous connections. If the minister could clarify which line that comes out of and what area of Children's Services' responsibility will see this reduction, intervention or child care.

The \$1 million in line 5 was originally covered by provincial dollars, is that correct? Now it appears to be federally funded. I believe it originally showed up in the estimates as provincially funded, and now it appears we're, through supplementary supply, seeking federal funding to cover that cost. I guess the question, if it is actually federal funding that's now being used to fund something that was originally supposed to be funded by the province: is this not federal funding replacing provincial funding, which, again, is contrary to what our understanding is of the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement? If the minister can answer those questions, that would be appreciated.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. These are separate numbers, I would say. When we look at the IT, every province has the ability and the agreement with the federal government – certainly, Alberta's does identify that there will be some IT and staffing costs related to the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement. That million dollars is not replacing provincial funding; that is federal funding to roll out this new program. We just signed that agreement back in November, but we knew there were going to be changes required to address the changes within the physical system to add the operating grant and handle the increased volume of subsidy applications that we were going to see.

When we look at program area 5.1, the million dollars that the member is asking about was a \$1 million, one-time reallocation, and that actually was to the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to support the residential schools unmarked graves research initiative led by Indigenous Relations. Those dollars were moved from my policy, innovation, and Indigenous connections area over to support the residential school grants.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll turn my time over to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The Chair: All right.

Hon. member, who would you like to speak with?

Member Ceci: Municipal Affairs.

The Chair: Municipal Affairs. Would you like to share your time?

Member Ceci: Sure.

The Chair: Hon. minister, is that good? All right.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Member Ceci: Thank you. The government is asking, of course, for supplementary supply for this ministry to take advantage of the federal funding through the Canada community-building fund, a fund that provides capital funding for municipalities to help them build and revitalize their local public infrastructure. The program is fully funded by the federal government and administered by the province. That permanent source of funding from the government of Canada is provided up front twice a year to provinces and territories to go

on to municipalities and Métis settlements. It's the second-largest supplementary supply number in this document. I'm just wondering if the minister can tell me how that fund will be distributed to municipalities and Métis settlements and when that will be done.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Chair. The member is right; this estimate is almost completely the federal additional money to the Canada community-building fund. I'm just looking here through my notes for how it's distributed. It will go to municipalities. The fund, of course, used to be called the gas tax fund, and in fact the number that we're getting from the feds is actually, I believe, well, it's \$15,695,000 more than the \$231,208,000 – there's that number – then \$15,695,000 that municipalities were not able to get spent through ICIP grant approvals. I think the hon. member knows that when you're doing construction projects, some of them go faster; some of them go slower. What you can see as part of this, Chair, to the member, is that you can look forward to us moving that \$15,695,000 into next year's budget once the municipalities confirm that that's when they need it, and that's just a matter of: they didn't get things built as fast as they anticipated this year. In other words, to make sure that they don't lose the money and that the federal money comes with them, we'll do that.

The municipalities have quite a range of ability to choose what projects. I'm just trying to see – I've got quite a few numbers in front of me here – trying to sort out the CCBF ones. In 2022 the city of Calgary is estimated to receive \$77.05 million, or 30.3 per cent of the total CCBF, and the city of Edmonton \$58.26 million of the total CCBF for all municipalities. It is for capital expenditures. I don't have, necessarily, the detailed amount for all of it. I'm looking through my notes to see if I can get you something here. There's a \$5,000 base amount for summer villages out of the CCBF and a \$50,000 minimum amount for other small municipalities. I think it's safe to say . . . [interjection] Oh, I guess I didn't use the word "million." The Treasury Board president is helping me to use my words. I left out the word "million," but I think the hon. member knows that. Nonetheless, I'm grateful for the assist.

I think what's most important is that we administer this. It's a federal program. Municipalities have a great deal of autonomy on how they spend that money, and in my opinion and, I dare say, our government's opinion, they do a great job of making wise choices. This is, I think, as the hon. member understands, simply a flow through. As he rightly described, the federal government provides the money to the municipalities, the province administers it, and that number that is coming here is actually the full number, so I could say it out loud for the record. It's \$246,903,000 from the Canada community-building fund. The reason, again, that the supplementary estimate is \$231,208,000 is because of that unspent money through ICIP, \$15,695,000.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thanks. Thank you for that information.

Can I just clarify, then? It sounds like, other than for summer villages and smaller communities, where there's a \$5,000 and a \$50,000 amount, the balance of the money is split out on a per capita basis. I think you talked about 33 per cent going to the city of Calgary. Is that correct?

Mr. McIver: I could tell the hon. member, through you, Chair, that the gas tax fund, what was formerly called the gas tax fund, which is now the Canada community-building fund, is governed by an agreement signed between Canada and Alberta back in 2014, and

all the expenditures will be according to that agreement. Now, there you go. It is funded based on populations, but again, as I mentioned as part of my earlier answer, the formula includes a \$5,000 base amount, a minimum amount, if you will, for summer villages and a \$50,000 minimum amount for other small municipalities so that they get enough.

The federal government structured it this way, and I think it's actually a good idea; in other words, so that municipalities, hopefully, get enough money to do something with. When you're doing construction, well, in some cases \$5,000 won't get a lot done. In other cases \$50,000 won't get a lot done, but in many cases it actually will make a difference either in creating a new project or in some cases actually enhancing or improving a capital project that the municipality would have done. At any rate, this is, again, as per the agreement between Alberta and Canada. Yeah, we are grateful for the federal government's support of municipalities, and I think that answers the question: largely population based.

8:50

Member Ceci: Just one further clarification on the \$16.7 million made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs. That program, as I understand it, was ICIP, and it was because construction didn't happen that would need to be billed in this year, so it's carried forward to a subsequent year, where it will be fully expended at that time.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Not to be critical, but I'll just correct the number. I think he used a \$16 million and some number. It's \$15,695,000. I don't say that to be anything but helpful, okay? The hon. member described it accurately. It's ICIP money through the federal ICIP program that was allocated to municipalities.

As the vagaries of construction go, sometimes you can't get all the work done in the year through some delay. It could be a contractor who was behind, it could be that some part or some supply in the supply chain was late, it could be weather based – so many reasons – but the important point is that what we taketh away here from the municipalities, we will giveth back next year. We just need to confirm with the municipalities first that they can spend that next year. Then don't be surprised to see me standing up here or else a piece of paper in your hand for that same amount being added as a supplementary estimate for next year, but probably not until we get some indication that the municipalities actually can use the money. I fully expect they will be able to use all of it as well as whatever ICIP is available to them next year, but of course we'll do that work with the municipalities first.

Member Ceci: I cede to my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre.

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like to share your time?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, if I could.

The Chair: With the Minister of Health?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, please.

The Chair: All right. Minister of Health, is that amenable? Absolutely.

Mr. Shepherd: And a time check, Chair?

The Chair: There are four minutes remaining in the second 20-minute block.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In regard to, I guess, the supplementary supply for Health, the amount of \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution, during the height of the third wave, in May 2021, our contact tracing workforce here in Alberta numbered about 2,500. Now, by August, in the midst of the best summer ever, we had the announcement from the government of the ending of testing, tracing, and isolation. That's hundreds of contact tracers that were laid off or did not have their contracts renewed as the government told them they would no longer be needed to notify close contacts and only continue to investigate high-risk settings.

But what we do know, Madam Chair, is that as of October 5 the Premier and the ministers of Education and Health announced that we were indeed going to reimplement contact tracing because, indeed, we found ourselves in the midst of a fourth wave. That contact tracing would not begin again until October 12, after the Thanksgiving long weekend. By that October 12, in the midst of that fourth wave, AHS had a total of approximately 1,124 contact tracers. They were in the midst, then, of racing to fill these positions which the government had prematurely chosen to end in its rush to declare the pandemic as an endemic.

My question to the minister is: can he clarify how much, if any, of this \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution was to cover the cost of needing to rapidly rehire the contact tracers his government chose to fire during its best summer ever? How much, if any, of it is for payments to those contact tracers that they did not fire but who may have had and likely did have to work overtime to address the gaps that his government created?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I can say that in regard to the \$375 million that was for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution a total amount of \$144.7 million was for contact tracing and case notification. I'd like to point out to the hon. member that we did re-engage contact tracers during the fourth wave, and we actually were able to increase the staff to be able to respond within 24 hours in terms of being able to contact trace once we actually, you know, got into the fourth wave.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to point out that, you know, like all other jurisdictions, as we got into the fifth wave, we limited our contact tracing in the fifth wave only to high-risk settings and high-risk individuals. This was the same response that was done, quite frankly, across the entire country given the widespread nature of the omicron variant, and we were able to run that area and then actually leverage rapid tests. We knew that when we actually had to deal with the omicron variant, we needed to spend more money in terms of rapid tests to be able to get that to Albertans, because the PCR testing couldn't keep up. Given the nature of omicron, as part of this budget as well, we spent \$153.6 million for rapid tests and inventory acquisition – that was in order to buy 14.3 million tests – and that's in addition to the tests that we received from the federal government. But that was the appropriate response.

I'd like to just point out to the hon. member that, you know, as we moved through the pandemic and we had different variants hit us, we responded accordingly. We put the resources in place, and that's really, quite frankly, what the supplementary amounts are all about. The total amount is . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, this concludes the second 20-minute block. Would you like to continue?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, please.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Indeed, I would be happy to talk about rapid tests. I would note that the minister has just spoken about how they responded to each variant appropriately, not his precise words but what he was suggesting. I'd say that a large number of Albertans, certainly a large number of health professionals, would have some thoughts on how appropriate it was. Again, I think we saw a government that repeatedly responded last and least, at the great cost, I think, probably, unfortunately, of some lives but certainly also to our health care system.

Speaking of rapid tests and this government's planning ahead, what we do know is that as of December 21, 2021, the government indeed, as the minister said, announced that it was going to purchase an additional provincial stockpile of 10 million tests. Now, they at that time said that they intended to secure that before the new year. We know, ultimately, that that was unsuccessful due to the fact that so many other jurisdictions were all trying to acquire rapid tests at the same time.

Now, we also do know that the province of Saskatchewan had shown some actual forethought here. In the fall the government of Canada had approached the provinces – and this was, of course, during the midst of the fourth wave, at which time this government was not distributing any rapid tests to the wider public despite the fact that it had a significant stockpile that it had not distributed at all. What we saw was, indeed, that the province of Saskatchewan had the foresight to take the government of Canada up on their offer, so Saskatchewan had a significant stockpile of rapid tests ready to go in December. Alberta chose not to do that. Now, by our calculations, if Alberta had taken the advantage that Saskatchewan did on a per capita basis, we would have had an additional 25.5 million rapid tests available for Albertans, but of course this government chose not to do that.

We also know that this government, again, despite the protestations of the minister at multiple times, did not act quickly to respond to the fifth wave. They waited until just before Christmas, just before the holidays, as our numbers were beginning to climb, and they were trying to go the other way but realized rapidly they had to do something, so they made this announcement about the distribution of rapid tests, on very short notice, at the end of December.

A couple of questions based on this, Madam Chair. Can the minister clarify how much, if any, of the \$153,600,000 that's listed here for rapid test kits might have been saved if his government had had the foresight and the good judgment shown by Saskatchewan and taken advantage of the opportunity they had in the fall to purchase rapid tests through the government of Canada rather than scrambling to get those 10 million during a time of incredibly heightened scarcity and demand in the midst of the fifth wave? Actually, I'd be curious, if he's able to tell us, too, how many of those 10 million he was actually able to get and when they arrived in the province.

Secondly, how much of the \$375,500,000 that was set aside for lab testing, contact tracing, or rapid test distribution was specifically for the rapid test distribution, and might those costs have been reduced if his government had taken the time to prepare a plan for distribution before being forced to do so by the rising of the omicron-driven fifth wave at the end of December?

9:00

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. First off, I'd like to point out to my learned colleague that actually Alberta began distributing the rapid test program in March 2021 and distributed over 8.8 million tests to over 2,000 locations, including priority settings like continuing care, schools, postsecondaries, and workplaces. Now, we did begin broad public distribution of rapid tests through pharmacies and AHS sites on December 17, 2021, and as of February 28 we had made over 12 million tests available to Albertans. Throughout January and early February over 8.5 million rapid tests were distributed to schools, and in February over 1.1 million tests were sent to First Nations and Métis communities for distribution.

Now, as pointed out in the supplementary estimates, \$375.5 million was for lab testing. Of that – and this goes to the question asked by the hon. member – \$24.8 million was for rapid test distribution costs. Again, as previously noted, for inventory acquisition, the 14.3 million tests, it was \$153.6 million to actually acquire that. Madam Chair, the Alberta government, you know, in recognizing, responding to the upcoming omicron wave not only had been distributing rapid tests as part of a program for months prior; we recognized that a wider distribution would be helpful given the nature of omicron as we were learning the impact that it could have on Alberta and our health care system, so we responded. Again, as I was saying before the timer went off in the first 20-minute block, which I only had four minutes of, that is really what the supplemental estimates and the additional funding are all about.

Madam Chair, we responded to COVID. You know, in terms of total funding associated with COVID, we're looking for just under \$716 million, but that's in addition to the \$1.1 billion that was already allocated the previous budget year to be able to respond to COVID. We fully appreciate – and this is part of the challenge in terms of when you don't know what you don't know. COVID was brand new to us the year previous. We made an estimate in terms of the budget, what it would cost, but you don't know what you don't know for how it would evolve and change over the period of time.

Madam Chair, we made one commitment to Albertans, and that was mentioned already by my colleague the Minister of Finance, that we would spend the money necessary to be able to respond to COVID as we could see it coming at us and respond appropriately to this given the changing nature of it. We saw differences, different approaches in delta and differences in omicron. We did exactly that. We had rapid tests throughout last year. We expanded the application in December as omicron came at us. Because of challenges with the federal government, who we had requested additional tests from – quite frankly, the federal government indicated that they'd give them to us, but they couldn't deliver – we went out, and we spent additional dollars to make sure we could get those tests in the hands of Albertans. We did accomplish that.

Again, Madam Chair, I am thankful that we are now moving into the endemic phase. We have come out of the omicron wave and moved to the endemic phase, and the numbers and the hospitalizations are continuing to go down.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Indeed, we don't know what we don't know, but we certainly do know that Alberta had some of the worst outcomes in Canada. So it's quite clear that other governments were quite able to understand, were able to make some decisions that were able to lower the number of excess deaths, that were able to prevent the same number of cases, that were able to indeed take actions that were more prescient than those we saw taken by our government, which at times was quite clearly so caught

up in its own internal politics that it was not considering what was best for Albertans but, rather, what was best for itself.

I would note that, you know, the Minister of Finance commented that Alberta will no longer be an expensive outlier when it comes to health care spending. Well, Alberta, unfortunately, was an outlier when it came to the costs of this pandemic. Indeed, Dr. Tara Moriarty, in her study that was released last year looking at excess deaths across Canada from COVID-19, reported that Alberta had nearly 150 excess deaths per 100,000 residents. That equates to about 4,800 more deaths than would be expected during the time period, the highest rate of any province in Canada, Madam Chair, and that is because of choices made by this government when there were things that it did know.

Speaking of which, when we're talking about, again, the spending of \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution and we're talking about staffing speech-language pathologists, Madam Chair, they were part of the staff which were required to help fill gaps due to poor judgment on the part of this government. Now, we recognize, of course, that in the initial redeployment that took place, I think starting from March 2020, even through, we'll be generous and say, that second wave in December 2020 most SLPs were quite all right with that. They understood the enormity of that, as many other health care workers did, and they were willing to step up and do their work. But by that point there were many things this government did know. Yet we found ourselves in the third wave where speech-language pathologists – and I've learned this by speaking with them – were again redeployed. Again, remember that this was when this government was sitting back and refusing to take action as several of its own MLAs were crusading against this government to end all public health measures as case numbers and hospitalizations were growing during the third wave.

What speech-language pathologists have told me is that there were times they would be called in, even at the last minute, which meant an overtime shift, where they were being paid double time, as much as \$100 an hour to be a line leader; that is, simply making sure that people were in their chairs and ready to go in to get tested. Now, again, that is important and essential work, Madam Chair, but by that point the government had the opportunity to begin to staff up for those positions. During that third wave I understand that speech-language pathologists were very happy to hear that AHS had taken the opportunity to begin to hire some folks to be line leaders, admin staff at the vaccine centres, and swabbers at their testing sites that would allow speech-language pathologists to get back to their important work supporting youth and supporting other people who needed their assistance.

But they found themselves called back again in the fourth wave in September 2021 because this government, which, again, had moved to end all testing, tracing, isolation in August as part of its best summer ever, at a time when it had had three waves to learn, to know, Madam Chair, had effectively gone radio silent, utterly absent, refusing to take action even as cases and hospitalizations were rising and, as we have heard, were locked in backrooms fighting amongst themselves about whether to take any steps to actually meet this growing fourth wave. As a result, my understanding is that they waited until four days prior to when they had to renew the contracts of the newly hired swabbing staff, which meant that many of those staff had gone on to find other work, so once again speech-language pathologists were pressed into being redeployed to man testing sites and others, again, at a premium cost of up to \$100 an hour.

Can the minister clarify how much, if any, of the \$375,500,000 set aside for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution would have been used to cover the costs of the premiums paid to

speech-language pathologists or other health care workers who had to step in to cover the gaps because his government waited too long to take the action to follow through on the contracts of the folks that had been hired to cover those positions?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, before I sort of respond to the breakdown of the \$375 million, I'd like to first comment on some of the comments that the hon. member across the aisle started out talking about, that Alberta has the worst outcomes in terms of deaths. Don't get me wrong. I feel for every individual who has been impacted and everyone who has lost a loved one during this pandemic, but the comments that Alberta has had the worst outcome in terms of deaths is quite simply incorrect. Although we've had deaths, if you compare Alberta in terms of the Canadian average, we are below the Canadian average. In fact, we are several times below the average you find in U.S. states and even so when you actually look at Europe. I appreciate the comments being made over there, but the fact is that the characterization of our government's response to COVID is simply incorrect.

9:10

Madam Chair, we committed to Albertans that we would spend the money necessary for an appropriate response to COVID, and quite frankly we have done that. If you look at the year previous in terms of the amount spent in 2021, that was \$1.5 billion. This year – right? – we're talking \$1.867 billion to respond and so that we can respond appropriately and make sure that Albertans and AHS have the resources that they need to be able to respond.

The response was varied and many. It involved lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution, supports for continuing care, vaccine deployment, purchases for PPE, rapid test kits, which we spoke to earlier, acute-care and entry screening, and then support for, you know, isolation facilities, border programs, public health guidance, department EOC operations, the COVID critical drug reserve. Madam Chair, we spent the money, and quite frankly our government, under the leadership of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, gave the commitment to us that the health system would have the money that it needs to be able to appropriately respond. We did provide that, and that's, quite frankly, what we're here doing today.

Now, Madam Chair, the question that the hon. member asked was sort of like: what is the breakdown of that \$375 million? I can tell you and share with this House that it's \$166 million for testing and assessment centres, \$144 million for contact tracing and case notification, \$40 million for testing supplies – this is the inventory acquisition – and another \$24.8 million for the distribution costs, already mentioned, for the rapid tests.

One more comment. I do appreciate, you know, the challenges that our health care system has faced. This has been a very challenging time, and our jurisdiction, Alberta, is no different than many other jurisdictions across the country in having the need to redeploy resources to be able to respond to the pandemic.

Madam Chair, I want to first of all thank all the health care workers, who actually stepped up to the plate through multiple waves. We saw in this fiscal year part of wave 3 but also wave 4. I thank them for stepping up. You know, we needed to be able to redeploy these workers, to be able to put health care professionals who had some training into different roles, whether that be moving individuals with health care training into contact tracing roles. But then, of course, as we moved out through a wave, we could actually move them back into their role to be able to provide the health care services that they were originally trained to provide. So I want to

thank them for that. That was necessary, and it's been necessary not only in our jurisdiction but across the entire country and in jurisdictions around the world.

That's why Budget '22 is so important, Madam Chair. Budget '22 is so important because we recognize that we need to increase overall our capacity in the health care system so that there needs to be less moving of resources from one location to another to be able to respond to future waves of COVID. We have an additional \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that, a \$1.8 billion addition to our operating expenses over the next three years, \$3.5 billion in capital. The hon. member and I had a lengthy conversation about the investment in capacity when we spoke about estimates.

But, Madam Chair, we recognize that we need to, quite frankly, normalize the resources that we have within the system – you know, the additional \$100 million a year, for example, for ICU – so that we can respond better without having to pull resources from other areas of health care, without having to postpone surgeries. We're doing that in Budget '22 to be able to increase capacity. Again, the estimates here are all about the monies that we have spent in the past fiscal year to be able to respond to the COVID pandemic appropriately and fully and make sure that our health care workers, who have done a tremendous job, had the resources to be able to step up and respond to the crisis and provide services to Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that response from the minister. Certainly, there is something to be said for providing the financial resources that are needed to respond to COVID-19, but what I would note is that indeed Alberta faced the same pressures as other jurisdictions, Alberta faced the same challenges, and certainly there are uncertainties that are baked into responding to a pandemic with a previously unknown novel coronavirus. But there were repeated decisions by this government that made that situation, that uncertainty so much worse for our front-line health care workers.

Indeed, spending of dollars does not make up for lack of leadership, it does not make up for putting politics ahead of public health, and indeed that is what we saw repeatedly throughout this pandemic, not unlike previous Conservative governments who put health care spending on a roller coaster. It would rise and fall with the price of oil, and the chaos, the uncertainty that created within the health care system made health care less efficient, more expensive, and created far more stress for health care workers, and indeed that is what we had throughout this pandemic thanks to this government's repeated decisions to act last and act least, to let its own political infighting get in the way of making the decisions to support those health care workers that the minister now stands in this House and purports to thank.

Now, respectfully, I recognize we're here to talk about the dollars, and, hey, if you want to talk about the dollars, the fact is that the costs of this pandemic are undoubtedly higher than they needed to be because of this government's decisions to repeatedly push our health care system to the limits, to repeatedly push the limits of our ICU and hospitalization capacity, and the ongoing impacts that we're going to have, which, indeed, I had the opportunity to talk about with this minister during the estimates process. The fact is that the minister and his government can congratulate themselves and pat themselves on the back . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; that concludes the first 60-minute block for the Official Opposition.

We will now move to the independent members of this House. There's a 20-minute block remaining.

Just to confirm, hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, would you like the first 10-minute block and the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley the second 10-minute block?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please.

The Chair: Yes. Perfect.

Would you like to share your time with the minister's?

Mr. Barnes: Yes. I have a couple of questions for Health and one for Energy.

Ministers, do you mind if we go back and forth? Thank you.

The Chair: Just a reminder to direct your comments through the chair. I'm happy to facilitate that for you.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Chair. First of all, to the Minister of Health: \$25 billion spent last year, and now we're dealing with another \$726 million in supplemental supply. I want to start with the \$174 million for increased physician compensation, please.

You know, again, thank you so loudly to our physicians, our nurses, all our front-line workers through what was absolutely an incredible two years, and I just couldn't imagine. But there were lots of things that we heard last year that were COVID and pandemic response related but not quite. Rural Alberta: I heard time and time again about communities being short of doctors for locum, about emergency wards not being open, about service not being able to be provided. Of course, two or three years ago there was quite a controversy with our rural doctors especially, and there was some talk of withdrawal of service, and I believe \$180 million was added to the budget for that. Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you: of the \$174 million, is any of that for locums? Is any of that to increase the number of rural front-line providers and physicians, and how much of that would be related to their extra work and their extra stress during COVID?

Thank you.

Mr. Copping: Thanks to the hon. member for the question. You know, broadly speaking, I can break down the numbers for the roughly \$174 million. The vast majority of it, ballpark \$85 million, was really associated with increase in fee-for-service billings, and that sort of had two components to it. One is a catch-up. You may recall the year previously, when we got into the first year of COVID, there was a delay, so people reduced the amount of time that they were actually seeing their doctors given the restrictions in place, and some people were just not comfortable seeing their doctors. What we saw this fiscal year was a catch-up, so people actually seeing their family doctors that they actually hadn't seen before, and you had an increase in billings as a result of that.

As well, we also put in place virtual codes to be able to make it easier, and in particular for omicron we put a new array of codes because we didn't want the same thing to happen as it did, you know, the first year that we were actually dealing with COVID. As a result, we changed the codes so that patients and doctors could build, like, for example, complex modifiers that they couldn't under the previous virtual codes so that they could continue to see their patients and see their patients virtually, which actually increased the costs associated with it, but it really was to make sure that we didn't

create that backlog of individuals seeing their doctors. That was one portion of it.

9:20

Another portion that was associated, \$43 million, was an increase in clinical alternate relationship plans due to the introduction of new and expanded ARPs. As the hon. member may recall, this was part of the initiative to be able to not only manage costs but better services – right? – in terms of a capitation plan and being able to expand that. Partly, it was to be able to enable family physicians, not only in urban centres but in rural centres, to be able to provide better services to Albertans.

Then I think the last piece, which is what the hon. member is driving at, is that \$43.4 million of this was associated with the rural, remote, northern program, and that was actually the increased funding associated with that due to the changes in terms of the approach to billing.

This was part, last year, of the overall \$90 million, between the supplemental estimates and then what already was budgeted, to be able to support doctors in rural areas. That \$90 million had a number of different components. If the hon. member just gives me a moment, I can pull them up here. Yeah. That included the rural medical education program, \$6 million; the rural integrated community clerks program, \$4 million; the rural health profession action plan, \$9 million; the locum program, \$3 million, which included a rural locum of \$1.4 million, a specialist locum program at \$1.5 million, and the rural physician on-call program, \$12 million. Now, some of this was built into the original budget, and then, as indicated previously, the other amount is in that \$173 million.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you. Keeping with the same minister, \$726 million more for COVID measures on top of about \$1.1 billion for the pandemic transferred from contingency already. I believe I have a number of \$169 million that is beside a line item for acute care and front-line services. Minister, I guess what I want to ask you is that we all know that Albertans fell thousands and thousands behind for their surgeries, and we saw an announcement for this year's budget of I think it was \$300 million for 100 beds, so I'd like to ask you: of that \$169 million extra that you're asking for today, how much is going towards reducing these wait times for our much-needed surgeries, and is any of that money going to increase ICU capacity?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. member is quite right. In Budget 2022 we put an additional \$100 million in terms of expanding capacity by 50 ICU beds. So that is the focus, and we've actually funded that over the next three years. That's based on the premise that we understood that even though we did flex up and flex down throughout this current budget year, to be able to respond in particular to the fourth wave, where at just under 380 beds we had to flex up into typically 173, the \$100 million in Budget 2022 is to be able to expand that 50 from 173, an additional 50 beds.

Now, in terms of the \$169 million for acute-care and entry screening, \$138.6 million is for hospital and ICU beds. That was actually to enable us to flex up beyond the 173. Also, because we had to flex up – that was wave 4, but in wave 5 we had to do some increase in ICU, not as much. We didn't have to head up to that 380 number, but we did, you know, go over 225 – right? – to be able to do that.

Plus, also, on the non-ICU beds, we had to increase our capacity there, but again it wasn't a large amount. So of that \$169 million, just \$130.6 million was for hospital and ICU beds to enable us to be able to respond to COVID during the pandemic. I guess my point is that it wasn't – it's not base funding, right? It is the flex up to be able to do this in response to COVID. Now, the \$100 million that we're putting in Budget '22 and for the next three years is base funding for the additional 50 beds, to make it easier for us to be able to respond to whatever happens next.

The Chair: One minute, 37 remaining, hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Minister. To the Minister of Energy, please: this is really an Energy budget. Two years ago we were a \$16.9 billion deficit. This year we're a \$3.2 billion deficit, plus the \$1.2 billion being asked for here tonight. Oil and gas royalties went from \$3 billion to \$13.2 billion, and that brings me to the \$300 million you're asking for residential support. Of course, your share of supplement is \$96 million, not the \$300 million, rather, that is going out to residential consumers.

So I congratulate you, first of all, on approximately \$200 million of savings in your department, but, Minister, I don't hear about – Albertans aren't complaining to me about the high cost of electricity. They're complaining to me about the transmission and distribution, the extra charges. Is any money going into researching how we can bring those costs down long term for them?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. Exactly. We are actually doing a lot in that area, led by Associate Minister Nally. Anybody looking at their bill sees the distribution and the transmission costs to be the most significant part of the bill. One of the things we're doing: the AESO is conducting a 2022 long-term transmission plan. Alberta Energy is reviewing the transition policy. They'll be taking feedback and reviewing the feedback from 2021 stakeholder consultation.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt; the first 10 minutes have elapsed.

The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley for the second 10 minutes. Would you like to share your time?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Share my time, and just maybe have the minister continue answering that last question, and then I'll ask mine.

The Chair: If that's amenable to the minister, you may proceed.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. As I mentioned, there are a lot of things under way to look at getting the costs of electricity down. In particular, the AESO's 2022 long-term transmission plan is under way. They're reviewing it. Alberta Energy has feedback on stakeholder input last fall. We're looking to identify solutions to address the rising trajectory of transmission costs. We're also looking at a number of things within the grid to try to get the price of electricity down, including self-supply and export. We're looking at energy storage, and the Alberta Utilities Commission has completed an inquiry into the future of the distribution system. So there are a number of things under way.

In terms of getting the energy price down, I would note that the return to the energy-only market, not proceeding to the NDP capacity market, has brought a number of announced investments into the electricity system: \$5 billion of investments announced for new generation projects, including 50 power plants. The more electricity we have in the system, the more we'll get the costs down.

We do know that while utility prices are high right now, we are very concerned with the distribution and the transmission costs. But, as I noted, there are several policies under way looking at innovative solutions to get the transmission costs down.

The Chair: The hon minister to supplement.

Mr. Toews: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. The member is right to ask this question. Albertans are paying very high transmission fees right now right across the province, especially in rural Alberta. As we consider what options we have, what levers we might have to pull, I think it's important that we understand what gave rise to these high transmission costs. It bears repeating tonight that the previous government – and previous governments before them – spent almost \$8 billion on transmission costs, and those costs must be recovered by consumers. The system was overbuilt, and those costs are real.

9:30

Madam Chair, I can say this, that there's been a lot of work done to understand the recovery curve, the methodology to ensure that it's most advantageous and appropriate that we're assigning the transmission costs, which were an overbuild by the previous government, to consumers who might benefit. And I can say this, that there's not a silver bullet out there based on everything that we can see. The fact of the matter is that the members opposite overbuilt the system; consumers are now paying.

But there's more. Madam Chair, the members opposite – when the NDP were in power, they hastily moved from coal to gas-fired electricity. We were on that trajectory, but they hastily, prematurely made that transition, costing Alberta consumers about \$1.4 billion. That's included in the bill. Moreover, they added a carbon tax, and when you add all three pieces up, it makes for significantly higher electricity bills than consumers would otherwise be paying today.

The Chair: The hon. member. Would you two like to share time?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

Mr. Barnes: We could.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Barnes: Minister, I'm confused. I'm very grateful that I was elected in 2012, but in 2012 it was all about the fact that the PCs had approved these transmission lines and the overbuild of these transmission lines through the province. Maybe the NDP government built the lines that a previous Progressive Conservative government approved. I ask you: should they have not honoured a contract, or am I wrong? Bill 50: I remember lawyers, I remember town halls of 350 people in Medicine Hat concerned not only about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act but the fact that Bill 50 was going to way overbuild the transmission lines, and, Minister, it was clearly a Progressive Conservative government. Please help me.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'm going to take a moment to remind all members to speak through the chair.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. Just to give some details on the transmission overbuild, from 2015 to 2019 \$7.5 billion in new transmission infrastructure was built, as noted by the Minister of Finance, that included approximately \$5.2 billion in critical transmission projects such as the eastern and western Alberta transmission lines and the Fort McMurray west 500-kV line. Since

2020, since our government came into power, we've spent \$100 million on transmission infrastructure versus \$7.5 billion.

I don't want to get into a debate of which government in the past authorized the approval. It doesn't matter. It's there in the budget, and those are coming up with higher electricity prices. The fact is that between 2015 and 2019 \$7.5 billion of overbuild in infrastructure happened, and consumers are paying for that right now, Madam Chair. That's why we are taking an innovative look at how to get down those costs through the various reviews I mentioned earlier.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Nally: Could I provide a little colour?

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like a supplement from the associate minister?

Mr. Barnes: How much time is left, please?

The Chair: You have just under four minutes.

Mr. Loewen: I'll do this question, and we'll see what's left after that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: My question is fairly simple. It's to the Minister of Culture, and it's more of a question as far as, I guess, maybe just an explanation. I'm not questioning the amount, I'm not questioning the need for the money that's funding going to Ukraine for humanitarian and nonlethal defence military equipment, but I guess I'm curious as to why that amount of money is in Culture and not in intergovernmental affairs. I'm just wondering if there'd be a simple explanation of why that is, because when I look through the business plan of Culture, I don't see anything that relates to any kind of transferring money between governments, especially internationally, though intergovernmental affairs could qualify for that. I just wondered if I could get an explanation for that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. Thanks for the question. The reason it was put through Culture is because Culture is set up with all of the granting staff to qualify and review and preview grant applications. These were put through under all of the rules. Even though we offered it, the organizations still had to apply and provide all of their financial data and their legal society data and all the rest of it to the department so that there was good tracking and record keeping for it. It was put through under the other initiatives program, which is a very broad, open program that allows for a real wide variety of specific programs. It was the cleanest, best reporting vehicle, I think, that we could have used, and that's the main reason that it was put through my department.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Just a follow-up and, again, just an honest question here. What organization made the grant application? Was it the Ukrainian government? Just trying to get that straight.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can give you the exact details; \$350,000 of it went to the Alberta provincial congress of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. That was for local Alberta services. Actually, there was a previous \$1 million in an initial grant and then \$5 million also added to it for a total of \$6 million to the

Canada-Ukraine Foundation, which is registered within Canada – so it's, again, within Canada – then the further \$5 million for the Ukraine World Congress for its Unite with Ukraine campaign. So that's where the money went, and those are the amounts that went to each.

Mr. Loewen: Perfect. Thanks, Minister. I appreciate that.

I'll turn the rest of the time over to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. How much time do I have?

The Chair: Fifty-two seconds.

Mr. Nally: I just want to provide a little bit of colour, and I'm glad that the member has picked up on the fact that there is a continuity of government. In 2015, when the NDP were elected, it's not like everything that the PCs were working on stopped. In short, the NDP were not guilty of being the first government to overbuild the system; they were guilty of continuing the overbuild that began on the NDP. They were also guilty of not stopping the overbuild, and in addition they are guilty of allowing the overbuild to literally explode on their watch. Madam Chair, as the Minister of Energy pointed out, we saw \$100 million in 2020, and in 2021 there were zero dollars spent on transmission. So they are guilty of not stopping the overbuild, which is the exact restraint that we brought to the electricity grid.

The Chair: Well timed.

Hon. members, we will now move to a 20-minute block with government caucus members. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to share time with the minister, I'm going to assume?

Mr. Neudorf: Yes, Madam Chair. I'd like to share time with the Minister of Children's Services to begin.

The Chair: And that's okay? All right.
Please proceed.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Chair. First off, I would like to thank the minister for all of the time that she's put into this file, particularly the time she's spent with many of my constituents talking and answering questions about Children's Services and the new agreement as well as her work on getting the agreement with the federal government, working very hard and diligently on behalf of Alberta and the unique composition of our constituents all across the province, making sure that this program worked as good as it could with the constraints put on her by the federal government on their half of the negotiation.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

To begin, I'd like to start on page 16 if possible. There is a total of \$134,726,000 requested with another \$1 million that is being reprofiled from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs. Can the minister tell us how many children this funding is expected to benefit?

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Chair. The majority of this funding is in fact due to the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement, to which we've spoken a little bit about tonight. I do

want to point out – it's one thing that I didn't quite have enough time to mention when the members opposite were asking questions – that there is really one taxpayer. One taxpayer. And bringing these hard-earned Alberta tax dollars back to this province is something that Alberta parents wanted to see. This is a positive, so we did invest. We invested in supporting child care providers throughout COVID. We've got excellent news for parents and operators right across this province with \$1 billion in funding starting in the next budget year.

But in December 2021, to answer the member's specific question, there were approximately 70,000 children from birth to kindergarten age enrolled in licensed child care. That's about 73 per cent enrolment where we're at right now.

9:40

Affordability grant funding and subsidy supports will result in an average reduction of 50 per cent, and that is based on the average child care fees that we see. Programs do report that information to the ministry, so we use that as an average. With the operating grant we will reduce fees for all parents in every single space, Mr. Chair, and that is in licensed day homes and preschools and child care facilities because we respect parent choice. This is an average, so some families may see less of a reduction when it comes to a percentage. Some will receive a greater reduction than that, but every single parent right across this province, in every corner, in a licensed space will see a decrease. They already have seen that. Those dollars started to roll out in January. Some operators had the flexibility to roll it out in February or March and then retroactively support parents.

We're also committed to creating another 42,500 spaces as a minimum over the next five years.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, through you, to minister for their work on that. I deeply appreciate it, and I'd again just reiterate that I appreciate the time that she spent in Lethbridge and area speaking to many of those operators there, answering their questions.

Again, I know that the minister put a lot of work in negotiating an agreement with the federal government that would work for Albertan families. This government knows that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to child care, and I would like to again thank the minister for her work specifically on this file. The Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement includes child care worker supports, which I see are being allocated at \$28,167,000 on page 16 of the supplementary estimates. Can the minister tell us what supports this funding will provide for these workers? I know many of these workers have contacted my office, and they're seeking just to understand the complexities of this agreement and which part was the responsibility for the federal government and which is the responsibility for us as a provincial government. I'd appreciate a response on that.

Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Chair. I do want to thank the member for just being so engaged on this file. It is true that we've had a number of discussions with operators in Lethbridge and area, and specifically the last meeting we had was on areas where there's still some work to do. We committed to rolling this out over five years, and I firmly believe that to do that, we need feedback from Albertans, so I do want to thank the member for organizing that and making sure that he is well connected with operators in Lethbridge and organizing opportunities for me to speak directly to operators

and educators because we want to make sure we get this right, and that's exactly how we do that.

The \$28.2 million is made up of three things: \$3.3 million from the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement; \$30.3 million from the federal child care workforce agreement. There was a total in that funding of \$56 million to support the workforce in that federal agreement. This funding is to strengthen the workforce through skills training and professional development. It will also support child care staff recovery and retention, wage top-ups for child care and preschool educators, which is something we heard was very important, and it's off-set by \$5.4 million due to lower than anticipated uptake of the child care critical worker benefit, as we've discussed this evening.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister yet again. It is my understanding from page 16 of the supplementary estimates that related to this \$28.2 million is a partial offset of the \$5,414,000 due to the lower than expected enrolment in the critical worker benefit program, so I've got a number of questions on this topic and this line item in particular. I'll ask maybe a couple and allow the minister to respond. Can I assume that this lower enrolment is why we did not use the full critical worker benefit program, and would the minister be able to provide insight as to why we saw a lower than anticipated enrolment in that same program?

Ms Schulz: Thank you. Those are excellent questions, Chair. First of all, the number of eligible workers was estimated based on ratios of support to front-line staff, and we wanted to make sure that there were enough dollars set aside to support all of those front-line workers, educators, and support staff who might be eligible for this program. It was estimated based on the highest possible uptake because that is the responsible thing to do.

As mentioned, phase 2 was expanded to make sure that we could include non front-line staff, those that may not be trained early childhood educators levels 1, 2, 3, those educators that we provide a wage top-up for in our licensed spaces and facilities. We heard from child care operators that this work was very important, especially during a time like COVID. Those who may come in as supports, those who made sure that facilities were kept clean and they could adhere to all of the guidance put forward by the chief medical officer of health, those who provide healthy, nutritious meals for our youngest citizens are very important. In my case, you know, my own son maybe ate bread for probably a good six months. They prepared exceptional meals, Mr. Chair, but my son didn't always appreciate them. But I know lots of children and parents very much do. These are very important roles. We heard that feedback. We expanded that program.

Staff levels are also, though, based on child care enrolment, and those numbers fluctuated, of course, throughout the pandemic. Children's Services did in fact communicate a number of times to programs to make sure that they, first of all, were aware of the benefit, that they knew exactly who was eligible in each of the phases. We did make sure that all workers who were eligible in this phase who applied received the benefit.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead. Carry on, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Continuing on the same topic for the minister's sake, given that it is a cost-shared program, will the federal government approve the reallocation of the \$5.4 million that went unused? Going hand in hand with this last question, having

already established this as a cost-shared program, can the minister provide some insight into how the federal government determines Alberta's allocation under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement?

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much. To answer the first question, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration is providing the oversight to this program and will address the use of any unspent federal dollars, so that's not something that I should probably speak to specifically.

To answer the second question, the federal government's 2021 budget allocated \$30 billion for a five-year commitment for all provinces and territories. The Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement designated amounts to be transferred in total to all provinces and territories under this initiative. The formula includes funding on a per-child population, and that's zero to 12 for each of the provinces. Those were the numbers that they used for their basis, so we work within those parameters.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Two final questions on the same line of thinking, and then I can move on. Will the amount change year over year, and will we require additional supplementary supply each year? If the minister can explain a little bit of that process. Then perhaps the minister can explain why we need supplementary supply if there's an agreement in place that allocates the federal amount. Just last bits of clarity on that topic.

Thank you, Chair.

Ms Schulz: Those are excellent questions, Chair to the member. To answer the first question: no. The funding for the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement is included in Budget 2022. It's based on our estimated requirements to meet the new terms of the agreement. Each province has an action plan that specifically outlines how those dollars are going to be allocated. Like I said before, we do have some wiggle room to make sure that we're meeting the demands and what we're seeing as we roll this out. I think some of the flexibility is a positive thing, but only changes to funding allocations might require supplementary supply, which would be something like carry-over funds. In previous years we did have some flexibility to use some of those dollars, for example to address COVID-related needs, specifically in the first year of the pandemic.

To answer the second question, the ministry still needs the authority to disburse the funds. Additional details for that – that is, you know, as per, I would say, the Financial Administration Act. We still need the authority to draw from general revenue fund and then disburse those federal dollars received from the federal government.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

More questions, Member?

Mr. Neudorf: Yeah. Thank you very much, Chair. Carrying on, then, still on page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates, it is mentioned that the funding requested in supplementary supply is partially off-set by a reduction of \$49,300,000 due to lower than expected enrolment in child care facilities. On that topic and that amount I also have a number of questions. These are a little bit longer, so I'll probably just take them one at a time. Can the minister tell the Chamber if that's a result of the pandemic and the adjustments being made there with some families keeping their children at home or if there's another reason for this enrolment

reduction or something else that can be anticipated? If the minister can unpack that portion of that amount.

9:50

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much. You know, one of the very important places that we get this information is not only from parents but also from child care operators, and we do keep in touch with them and have throughout the pandemic.

In Budget 2021 the ministry did plan for enrolment rates to return closer to prepandemic levels. Obviously, none of us knew what each additional wave would look like. I think it's fair to say that there was some uncertainty due to COVID but also due to the economic situation that we saw at the time. However, levels have returned to just over 70 per cent enrolment. I think that's positive. They're still lower than the prepandemic levels of about 80 per cent. We do want to have a little bit of wiggle room there to make sure that there are spaces available for parents when they need them, but this, of course, did result in less spending in 2021-22.

We do continue to support Albertans applying for child care subsidy. This reduction has been restored in Budget 2022. Since the pandemic began, again, we've allocated \$165 million in supports so that child care programs could remain open and support parents who really, truly needed those dollars to take part in the workforce. Of that, provincial funding was \$26 million, and federal was \$139 million.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Continuing on that thought, how does lower enrolment in child care facilities result in an additional \$49.3 million? I think you partially answered this, but if you can expand a little bit more fully: I would assume that we would expect enrolment to continue to increase as we move away from the pandemic, and if so, how will this affect future budgets, and how will you make your decisions in light of that trend as we proceed towards recovery?

Ms Schulz: No. You know, we do not expect it to affect future budgets. As I've said, the agreement that we have with the federal government does require us to not replace provincial investments with federal, so we're going to continue to invest at budgeted levels in the past, and we'll continue to support the increasing demand of Albertans applying for child care subsidy. The one-time reduction has been restored in Budget 2022. This is something that we know Albertans are going to rely on. Again, as we roll this out, it's things like making sure we have spaces in areas that we need them, specifically rural, remote, northern communities, and making sure that we have lots of options like day homes and preschools, that we're focusing on as well, and I think that will help us better meet the needs of Alberta working parents who want choice, flexibility, and different options when it comes to care.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

You can carry on, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Can the minister also provide the Assembly with an explanation as to why we are doing supplementary supply when child care programs were undersubscribed and federal funding via the bilateral child care agreement increased significantly? Again, I think that's what some of my constituents would like to ask and just understand, how that relationship all works, in this format here tonight.

Ms Schulz: As I've said, this funding has been restored in Budget 2022 to continue to support the recovery of the child care sector. We know that parents really were counting on these dollars, whether it is to take part in postsecondary or education and skills training. I know, obviously, Chair, that there have been major investments made in that area because we know that our unequivocal focus is making sure that Albertans can get back to work and drive our economic recovery. We were one of the first provinces, as I've said, to roll out the affordability dollars to parents, again, knowing how important those supports are for working parents, especially for children zero to five. You know, that was a parameter of the federal government's program, but it also is where we see that child care fees are high or higher. We know that a strong child care sector supports all working parents. It's absolutely vital in getting parents back to work.

It is, like I said, \$3.8 billion over five years for this made-in-Alberta plan. We'll continue to fight for the flexibility that we need or push for the flexibility that we need to meet the unique needs of Alberta working parents. That's also something that I think Albertans expect, the flexibility to meet the needs here and not have a child care program that was designed in Ottawa or in other provinces where the market is different, the needs of parents are different. Rest assured, Chair, that we will continue to push for that. There's \$135.4 million allocated for this agreement in '21-22.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you again to the minister through you, Chair.

Two final questions. On page 16 a supplementary amount of \$1 million is requested to provide information technology for child care initiatives, which is federally funded. Can the minister tell us what this capital funding is going towards? It's not necessarily, at least in my thinking, my first thought for child care, that we're talking about information technology. I think many people have a question: what is this allocated toward, and how will it be used?

Thank you.

Ms Schulz: Chair, I had the exact same question when I first saw that within the agreements. You know, I would say this. We talk about red tape and reducing red tape. One of the first things we did in our ministry was work with Service Alberta and the ministry of red tape reduction to overhaul the subsidy application system where it used to take two weeks, three weeks, a fax machine, maybe a bus pass or a taxi or definitely a car to get down to the library. I mean, who has a fax machine in 2020? I think 2020 was when we made those changes. Now parents can apply from their smart phone or their computer wherever they are and know within 10 minutes what they can probably expect in terms of a subsidy.

You know, IT doesn't sound like a direct link to in-person child care services – it's not people's go-to – but we did have to make some changes to that system. Again, that was to allow us to add an affordability grant, because typically our system manages wage top-ups for early childhood educators and subsidy up to – back then, at that point it was \$90,000 of household income a year. We had to make changes to the subsidy threshold, the eligibility threshold, as well as for those affordability grants but also the volume.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Obviously, Chair, as parents we're quite excited about this program. We saw the volume of applications coming in for subsidy go up, and we needed to make sure that the system can handle that. I mean, hopefully, as we move forward, the system will become even more responsive to changes that we're seeing. We also know that we need data to, I would say, effectively make future investments and get these dollars out to programs so that they can help support parents.

The Chair: Five seconds remaining.

Mr. Neudorf: If I could just read it into the record?

The Chair: No. Sorry. Next time.

We'll now move to members of the Official Opposition for 10-minute blocks. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, would you like to share your time?

Ms Hoffman: I would, yeah.

The Chair: With which minister?

Ms Hoffman: The first question is to Culture and then the remainder for Energy, if possible.

The Chair: Okay. Is that amenable for Culture and Energy? Okay. Perfect.

Please proceed with your 10 minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks so much. I want to recognize the public servants who are here tonight to support us in this important discussion as we consider supplementary supply. Thank you very much to them and to all members of the Assembly. I also want to say how I appreciate the tone we've had here tonight, and I hope that we're able to keep it going. I think that having the back and forth and having some opportunity to probe more deeply is certainly beneficial to getting better information to answer questions.

My first question, the only one I really have to the Minister of Culture. I understand there was a \$1 million commitment and then a \$10.3 million commitment made on separate dates about a month ago and about three weeks ago. I'm just looking for clarification that that money has actually made its way out the door. We know that every day people in Ukraine are continuing to defend their territory, and their sovereignty matters, so I just want to make sure that the announcements that have been made have actually resulted in the, you know, helmets and first aid kits that have been announced.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. The grants have been through the process. Well, I've signed off on them. My understanding is that they are out the door, but I don't actually sign the cheques – they're direct transfers – but I have signed off on them, so they should be, if not already. That's as close as I can give you for an exact answer on that.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. If either the Minister of Culture or the Minister of Finance would take it upon themselves to confirm that that money has actually been distributed and notify the House tomorrow in whatever fashion they see fit. I just think Albertans would like the confirmation as quickly as possible that the commitments that have been made have materialized. I know the pledges were very well received, and rightfully so, but, yeah, every day people are putting their lives on the line, and I think we'd like to make sure that we have that confirmation. I appreciate that it's been signed. I just want to make sure that the resources are actually being provided, especially in hearing about things like medication and, you know, a lot of these very things that people there need to sustain their own lives. Waiting for three or four weeks to get money to buy medication that's much needed would not be sustainable for many people.

10:00

The remainder of my questions relate to Energy, and I just want to start by acknowledging that there are a couple of areas of overspend in this budget. The primary one relates to the recent announcement of an energy rebate, \$50 a month for three months postdated. I think that's January, February, March, but I imagine the money won't get out the door till probably April. But because it's in the current fiscal year, I think that's why we're being asked to approve the expenditure today. I'd like just some confirmation from either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Energy that with the \$50 per month, because it's for the first three months, which are in the fiscal year that we're already about to leave, that's why it's being asked for even though people probably won't actually see the cheques until the next fiscal year in their own mailboxes.

Mrs. Savage: Madam Chair, the member is correct. It's \$50 per month, for a total of \$150, to help address the electricity costs for the months of January, February, and March. This targeted relief will be provided to residential, farm, and small-business operators, consumers who consume less than 250 megawatt hours per year. We anticipate that that will cover up to 1 million homes and farms and businesses.

The exact eligibility criteria are being determined right now and will be announced very shortly. The government is working with utilities and regulators to determine the exact details. That includes working to enable the retroactive rebates to be applied to the consumers' bills as soon as possible. We'll be releasing those details as soon as possible. This rebate, combined with the natural gas rebate announced in Budget 2022, will provide some real relief to Albertans. We also think that the electricity rates, just to give an example of how the \$50 will help, have gone up, on average, by between \$50 and \$75 per month for the typical Albertan household, so a \$50 rebate per month for that period of time should significantly help those consumers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Except, what I'm hearing and what I imagine most members of the Assembly are hearing is that most people are saying that their bills are doubling or more than doubling. I've been door-knocking a lot this late winter, early spring, and many people on fixed income are talking about \$300-plus increases to their actual bills. So it's \$900, over that same period that they'll be getting \$150 for, that they're seeing as the increase over what their bill was before. I know that members have had it raised with them. I am aware that other people have been raising it with members of the government.

So it certainly isn't as substantial as I think many would hope to see when the government is celebrating this unplanned revenue that they have come across for the people of Alberta. Again, that revenue belongs to Albertans. It doesn't belong to one party or even to this Assembly. It's the benefit from primarily natural resource revenue, that we are all owners of and therefore should all see the benefit of.

The government is asking the Legislature to appropriate funds to provide some relief to Albertans, but at the same time they're spending \$30 million on the war room. I know that we have asked questions about why the government is continuing to prioritize that, and I think that we deserve some more clarity about why that \$30 million isn't being passed on to consumers to help reduce their personal burden that they're facing and why the government is seeking to, instead, ask for more money when they could simply reprofile some of the money from the war room, which hasn't seen

the kind of returns that I think most Albertans would hope from a \$30 million investment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. The funding for the Canadian Energy Centre comes from the overall industry advocacy budget of \$27 million. The portion that goes to the Canadian Energy Centre is \$12 million, so it's not the \$30 million. The remaining money in the industry advocacy budget goes to cover government advocacy for things like hydrogen, for things like critical and rare-earth minerals, for geothermal, for all the energy advocacy that we could anticipate and undertake. So it's only \$12 million that goes to the Canadian Energy Centre.

When you compare that to the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent targeting environmental initiatives in Canada and in Alberta to land-lock our resources, it's money well worth it to protect our energy sector and to ensure that we're able to continue to get our energy product to market. We've seen the impact in the past of what happens when you don't stand up and support your energy sector. It's vetoed pipelines. It's delayed projects. It has impacts on royalties collected. It has impacts on the differentials. We ended up in curtailment because we didn't have enough pipeline capacity to move our resources to market. Again, to emphasize, the budget for the Canadian Energy Centre is \$12 million.

The remaining budget is extremely important to Albertans if we want to be able to develop a hydrogen economy, if we want to be able to diversify. We know that the funding that has been used to target our oil and gas sector in the past is money looking for the next cause, it's money looking for a home, so we have to stand up and make sure that we're supporting hydrogen and all the sorts of energy that are going to be needed to bring in a lower carbon future.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Sure. Chair, may I have a time check?

The Chair: One and 20.

Ms Hoffman: Hopefully, I'll get to hear more supplementals in a further exchange, but I will take this one minute to just say that many Albertan families are facing a really tough time right now in terms of their personal bills and particularly as it relates to their power bills and energy costs. When I think about the government celebrating the \$300 million, which works out to about 50 bucks a month just for three months – and, of course, that continuation of the program isn't in Budget 2022, so we don't see any anticipated relief for Albertans in the out-months.

When I think about the \$1.3 billion, at least, that was gambled on the re-election of Donald Trump, what a difference that money could have made if it would have been extended through this budget to actually help family budgets rather than a failed bet on who would be the President of the United States. I can't help but think of the opportunity that that could have created. It could have been 250 bucks for those three months, or it could have been \$50 a month for an extended period of time. I think most Albertans would like to see some kind of stability, certainty, a return to some type of rate cap. Has the government considered what would be possible if that money that was gambled on that re-election bid instead had been focused on supporting everyday Albertans, particularly as it relates to their power bills?

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members . . .

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would also note . . .

The Chair: Sorry.

We'll now move to members of the government caucus for the next 10-minute block. Hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I would, yes, with the Minister of Culture.

The Chair: Minister of Culture, is that amenable?

Please proceed.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Excellent. I actually appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talking about Ukraine and, of course, the challenges that we've seen there. I'm certainly thankful to see our budget addressing some compassionate work and making sure that we as Albertans are helping out as best we can. I think it's fair to say that the horrors of the ongoing war in Ukraine are top of mind for many of us, and I've certainly heard from a lot of my constituents about this as we've seen images of bombed maternity hospitals, the one in Mariupol, a site which was supposed to be a place of life and hope, that have been circulating online and on our TV screens, a sickening example of the atrocities that are being committed. These images can leave many of us here feeling helpless and unsure of what we can do to help the people in Ukraine, and that is why, again, I'm so glad to see that our government is planning to commit funding to Ukraine.

If the supplementary estimates are passed, I see that on page 20 it says that the ministry is requesting supplementary funding "to provide funding to Ukraine for humanitarian and non-lethal defensive military equipment." I just wonder if the minister can tell us about what organizations this is going to be funding and what they will be using the funding for specifically.

10:10

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. Yes. I did briefly state a few minutes ago that the initial \$1 million went to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, then \$5 million more to the same, which makes a total of \$6 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, and then \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress, which is actually sort of a support organization for Ukrainians around the world to support their country, to support what happens with them. I can just confirm that the two organizations have a slightly different focus in terms of what we have committed to them for. The Canada-Ukraine Foundation is almost entirely for humanitarian aid: food, hygiene products and materials, medical. Those sorts of things are the primary purpose for the Canada-Ukraine Foundation. The Ukrainian World Congress is more for nonlethal defence to go to Ukrainian defence personnel in Ukraine. It includes things like helmets, night-vision goggles, boots, protective vests, also some communications equipment and logistics resources. That's sort of the general direction for those.

I can be even a little bit more specific on the \$350,000 for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Alberta chapter, because I just happen to have the actual page with me. That money specifically, according to the agreed-upon grant application: part of it will go for a public information campaign to educate Albertans about the war in Ukraine and, particularly, its impact on Alberta. I should say that that will also be in anticipation of refugees that may end up here, to facilitate joint fundraising projects – they're going to use it, actually, to multiply what we've given them through fundraising efforts to, hopefully, make it substantially a lot more than that, in fact – for humanitarian purposes and refugees to Alberta and to

enable a number of organizations to use organizations of the Alberta provincial chapter to liaise and provide co-ordination of volunteers with Alberta's professional immigrant settlement agencies. There is the anticipation that there will be a need to help some folks, whether it's for a shorter term of a few years or permanently – I don't know – to help settle immigrants that end up here because they are refugees of war.

That \$350,000 expense is associated with that: \$225,000 of it will be for staffing costs to achieve these objectives, another \$100,000 of it will be for general operations, and the last \$30,000 for social media marketing. That's \$350,000 to the Alberta chapter. That's the one I can give you the most details on because I happen to have it here with me tonight.

I hope that answers the question, and I'm open to whatever else.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to rise and respond to the I think very good question from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that is in terms of the status of the funds. It was certainly the belief of the Minister of Culture that the funds had gone out, and it was my belief. We can confirm right now that the funds have gone out to all three organizations, and I think all members of this House would be interested in that.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I'm glad we could get a double in there.

I'm also just excited to hear about the partnerships with civil society organizations and the ability to leverage these great organizations to just get that much more done with the government dollars here. Great to hear. Thank you, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister for that initiative.

Alberta has a large population, obviously, of Ukrainians, many of whom live in Calgary-Klein and have friends and relatives who have been severely impacted by Russia's aggression in their country. The fear and anxiety of these Albertans, what they're facing each and every day, is just unfathomable. I couldn't even imagine having to turn on the TV and log on to Twitter each morning to see how the war is moving and what area most recently has been hit with the air strikes, hoping to get confirmation that their loved ones are still okay and alive. The question here is: can the minister tell us how this funding will support those who are currently being impacted by the war here and in Ukraine?

Mr. Orr: I mean, this is truly a tragedy almost beyond belief, and the needs for just urgent humanitarian aid products are sort of the immediate urgency of the hour: food, clothing, baby care supplies. All of these different kinds of things are being delivered. I can also add that I know even from Alberta here there have been a number of individual voluntary organizations that have sent aid to Ukraine. I've received pictures of the plane landing in Ukraine, it being distributed to different cities. There's sort of the immediate physical support that will come but also, you know, the long-term trauma, the separation of families, the death of loved ones.

Like I said, these are tragedies almost beyond belief. The need to welcome and to help people settle and be accepted, those that end up here in Alberta as refugees: I think there'll be a tremendous need for us as Albertans and in particular the Ukrainian community to gather around their people to try and provide for them that sense of welcome, of belonging.

I don't know that we can even begin to imagine the struggles that they will face, but I know that there is an intent to be able to provide housing, of course, employment opportunities, resettlement issues, counselling and supports, and all those different kinds of things. It's the full spectrum, really, of the immediate physical need to much

longer term mental, economic, social supports, that will be there to help the people particularly that arrive here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair, and again thank you to the minister for all of his efforts to help make things better for the people in Ukraine as well as those who have loved ones here that have people impacted by this war.

Talking about our civil society partners and ways people can get involved, I'm just curious, with the numerous ways that you've mentioned, if there's going to be a site available or if you can reference how people can get connected so they can volunteer and they can help contribute financially or in other ways if possible.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the best answer to that would be to connect with the Alberta council of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. That is their role to sort of be that clearing house. That's what we've funded them for, to be that resource and that centre guide, and I think they'll do a great job of that. That would be my answer, to connect with them, and they'll be the ones that will be the most informed, the most connected and aware of what the specific needs are in that regard.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member will not have enough time.

The next 10-minute block will go to members of the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: I just wanted to paraphrase the last question, and I know the minister didn't have a chance to respond. Just the question around the significant investment – we believe it was reported at least \$1.3 billion – on the re-election of Donald Trump in one specific energy project and how that money could have instead been used to support family budgets. It would either be \$250 a month, I believe, following the same formula that the minister outlined around \$300 million being \$50 a month, or it could have been extended for many more months. Does the minister have any thoughts about how that money could have been reprioritized to address family budgets?

The Chair: I'm assuming you're sharing your time.

If the minister is amenable, please proceed.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. One of the things that could've helped us with having more funds available was if there hadn't been the NDP crude-by-rail deal. Madam Chair, it would have cost the government \$2.7 billion to run that program. We've achieved a significant cost reduction by renegotiating the contracts, and we saved at least \$400 million from that.

10:20

One of the significant things here is that some of the money – you'll notice in the supplementary estimates that their overall savings from Budget 2021 in the Department of Energy budget was \$203 million. Over \$50 million of that was some further savings in the crude-by-rail contracts, about \$51 million, which has been available. Certainly, if there hadn't been the crude-by-rail contracts negotiated in the very last days of the former government's tenure, we would have had additional funds. On top of that is the Balancing Pool allocation, \$1.3 million in ratepayer money, which is now being paid back, due to the NDP's disastrous management of our

electricity system. So those two things, \$2.7 billion in crude by rail plus \$1.3 billion in the Balancing Pool, are fairly significant.

I would just point out that with respect to the KXL claim we are pursuing a NAFTA claim in the United States, under a CUSMA claim, for arbitration to recover those costs. Madam Chair, that investment in KXL was to derisk a project due to political risk. The crude-by-rail deal was just simply a bad deal, as was the Balancing Pool. Those things would have significantly returned money. But, as I said, we are providing \$300 million electricity support to consumers through the budget.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I was hoping we would have heard was some discussion around what could actually be done for Alberta families instead of trying to lay blame for skyrocketing costs that Alberta families are facing today under the current government's leadership.

I do want to touch base on page 26 of the supplementary supply estimates. There's a line item where it says, "cost of selling oil." The budget we're asking for here in the Assembly is almost double what the current estimate was, with the supplementary estimate an additional \$63 million. I'd like to have the minister explain a little bit why that number is so much higher than anticipated.

Mrs. Savage: Madam Chair, the cost of selling oil refers to the APMC costs to market the BRIK barrels, bitumen royalty in kind. It goes up and down depending on the volume of oil marketed. There's been a greater amount of – it also goes up and down dependent on the costs of transportation and other logistics. So over last year the cost of selling oil went up because there were more BRIK barrels being marketed, transportation costs were higher. Also, some more of the costs for selling oil were pulled back into APMC. Previously, in prior year's budget, there was a third-party agent that was engaged to do it. That's been pulled internal, in-house, to do that by APMC, which has saved significant costs overall from the third party. Those various factors of the cost of selling oil have increased it. One of the parts is that it's a good thing. It's a good thing if there's more oil being marketed by APMC because there will be a revenue associated in another part of the budget. That's basically background on that additional cost.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: May I have a time check again, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Just over five minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, wow. Excellent. I will ask one more question and then probably will, if there's still time remaining, pass to one of my colleagues, probably the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The minister just highlighted that moving staffing from a third party to internal hire within APMC has seen cost savings, significant cost savings, I think she just highlighted. I just wanted to say that I'm glad that she has shared that information with the House, and I hope that when colleagues around the cabinet table are looking at privatizing or outsourcing to third parties, they consider some of the feedback that we just received about some of the benefits when you actually do things internally, in-house, and how you can see significant savings that can, in turn, be passed on to Albertans at large, including, of course, the taxpayer. So thank you, Minister, for that clarity.

I'm happy to pass the remainder of my time to my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Member Irwin: Yes, please, if you don't mind.

The Chair: Which minister?

Member Irwin: Let's stay on the Energy train, why not.

The Chair: Hon. minister, are you amenable to sharing time?

Mrs. Savage: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Member Irwin: Thank you.

Thanks very much. I would like to touch on a few pieces that have been said before but maybe just get a little bit of clarity. You know, well, I will preface this a little bit. I am going to get to my question here in estimates, but I did hear the minister railing a bit against – when asked about the war room by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, her response was to talk about activists and that sort of thing.

I just really hope that this minister, you know, reflects on the fact that – she did make a comment about, I think, a low-carbon economy, which was nice to hear. But we are hearing today – and I didn't get a chance to speak in the Legislature at all, or I would have noted it – just where we're at with climate change these days: 30 degrees above normal in the Arctic today, 40 degrees above normal in the Antarctic today. So we are definitely seeing the devastating effects of climate change. I do hope that this minister is very aware of that.

I'll connect that to the war room and to the budget line estimates, to just, again, think about how that money, the \$30 million on the failed war room, could be instead used. I mean, we could point to countless examples like, you know, perhaps reindexing AISH. To ask it again and maybe in a different form: if you're not going to shut down the war room – and I feel like the prior answer was unsatisfactory – why not look at reinvesting that money in, say, diversification projects? I'd love for the minister to just talk a little bit more about why we're paying for the failed war room.

Mrs. Savage: I've got to get a question just to address some of the questions around climate change, and I can tie some of that background into some of the work that the Canadian Energy Centre is doing. Let me talk about the tremendous project that our Canadian oil sands producers are undertaking in their pathways initiative to net zero. That's to get our entire oil sands to net zero by 2050. That's a significant initiative that the Canadian Energy Centre is promoting. In fact, their recent advertising campaign in New York City, in the *Wall Street Journal*, on billboards in New York City was: cleaner, closer, committed to net zero.

Talking about the importance of Canadian energy, I can't think of a better use of Canadian Energy Centre funds than to promote how great our country is and how great our oil sands producers are in addressing climate change. So that's one of the significant things that the Canadian Energy Centre is doing, and I would think and I would hope that the members opposite would be proud of that, would be proud of our oil production here in Canada, would be proud of the fact that our pathways initiative is getting our oil sands to net zero.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise. Just on the question of the energy centre and the

important work that it does, we certainly heard from the Minister of Energy of the great progress that our oil sands producers are making in terms of reducing emissions. I think we all agree that that's important work, but I would assert that there has been an inordinate focus . . .

The Chair: My apologies, hon. minister. Perhaps in the next round.

We will now go to members of the government. Hon. Member for Grande Prairie, would you like to share your time and with which minister?

Mrs. Allard: Yes, please, Madam Chair. I'd like to start with the Minister of Energy, please.

The Chair: The Minister of Energy says that's okay. Please proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Energy is a hot topic tonight, and it should be in Alberta these days. I just wanted to highlight – again, I'm reading from the fiscal plan update that there's a \$300 million increase in Energy for the \$50 per month fixed rebate for electricity costs, and these increases are for January, February, March of 2022, to be provided to these consumers who are using less than 250 megawatt hours per year consumption.

10:30

That said, I guess my first question for the Minister of Energy is – I note and I'm referencing page 23 of supplementary supply. The supplementary estimate is only \$96 million out of \$300 million, and I just wondered if the minister could expand. She started to answer that in one of the previous questions from the members opposite, but I was curious to understand why that is so much less than \$300 million. As the Minister of Children's Services said earlier, there's only one taxpayer, so I'd really like the taxpayer to understand what this government has been doing to be fiscally responsible with this budget and, in fact, to bring in a balanced budget. Through you, Chair, to the minister, I'd love to hear her answer on why the supplementary supply is so much lower than the required \$300 million.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The Member for Grande Prairie is correct. Of the \$300 million allocated to the electricity rebates, \$96,246,000 is in the supplementary estimates. The other \$203.8 million is coming from surplus funds in the Department of Energy budget, funds that we did not use last year in 2021.

That's a good-news story, and I can go over some of the areas where we've achieved savings significantly. First off was the crude by rail, the divestment of the contracts, and due to the very good work of our officials in APMC with the divesting of those contracts, they found another \$51 million in savings this year which is available and is now in that surplus of \$203 million.

We have some surplus with lower spending in the resource development and management part of our budget, so that's a savings. With discipline and the government's emphasis on essential spending only, we've achieved \$13 million in savings in that area.

We've achieved some savings in the site rehabilitation program. That's the allocation of spending from year to year, so there are some cost-reduction savings in the site rehabilitation program.

In the renewable electricity program, which was a program from the previous government, there are lower anticipated payments, \$5 million in savings, as a result of favourable electricity market prices. That amount is partially off-set by the \$63 million increase

in the cost of selling oil, that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora had asked about.

So this is a good-news story. We've saved \$203.8 million from the budget last year, which has been applied and can go to lowering electricity costs for Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Madam Chair, and, through you, my thanks to the minister and her team on behalf of the Alberta taxpayer for those savings.

I did want to go back to something that we were talking about with the Minister of Energy and also with the Minister of Finance from the members opposite around the Canadian Energy Centre. I know the ministers got cut off in their answers. I was just wondering if either minister would rise and respond.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I have been quite interested in the conversation around the value of the Canadian Energy Centre and the important work that they do advocating for Canadian energy. We've heard the Minister of Energy stand up and talk about the great progress that our oil sands producers have been making – we can certainly add our conventional producers as well to that – in emissions reduction.

Madam Chair, right now there has been an inordinate focus on one part of the E in ESG, simply on reducing emissions at the expense of social and governance issues. CIBC Capital Markets just issued a report. I picked it up tonight on BNN, and I'm going to just read a bit of it into the record.

CIBC noted that the focus on carbon emissions has led ESG funds to make the "shocking" decision to load up on Russian energy firms.

"In the most shocking example we have come across to date, the ESG fund universe owned twice as much Russian oil and gas as Canadian oil and gas at the end of last year."

Madam Chair, the Crown rests.

Our investment in the Canadian Energy Centre to advocate for Canadian and Alberta oil and gas is essential. It's not only an opportunity but a deep responsibility to get responsibly produced, ethically produced oil and gas on to the market to displace Russian production, Russian production that's fuelling the war against Ukraine, the atrocities against Ukrainian people.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I'll have you table that document at the appropriate time.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could I have a time check, please?

The Chair: You have four minutes left.

Mrs. Allard: Perfect. Thank you so much.

I want to go back to the electricity costs and the electricity rebate. Again, I'm referencing page 24, I believe, of the supplementary estimates. I see that the \$96,246,000 has been requested along with the \$203,754,000 which is being reprofiled. Again, I want to highlight for the taxpayers this evening that are watching that the ministry has managed to save over \$200 million to help them, to support them in their electricity expenses.

In order to pay for this electricity rebate program, estimated at \$300 million, I have a couple of questions, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. First, can the minister tell the House how

many households this funding is expected to support with the \$150 rebate over three months? Then my second question. We've seen some criticism that this program should have been extended longer than three months. Can the minister tell the House what the projections are for electricity rates after the rebate period has concluded?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. The electricity rebate program for the \$50 per month, totalling \$150, applies for three months – January, February, and March – and we estimate that it will cover over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses to help retroactively pay the costs. The homes, farms, and businesses that qualify are those who consume fewer than 250 megawatt hours per year, so that will be quite significant. It's offered for three months over the winter. That's when consumers are struggling the most.

Madam Chair, we're taking a number of efforts in the long term to bring down the costs of electricity. We spoke earlier – and the associate minister of natural gas also spoke to it – on a number of things and initiatives that are under way to reduce electricity costs long term, including addressing the long-term problems and costs associated with distribution, transmission. This amount for the \$150 per month will help over 1 million homes, businesses, and farms to weather the electricity prices over the winter months.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Madam Chair and, through you, to the minister. To aid in transparency for all Albertans, I'm hoping the minister will be able to provide a bit more clarity around how this program will actually be delivered to Albertans, those that qualify. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: how will this electricity rebate be received by Albertans? Can they expect to be receiving a \$50 cheque three months in succession? Is it one cheque for \$150, or will this rebate just show on their electricity bills?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Madam Chair. The exact eligibility criteria are being determined and will be announced in the very near future. The government right now is working with the utilities and the regulators to determine the exact details, including timing. It takes a little bit of time to work those details out, and this work includes working to enable retroactive rebates to be applied to consumer bills as soon as possible. This work is under way, and the exact mechanism and details will be released – and transparently released – as soon as possible.

The Chair: The hon. member, with 25 seconds.

Mrs. Allard: Perfect. I'll be really fast, Madam Chair.

My final question. The cost estimate is about \$300 million, and I'm just wondering: is there a possibility that this rebate program will cost more, and if so, how will that be funded?

The Chair: The hon. minister, with 13 seconds.

Mrs. Savage: We're anticipating – the estimate is that it will cost \$285 million to \$300 million. That's based on an estimate of how many consumers and how many businesses qualify.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm assuming you're sharing your time. With what minister?

Member Irwin: You know what? I'm having a lot fun with Energy, so if we could continue.

The Chair: That's great to hear. The hon. minister seems amenable to sharing time. Please proceed.

10:40

Member Irwin: So kind, so kind. I appreciate that I had the chance to just mention climate change because, you know, I fear it's a topic that doesn't get enough attention in this Chamber. There are a lot of folks out there, young and old, who write to me every day, that are incredibly concerned about the very real impacts of climate change and that we're seeing, as I noted earlier, just shocking increases in the temperatures in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. It's truly a crisis, and it should compel all of us in this Chamber to take action.

You know, I'd like to switch gears to talk a little bit about – switch gears for me, but it's actually been a topic that's come up a lot tonight, and that's on utilities. I have to say that, just so I don't get called out on it, I am, of course, referring to page 25 in the supplementary estimates. I haven't had a chance, actually, to talk a lot about my constituents lately in the Chamber. Like, I'm sure, most MLAs, we're hearing from so many of our constituents who are struggling with their bills. Even tonight I was talking with someone on Instagram who said that she's going to face, likely, having to very much choose between paying her power bills and paying for groceries. She said that she's immunocompromised. Anyways, it's one story out of many. I know I don't have time to talk about how many folks we really are hearing from. It's not an exaggeration. There are a lot of people who are struggling.

I think, too – and maybe the associate minister would even want to chime in. You know, I was actually just door-knocking in his riding on the weekend, and it was fantastic to meet some of his constituents in Morinville-St. Albert. It really was. We had some wonderful conversations. I did hear from folks. I always ask people when I'm at the doors: what issues are top of mind for you? Utility bills. It's interesting that where we were door-knocking is quite different demographically than Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: fairly big houses and a lot of folks who are doing fine financially, they would say. But even many of them said: "You know what? It's been hard." We're seeing the concerns about rising utility bills transcend socioeconomic backgrounds, right? Like, everybody is struggling it seems.

You know, can I ask this minister or this associate minister to further clarify how it is – if we're hearing from our constituents, I'm certain they are as well if they're listening – justifiable to offer to Albertans simply a \$50 rebate. How is that sufficient? I need that again clarified on the record for my constituents and for theirs as well.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thanks. I'm just going to make a couple of comments and turn it over to the associate minister, seeing that he can talk in reference to his constituents. I would note that we do recognize the pressures that high electricity costs can place on Albertans. We hear it, too. I hear it in my constituency, Calgary-North West. We do note that the electricity rates are based on market conditions, namely supply and demand. There are several options to help alleviate some of the high costs, including fixed-price contract, equalized payment plan. But we recognize, on top of that, that people are struggling. That's why we brought in the electricity rebate program, \$300 million of support for Albertans, totalling \$150 for each consumer.

I'll turn the time over to my colleague the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity to speak to his constituents.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm quite aware that the hon. member was in my riding. They met at Mercado's, which was my unofficial campaign residence during the nomination. In fact, my son works there. Certainly, it's a very meaningful location for me.

What I will say to the hon. member is: let's stop underpinning what we're actually – the support we're providing: it's not \$50. We're providing \$150. That is going to hit their bills in the form of a credit of \$150. Where we landed on that is that we know the average bill increased between \$15 and \$75, and that's per month, so \$50 is on the high end of that, and we are paying it retroactively for the months that had the highest increases, which would be January, February, and March.

I want to reach out to that member, you know, through you, Madam Chair, to them and to their entire caucus because they seem to be speaking to a lot of members, they're speaking to a lot of individuals that are struggling with utility costs, and I hope that they are making those individuals aware of a couple of things. One is that if they are on a variable rate, then they should encourage them to take a look at a fixed-rate contract because not everybody saw their electricity bills go up double and triple. They would have seen small increases through usage, but the individuals who saw the big increases are because they had variable rates. I would encourage the hon. member to direct those folks that are struggling with higher costs to the Utilities Consumer Advocate and have them take a serious look at fixed-rate contracts.

The other thing that I'd encourage the member to do is that if they actually have someone that is struggling with utility insecurity and is at risk – I mean, they're not even listening, Madam Chair. They're either talking amongst themselves or looking down at their shoes, but I would encourage them to refer those members to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where they can actually get supports. There are supports for low-income seniors. There are supports for low-income Albertans that are struggling with utility and security.

Lastly, if we have an individual that is on the verge of having their utilities cut off, Madam Chair, my office has been reaching out to the utilities, and they have provided assurance to us that they have no interest in cutting anybody's electricity off. They have said to us that they will work with any Albertan that works with them and they will provide flexible payment terms that will allow them to keep their lights on. If nothing else, encourage those individuals to contact their retailer because as long as they're contacting the retailer, they will work with them, and then there's no reason to have their utilities cut off.

Again, between that and referring them to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where there's some really good information on fixed-rate contracts, that would be my advice, Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. members, if they could share that with these Albertans that are struggling with a higher cost of electricity.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member. Two minutes.

Member Irwin: Wow. You know, this is very good timing because I wasn't able to mention her name before; I just asked her if I could, if I could share. This is Patti, the person I was referring to earlier: "We've been unable to pay rent and the extreme utilities and buy food. I prioritize rent, gas. I owe over \$1,200 on both of my bills." She says: "I'm immunosuppressed due to medications. I have not worked since January 2020. I've run through my savings RRSP. I

went and got a job in January. Three days in I caught COVID, and I'm dealing with the effects of that."

That's just one example, somebody who is a low-income Albertan who's struggling every single day, and this minister is asking those folks to just go figure it out, go navigate a fairly complicated system. I admit that I'm not, you know, a rocket scientist, but it is hard to navigate the system of trying to figure out how to move to a fixed rate. I just think it's quite rich of this minister to offer that as a solution to Albertans when he and his government could be taking that real action to make Albertans' lives easier.

I think, you know, this government even co-opted one of our sayings from a while ago: making life more affordable. You're certainly not making life more affordable. You're making life more expensive and you're making it very difficult, particularly for folks who are working three jobs, folks who are a single mom who is being told to just go and change your contract or go and figure it out. That is just not enough. Very much a pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps mentality, and that's incredibly frustrating because that assumes that everybody has boots.

All right. I don't think I have a lot of time left, but I would again just, you know, get on the record that, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora did as well . . .

The Chair: My apologies.

Hon. members, we will now go to members of the government. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Hanson: I'll share my time with the Minister of Health. Shockingly, Minister.

The Chair: Happy to do so. Please proceed.

10:50

Mr. Hanson: Awesome. Thanks. Just a few questions here. In the Health supplementary supply estimates, page 28, there's additional money for physician compensation, with page 29 under line item 3.2 further clarifying that this additional funding is for physician services. Can the minister explain how this increase relates to the number of doctors in Alberta?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much to the hon. member for the question, Madam Chair. The supplementary estimate is due to higher than budgeted costs primarily for fee-for-service billings, alternate relationship plans, and the rural, remote, northern program rather than the actual number of active physicians in Alberta. Now, the growth in expenditure relates to an increase in fee-for-service compensation for physicians. This is due largely to an increase in demand for services, sort of a catching up of the previous year. As I indicated in a previous set of questions, during the first year of COVID there were a large number of Albertans who decided not to see their family physicians, for example. They held off on doing that, but then in the most recent fiscal year, as vaccines became more available and more people got vaccinated, they felt more comfortable to go and see their doctors, and there was a catch-up. So that's a big part of it. Another part of it is also associated with ARPs, and then, lastly, in regard to the rural, remote, northern program.

Now, all of this growth is not directly targeted at increasing the numbers, but I can share with the hon. members that, you know, the number of physicians billing in Alberta actually increased this budget year over the previous budget year, and the number of doctors coming to Alberta, when we do a year-over-year comparison, also increased. That is in part in terms of particularly

the rural, remote, northern allowances. That was additional money particularly for rural doctors where there are challenges and shortages in certain areas.

As well, as I indicated earlier to the House, Madam Chair, for the omicron wave we increased flexibility for billing of virtual codes by doctors. One reason we did that was because we actually understood that there were some challenges of doctors doing billings when people wouldn't see them, a loss in revenues and a risk that family doctors would be closing their doors. We didn't want to see that happen, so we made the change in terms of the virtual codes. Although it doesn't relate directly to the number of doctors in terms of the payments here, it helps to retain and then also attract, because we have, especially in our rural areas, some of the highest pay rates for family doctors so that we can attract them and retain them.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. I know that the minister is probably shocked that I'm asking these questions about rural health care and rural physicians, but I just have to get it off. One of the biggest issues facing rural communities, as has been discussed, with regard to health care is a lack of physicians who are able to operate clinics and provide medical care. This is by no means a new problem; however, it is a persisting problem that needs to be treated. I see on page 28 of the supplementary estimates that \$173,857,000 would be allocated toward physician compensation if these estimates were granted. My question is: how does this increased spending on physician compensation attract physicians to rural Alberta, and will it be different for more remote areas?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, our government is focused on ensuring that there is equitable access to health care across the entire province, including in rural Alberta. Quite frankly, this \$173 million: part of that is actually to do just that. You know, spending more on physician compensation means more efforts and better ability to recruit and retain doctors across our entire province. Two of the categories that I mentioned in my earlier answer of \$173 million is \$43 million in clinical alternate relationship plans, or ARPs, to provide 15 new ARPs, 12 of which are related to clinical stipends plus three additional ARPs, and an increase of \$43.4 million in the rural, remote, northern program.

Now, Madam Chair, the rural, remote, northern program compensates physicians who practise in underserved areas, particularly northern Alberta. The program pays a percentage premium on services in geographical locations depending on the latitude where the services were provided. There are higher percentage premiums for locations with fewer physicians that are more remote, considering the availability of general practitioners and specialists' proximity to regional centres and proximity to Edmonton and Calgary. Communities are given isolation scores and are assigned a premium amount as well as a flat fee, details of which – if the hon. member is interested, you can go online and check it out. These estimates also include a \$2 million increase for the rural health physician action plan.

Madam Chair, this is part of our \$90 million commitment that we made last year in terms of improving doctor recruitment and retention in Alberta, particularly in rural areas. Let me just give you a breakdown of this. This includes, as I indicated, the rural, remote, northern program, which is in total \$57 million, which includes the \$43 million increase, which is part of these estimates; the rural medical education, which is \$6 million; the rural integrated community clerkship program, which is \$4 million; the Rural Health Professions Action Plan, which is \$9 million; there's also a

locum program that's \$3 million, and that is comprised of a rural locum program of \$1.4 million and a specialist locum program of \$1.6 million; and a rural physician on-call program of about \$12 million.

Madam Chair, I'd like to point out that this \$90 million that we made in this year's budget: it's in Budget 2022 because we understand the importance to be able to attract and retain doctors, particularly in our rural communities. Also, we have a new program, the RESIDE program. As the hon. member knows, \$6 million over three years to target certain areas where there is a lack of particularly family physicians in those areas, to be able to pay for some of the education of residencies so that they could actually sign a contract and go and live there, hopefully settle, raise a family, and stay in that particular area and be able to provide services to rural Albertans.

Madam Chair, not only will the estimates in this budget help pay for that in the current budget year, but we are investing in the next budget year in Budget '22.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Minister. I'm sure that you will agree that getting people from one community to go to school and come back to their community – they're more likely to stay, so I thank you for that program.

During the COVID pandemic a major focus of this government has been protecting our most vulnerable, primary among them being seniors in continuing care homes. On page 28 of the supplementary estimates under the additional \$716,120,000 estimated for COVID-19 pandemic response, I see over \$260 million dedicated towards continuing care. To the Minister of Health: what outcomes are expected in Alberta's continuing care services as a result of this increased funding?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. In terms of the breakdown of that \$260.4 million, that includes just under \$258 million in support to continuing care operators and just approximately \$2.7 million for continuing care audits.

Madam Chair, as you know and as the hon. member knows, our COVID-19 response has focused on protecting continuing care residents and staff since the beginning of the pandemic with ongoing adjustments as new evidence has emerged. Continuing care settings are uniquely high risk for COVID-19 outbreaks and severe outcomes. We recognized this early in the pandemic and provided incremental funding for continuing care operators starting in May of 2020.

As continuing care measures remained in place until the province reached step 3, the government of Alberta has continued this funding throughout this fiscal year to support clients, residents, and staff in these settings. Specifically, this funding helps contracted designated supported living and long-term care operators to pay for increased costs during the pandemic, including enhanced staffing, extra cleaning supplies, and a wage top-up of an additional \$2 per hour for health care aides. The funding also includes a \$2 wage top-up for HAs in contracted home care agencies to help retain current and recruit additional staff and allow more Albertans to be cared for in their own homes.

Madam Chair, you know, this is critically important. Not only does this supplemental pay for and support continuing care homes in the existing budget year, but Budget '22 also continues on this because we recognize that even though we're heading into the endemic phase, COVID is not over; it's still with us. We need to support our continuing care homes.

I was also, Madam Chair, incredibly excited to be able to make the announcement of – you know, Budget '22 is not only about

supporting continuing care homes through the pandemic, but we are also making significant investments in capital. We will have this in the upcoming budget; 1,515 new spaces for continuing care. We increased the budget by over \$200 million for the upcoming . . .

11:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt.

The remaining six minutes will go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to likely share time with the minister.

Ms Gray: I would love that. With the Health minister, to begin along the same line that was just being debated. Thank you very much. On page 28 of the supplementary supply estimates the increase to physician compensation, which you've had the opportunity to speak to a number of times through this debate. Minister, if I was listening carefully enough, I believe at one point you were saying that the physician compensation increase, spending more on compensation, allows you to better recruit and retain doctors. That was one of the things that you said.

Looking at the supplementary supply and thinking about the previous year, I'm curious. We do not see any additional dollars for other health care workers when it comes to their compensation. We know strongly that the heroes of this pandemic struggled with burnout, struggled with staffing issues, and I don't see anything in this supplementary supply for other health care workers, allied professionals, other than physicians, and, in fact, in the media recently bargaining positions of pay cuts.

While physician compensation is increased to better recruit and retain, I'm concerned that the supplementary supply estimates do not include compensation increases for other health care professionals, and I'm curious about your department's, Health, human resources plan because I think there are some serious concerns, particularly coming out of the pandemic, in this regard.

Mr. Copping: Well, thanks to the hon. member for the question. I appreciate that, you know, this is the way – partly it's how budgets are broken down. In regard to physician compensation there is a specific line item that was associated with that, so we can actually talk specifically to that. I can say, for example, that for continuing care we did provide a \$2 wage top-up, as I just spoke to earlier. That was in the supplemental estimates, and then we actually will continue that into the next budget and Budget '22.

In regard to other health care professionals, for example nurses, for some of these we didn't need a supplemental benefit because this is actually either – you know, in terms of the most recent nurses settlement this was either captured within the current AHS budget or, quite frankly, its budget is budgeted in Budget '22 in terms of the other changes associated with that.

But I would like to make one comment about – you know, the hon. member sort of raised the negotiations that are ongoing, and this goes more to a Budget '22 question. Similarly, in terms of Budget '22 with physician compensation we did not make a significant change because we don't know what the outcome of that bargaining will be. Similarly, in terms of the bargaining that's going on between the HSAA and AHS at this point in time, bargaining is just that: bargaining. As the hon. member knows, with experience dealing with unions as a former Minister of Labour and Immigration, the parties put a position on the table and then they move from there.

Again, as I've indicated in this House earlier, I'm very hopeful and optimistic that the HSAA and AHS will move towards an agreement just like UNA and AHS moved towards an agreement. Any costs associated with that in the current year were such that we didn't need a supplemental estimate, but the fact is that, as the hon. member knows, Budget 2022 includes the costs in that. We will do the same thing as necessary for any other agreements that we reach.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. Then I will just very quickly, because we're running out of time – part of the supplementary supply estimates refers to the lower than budgeted expense in some programs off-setting some of the increases in others, and we learned through Budget 2022 that one of the areas of underspending is in the EMS budget. So in relation to these supplementary supplies I simply want to ask the minister why that underspending may be happening given the number of red alerts that we have across this province. EMS is so critically important to Alberta families and is an issue of concern. So I raise that as one of the items of lower than budgeted expense in your Budget 2022.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you for the question from the member. Like, in supplementary estimates, if I can point your attention to it, there's a \$164 million savings which off-sets the \$173 million, so the net is a \$10 million increase. I can tell you, though, that when we look at the major dollars associated with that, the savings is not associated with EMS, quite frankly. You know, we can see that the biggest element of that is a \$65 million decrease in the drugs and supplemental health benefits, a \$59 million – sorry; a \$45 million decrease for a capital grants requirement. This is in regard to the continuing care beds and because we – this was an RFP that was done on the expense side to increase the continuing care beds. Given COVID we weren't able to actually implement that last year, so that money we moved over to Budget 2022. When I make reference to the 1,515 new beds that we actually have coming this year, that's what it relates to, the \$44 million.

There's a \$10 million decrease in out-of-province health services due to lower demand as a result of the pandemic, an \$8 million decrease in addiction and mental health as a result of the delay in opening recovery communities, but we've actually just moved the money. Moving on, a \$4 million decrease in regard to information technology. These are the changes . . .

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2021-22 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 14, agreed to on March 17, 2022, the allotted time of three hours has elapsed. We shall now proceed to the final vote on the supplementary supply estimates.

Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report the 2021-2022 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2021-22 supplementary supply

estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$55,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$134,726,000; capital investment, \$1 million.

Culture and Status of Women: expense, \$10,350,000.

Energy: expense, \$96,246,000.

Health: expense, \$725,974,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$231,208,000.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Hon. members, I would like to alert hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 61(3) following the Committee of Supply's report on the supplementary estimates, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

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

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Bill 8 will provide authority for government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. Supplementary estimates include \$1.2 billion in expense and \$1 million in capital investment.

The funding in Bill 8 will ensure that the government can cover the health care costs of the pandemic while also sending aid and equipment to Ukraine, provide electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with rising costs, support child care workers and parents of young children, and build municipal infrastructure.

11:10

Other items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are off-set by savings in other areas, meaning the overall increase to the deficit forecast for '21-22 will be limited to approximately, in fact, just over \$200 million. Responsible fiscal management, a growing economy, and strong energy prices have helped the government successfully shrink this year's deficit by about 81 per cent since Budget 2021 was first tabled. I ask all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support this bill and help the government move forward with these important supports.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent for the Chamber to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Canadian Pacific Railway Service

16. Mrs. Sawhney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Rutherford speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join the debate?

I will give just one minute for our officials to exit the Chamber.

Okay. Any members to speak to Government Motion 16?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Government Motion 16.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 16 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:12 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Savage
Allard	Madu	Sawhney
Copping	McIver	Schow
Frey	Nally	Schulz
Gotfried	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Nicolaides	Toews
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Turton
Jones	Orr	van Dijken
LaGrange	Panda	Yao

Against the motion:

Ceci	Gray	Irwin
Deol	Hoffman	Shepherd

Totals: For – 27 Against – 6

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we've made some great progress this evening and Albertans were well served by the Chamber. At this time I move that we adjourn until tomorrow, Tuesday, March 22, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:16 p.m.]

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