



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 22, 2022

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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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)
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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)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
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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)
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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Vacant
Vacant
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the galleries today is Cyndi Bester, the executive director of the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, a guest of the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Also seated in the gallery are guests of the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

I would like to ask that the Ncube family as well as the Taylor family and Ms Bester please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Renaud: Modest sacrifices: that's how the Premier characterized the massive cuts and sneaky schemes to take more money directly out of the pockets of Albertans. This means \$500 less for every Alberta family. It means \$750 less for a senior couple, and it means \$3,000 less for people living on AISH. Mr. Speaker, last year I spent a month living on the same amount of money as an AISH recipient. It was nearly impossible, and I had so many advantages that others do not. I did this well before we saw a 30-year high in inflation. Groceries, rent, cost of clothing: all of these things are skyrocketing.

That's not enough. This government had to turn it around and make it worse. They're hiking property taxes, school fees, tuition, and so much more. Even when they're prepared to help, they fail. Their natural gas rebate program is a fake. Their electricity rebate amounts to \$50 when Albertans are staring down bills in excess of \$700. The Premier stands there claiming modest sacrifices when we have Albertans that are homeless, others that fear they soon will be, and even more facing the potential shut-off of electricity and heat in their homes. For the Premier, who enjoys being driven around by security and enjoys a six-figure salary, the horrible, cruel decisions from this government may simply be modest sacrifices, but for everyday Albertans it is much worse.

This Premier is out of touch. He has lost the trust of the people that put him in his office, and it's time for him to go. Albertans watching this, I want you to know that hope and help are on the way. We stand in this House every day ready to serve you and to make life more affordable for you and your family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has a statement to make.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night under the cover of darkness the Liberals and the NDP struck a shady backroom deal that will secure power for Justin Trudeau until 2025. The reaction from Canadians was swift: anger, frustration, betrayal. I share in those feelings, but unlike some, I am neither shocked nor surprised by this unholy left-wing alliance. The NDP, the same party as the members across the aisle, at this point only exist to serve the interests of Justin Trudeau. The party of Tommy Douglas and Jack Layton is long, long gone, and the NDP has sold out every value and principle it once had for a taste of power that Canadians did not bestow upon them.

Albertans know this all too well as the NDP members across the aisle have been good friends and allies with Justin Trudeau and have been doing his bidding for him at every single turn. They backed Trudeau's vetoes over the Energy East and Northern Gateway pipelines. They refused to back a motion saying Albertans, not Justin Trudeau, should decide who represents them in the Senate. Just last week they refused to support a common-sense motion telling Justin Trudeau to drop his pointless travel restrictions. On April 1 they will support yet another massive increase to Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, a policy that they support. Funny, given they claim to care about the rising energy costs.

Anyhow, for the rest of Canada, I'm going to tell them what they can expect from an NDP-Trudeau alliance. They will jack up your taxes every chance they get, they will continue to block pipelines and energy development even as the demand for responsible Alberta energy soars, and they will abandon support for our Armed Forces at a time when the world needs countries like Canada to stand up for freedom and democracy. That's just who they are.

But all is not lost. Conservative governments across Canada will continue to push back against Justin Trudeau's policies and the Jagmeet-Justin bromance. In 2019 Albertans fired the NDP in part for supporting Justin Trudeau's antienergy policies, and in 2023 I'm confident Albertans will do the same.

Thank you.

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

Aviation Industry

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The aviation industry has a long, rich history in Alberta. It employs thousands of Albertans and has contributed significantly to our province's GDP, economic growth, diversification, and connectivity to the world. The aviation industry in Alberta is both entrepreneurial and resilient, but we cannot hide the fact that it has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and the enduring and heavy hand of federal health-related restrictions. Major airlines laid off people across the country, and at one point almost all routes were suspended.

But, Mr. Speaker, the good news is that bad times will pass, and our aviation industry, along with our economy, is coming back stronger than ever. Just last week WestJet announced that Alberta will lead Canada's travel and tourism rebound as the airline restores its summer 2022 schedule to near prepandemic levels. WestJet is also investing in Alberta's connection to global and business economies with more nonstop routes to London, Heathrow, Gatwick, Rome, Paris, and Dublin.

Flair Airlines, headquartered right here in our capital, has also announced that they are confident in travel demand over the coming year and has announced significant growth in both routes and capacity. Lynx Air, whose headquarters are in Calgary, will take flight soon with a growing network, having added Victoria as its

sixth destination, and a month ago Swoop, another Alberta-based airline, added five new routes to the U.S. from its operational base right here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to see our aviation industry growing and our province rising as a hub for aviation, aerospace, and logistics and, at the same time, providing hope for a rejuvenated visitor economy. Now that the federal government, at the urging of this Assembly, is moving towards easing travel restrictions and with spring in the air, it's time for all Albertans, not just our snowbirds, and visitors from around the world to spread our wings and support an industry that is so vital to our bright and ambitious future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Racism

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day to recognize and show solidarity with all peoples fighting against racism, and while we've arguably made real progress since it was first observed, in 1979, the hard truth is that racism remains. In recent years we've seen repeated attacks on Black Muslim women, the ongoing genocide of Indigenous women, attacks on mosques and synagogues, anti-Asian hate, and the return of overt White supremacy promoted in media, on social media, and, sadly, even by some in political power. Less than five years ago we saw Nazis march openly in Charlottesville. It was only last year that we saw their flag flown in Alberta, only last month on Parliament Hill.

Now more than ever we each have a duty to stand against these voices of hatred and their attempts to gain power and influence, but let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, that racism runs deeper than its most visible face. As recognized by members on both sides of this House, systemic racism is real. It has deep effects on the lives of racialized people. From our justice system to health care, education, economic opportunities, social supports, racialized Canadians face more barriers and have poorer outcomes not because of any moral failing, lack of personal effort, or failure of will but because of unchecked biases and discrimination baked into our systems and institutions that govern our lives.

That's why in their recommendations last year the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council called on the government of Alberta to mandate the collection of race-based data in all departments and its use to identify existing gaps between racialized and nonracialized communities and to track progress to address it. Tomorrow I'll introduce a bill, the Anti-Racism Act, that would create a structure and process to do just that, a thoughtful path to empower all public bodies to take on that important and essential work, and it's my hope that on this crucial issue we will be able to come together on both sides of this House to make Alberta a leader in working to end all forms of racial discrimination.

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, prior to COVID many boasted about Canada having one of the greatest health care systems in the world, but when stress-tested, capacity declined and wait times increased. The system failed to adapt and meet expectations. Dedicated front-line staff did their utmost working in a stressful environment, dealing with countless managers and supervisors in a bureaucracy resistant to change.

1:40

Now, our government put forward a number of great initiatives in this budget: \$2.2 billion to build health facilities, \$100 million to expand hospital capacity and ICU beds, \$64 million towards EMS, and \$23 million to Alberta's 911 system, to name a few. But a problem remains. Canada ranks second as the priciest universal health care system in the world but among the bottom in performance. With Alberta being the most expensive in the country and considering the failures at AHS over the last two years, it is clear that higher levels of spending do not translate to better results.

Budget 2022 calls for the addition of 850 new full-time positions at AHS, but under the same ineffective management, is this money well spent? AHS staff dissatisfaction is another factor. Without meaningful interaction with the front line to create a positive work environment, fundamental change will be difficult.

Mr. Speaker, AHS is a bloated and underperforming entity that requires reform to ensure its future success. Professional consultation, restructuring management, and meaningful implementation of publicly funded, privately delivered services will help. One does not leave a struggling system to continue struggling. It's imperative that we have trust in our public institutions, trust in government, and trust in leadership to do the right thing. To satisfy trust and generate competence, change becomes necessity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Education Concerns

Ms Hoffman: I knew it wouldn't be good, but I didn't know it would be this bad: those are words I hear often from Albertans when they talk about the current government. The UCP keeps making life more expensive and more difficult for everyday families. School fees are going up. Ride times are going up. We need replacement schools. We need new schools. And the UCP is failing.

Families living in Calgary choosing public or Catholic schools got only one each over the last three years. Public school families in Edmonton, Lethbridge, St. Albert, and most of the province, to be honest, were completely shut out of this year's budget. At a time when the government stumbled backwards into additional revenue because of a spike in the international price of oil, oil that belongs to each and every Albertan, families across Alberta are saying that you just can't trust the UCP to build public schools.

Then there's the curriculum. The UCP has trashed our international reputation through their desire to ram through their Dumpster fire of a curriculum. Teachers don't want it. Principals don't want it. Indigenous leaders don't want it. Parents don't want it. Academics don't want it. I asked the minister to name one – just one – employer who would stand with her publicly and say that her curriculum would set kids up for success in the world of work, and she couldn't do it, because her broken curriculum is rooted in a desire to amplify the voices of people like Chris Champion instead of helping kids be successful.

And teachers: this government is so focused on going after the very professionals entrusted to educate children. They went after their pensions. They fired them from the curriculum partnership. They fired the educational assistants who support disabled students, and then they cut the funding to the point where we have 1,000 fewer teachers in Alberta classrooms today than when the NDP was in government.

To all the voters thinking, "I knew it wouldn't be good, but I didn't know it would be this bad," it is this bad, and Alberta children deserve so much better. It's clear that you can't trust the UCP with public education. To the Premier: you keep saying that you have a

mandate to do whatever you want with public education. Let's test that. Call the election, and let Albertans decide.

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

Budget 2022

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's focus on responsible fiscal management and relentless pursuit of economic growth have put the province on a more sustainable fiscal path. Budget 2022 moves Alberta forward by building health care capacity, getting more Albertans working, and sticking to the fiscal plan, resulting in a balanced budget for only the second time in more than a decade.

To expand system capacity, the budget will grow Alberta Health's total operating expenses budget by \$600 million this year, and it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-25 in order to scale up capacity. Budget 2022 ensures that Alberta remains one of the most affordable provinces in Canada to live and work. Alberta's lower cost of living combined with relatively high average earnings and the lowest overall taxes mean that Albertans keep more money in their pockets.

Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program, an increase of more than \$700 million over the next three years to support teachers and to address cost pressures in transportation as well as growth in enrolment, \$6.2 billion which supports Albertans by providing the education and training opportunities they need to prepare for the workforce, and \$5.8 billion for postsecondary operations. Budget 2022 includes about \$2.5 billion over three years in support of the child care agreement with the federal government. Alberta is moving forward to a prosperous financial future through a well-developed set of fiscal anchors to guide decision-making, bringing per capita spending in line with other provinces, keeping net debt to GDP low, and finding a path back to balance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member for Edmonton-South

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-South has a lot of explaining to do. In December the Alberta RCMP Cybercrime Investigative Team executed a search warrant on the member's home, and he's now under criminal investigation for, quote, unlawful access to private information related to the vaccination quota.

Mr. Speaker, this ongoing vax hack scandal does not look good for that member or the NDP. In the months leading up to the police raid, he was obsessed with the vaccination status of government MLAs. He was even obsessed with the timelines of MLA vaccinations, posting online about when the government MLAs got their shots and when they were eligible to receive them. We posted his history of harassing government MLAs over private information online, but there are still a lot of questions that are yet to be answered. How did he know any of this? Why was he so obsessed with private medical information of MLAs, and did he take it upon himself to find this information?

He certainly has the ability, Mr. Speaker. In fact, believe it or not, he brags about being, quote, an ethical hacker. Yes, you heard that right. The self-styled hacker is now under police investigation for – surprise, surprise – hacking. But the real question here is not for the Member for Edmonton-South, because he already confessed to Postmedia today. Therefore, the NDP leader, who may have been directly involved in this hacking scandal, has yet to come clean about what exactly she knew about the member's hacking when he

was in her caucus. Did she benefit politically from any of his online activities? Would she have? Albertans need to know: is this the first time, or is this an isolated incident?

Mr. Speaker, we are just starting to scratch the surface of the NDP vaccination hacking scandal, but let me be clear. If the NDP leader, any of the MLAs, or her staff knew or benefited from this illegally obtained information, then the NDP leader must resign. The NDP leader has been very defensive about what she knew about this scandal, and hopefully soon we will find out why.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Bullying and Racism

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to read part of a statement written to the RCMP by Thabo Ncube, a 14-year-old student who was wrongfully accused but who along with his family earnestly and patiently sought justice.

If ever I've learned anything, it is that you should not make bad decisions based on other bad decisions. There are always people who may not like you or who will try to get a rise out of you, and all that you can do at that moment is to keep your cool and not retaliate. In my situation I tried to protect myself, and it ended me in a bad place. For me, unfortunately, I had to make hard decisions and choices more frequently than other people who do not look like me. I face more; therefore, I have more decisions to make every day.

I'd gone back to school, and everyone thought I pulled a knife on that girl when I didn't. School is not the same anymore. It was tough losing friends during the time, but I had real friends who stuck by me the whole way. The culture of snitches getting stitches is very bad, and it is not okay to use that against someone who wants to stand up for the truth. People should not have to live with the fear of being punished for saying the truth. Everyone should be able to speak freely and proudly about what they think is right without negative consequences or fear of being shamed.

In life, before we go on to confront others, I think it is important to hear all sides of the story. When the school came to some decisions, I was confused about why nobody asked me about my side of the story, not even the police officer when he charged me. It was not right, and the kids and the adults would assume that I did pull a knife on someone without having both sides of the story. At that time I wasn't at school, the rumours were spreading, and more and more were made. People were saying I had killed someone, stabbed her and cut her. I knew better than to retaliate, so then again I kept my cool. Any reaction I make is almost always taken the wrong way. If I ever say something back, I know I will get the worst punishment because of the colour of my skin.

I hope I am the voice for many and that everything that I've been through was a lesson for me and can be used as a teaching for many.

Thank you to Thabo and Sinikiwe and the Ncube family for your courage; to Blake and Crystal and the Taylor family for standing by them; to the RCMP, who listened; and to the MLA for Highwood for being an advocate. All charges have been withdrawn.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has question 1.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, rural doctors continue to flee Alberta at alarming rates thanks to the UCP's mismanagement of our health

care system. According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta 140 doctors left our province in 2021, a trend that's, unfortunately, increasing because of the UCP. Communities in northern, southern, and in central Alberta have fewer doctors this year than last, families are left without a doctor, emergency rooms have to close, expectant mothers are left to drive hundreds of kilometres to cities to deliver their child, all because of the UCP's attacks on health. When will this government stop their attack on health care, acknowledge the damage they've done, and reverse this all?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would call a \$2 billion increase in the baseline budget of health care an attack. Alberta spends more per capita than eight provinces on health care. We have more physicians working in the system, in fact, than ever before in our history, more nurses, and this government has announced major capital projects, including the largest ever hospital redevelopment program in the history of the province, the \$1.8 billion Red Deer regional hospital, in addition to the completion of the Calgary cancer centre, the expansion of the Peter Lougheed surgical facility, the new La Crête medical centre, and so much more.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, new facilities need new doctors, and this UCP government has left the south zone with 41 fewer doctors this year than they had in 2019. The primary care network said in December that up to 43,000 residents in Lethbridge cannot access a family doctor. With these trends in the south of the province, I'm afraid that even more residents will soon be left without a doctor, unable to access care they need. The UCP says that they're addressing the problem, but the data says otherwise. The UCP balanced their no-help budget by cutting the care that Albertans are able to access. What does this Premier have to say to 43,000 people in Lethbridge who do not have a family doctor?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the no-help budget: that includes \$22 billion for health care; that includes a \$600 million increase in the baseline for health care on top of last year's \$900 million increase in the baseline budget for health care. In 2021 we saw a net gain of 33 physicians across the system in Alberta. In February 2019 we had 28,735 nurses, but in February of this year we had 30,517 RNs, more than ever in Alberta history.

Mr. Shepherd: And we have 43,000 Albertans in Lethbridge who have no doctor thanks to the devastating impacts of this government's attacks on doctors. Yet we see the UCP again using the same scare tactics against Albertans who've dedicated their careers to saving the lives of our families, friends, and neighbours. The UCP are trying to cut the wages of health care professionals, heroes of the pandemic, like respiratory therapists, who helped COVID-19 patients in the ICU breathe. Aren't doctors fleeing the province enough? Why is this government now trying to drive out all these other health care professionals, too?

Mr. Kenney: One of the reasons that Albertans don't buy the NDP medi-scare campaign is because it's so obviously false. They're claiming that we've cut the Health budget when we've increased it by \$2 billion. They claim that doctors are leaving the province when the number of doctors is at a record high. They claim that we've laid off nurses when there are 1,800 more nurses working in our health system now than when the NDP was in office, Mr. Speaker. They claim that we're shutting hospitals when we're building new hospitals and investing in record and increasing health care capacity, increasing the number of ICU baseline beds by 50 above what the NDP had.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition has question 2.

Personal Income Tax Deindexation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier refused yet again to help families fighting record inflation. Instead, he doubled down on his bracket creep plan, taking more and more of Albertans' income, and when I asked what it would take for the Premier to stop taking from those with the lowest incomes, he mused about cutting taxes for the wealthy. Those earning seven figures will be the first to catch a break. How very on brand. Is the Premier really saying that he would rather cut taxes for the top earners instead of scrapping his billion-dollar income tax grab on families?

Mr. Kenney: You know what's on brand for the NDP, Mr. Speaker? It's their coalition with Justin Trudeau, a coalition that was just cemented today by their leader, Mr. Singh, in Ottawa, who has kept their ally Justin Trudeau in office for the next three years. Now, I know the NDP's favourite research technique is to hack into people's private information, so here's a research tip for them: they could hack into our public policy and see that we are giving Albertans \$1.7 billion of consumer relief on the fuel tax and the electricity rebate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's amusing hearing the Premier talk about a coalition when he may not even pass his own confidence motion inside his party.

Now, the Premier is taking a billion dollars from Alberta families on the back of inflation. Instead of fixing that issue, he wants to hand that billion dollars back to top earners: \$700 million to the top 1 per cent alone. Why does a single mom earning \$50,000 a year get \$500 less while a CEO with a \$2.7 million salary gets \$100,000 more in his bank account?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposition hacked into Alberta's tax system when they came to office, and they drove revenues down. They drove jobs and investment out of the province. They raised income taxes by 50 per cent. And guess what? They got less revenue. They raised taxes on businesses by 50 per cent, and they got less revenue. This government is cutting taxes, and jobs are taking off. We're leading the country in growth, and we have a balanced budget.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the government has a windfall. That's it.

Meanwhile they gave wealthy corporations a \$4.7 billion handout with no jobs in return. He let big insurance companies hike premiums by 30 per cent, pocketing millions. He gave 40 per cent raises to government money managers while threatening the wages of respiratory therapists and social workers, all this while his tax on inflation takes more from the poorest Albertans. Why is the Premier robbing from the poor to give to the rich? When he watches *Robin Hood*, is the sheriff the good guy?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader is partly right, because Albertans are experiencing a windfall of economic growth and diversification. Last year was the best year ever for Alberta exports, the best year ever for Alberta manufacturing, the best year ever for high tech, the best year ever for venture capital, the best year ever for ag revenues, the best year ever for forestry. I want to give them a trigger warning. They won't like it, but last month was the best month on record for Alberta oil and gas. This economy is taking off. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Ms Notley: And this Premier had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Notley: Now, I want to read part of a message that I received from an Albertan named Joelle Powell, and I quote: I want to be kind to others, to open my heart and my wallet, but today I have to borrow money for food and utilities, and I'm fearful of being destitute. End quote. Yesterday the Premier said that he won't stop his plan to keep more income tax because he's asked Albertans to make, quote, modest sacrifices. A simple question: is Joelle not being able to afford food his definition of a modest sacrifice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention the windfall for film and television workers – we've seen a 10-fold increase in that industry as a result of our policies – and the forthcoming windfall for Alberta workers with the \$18 billion of new investment in petrochemicals, the billions of dollars of new investment in hydrogen. Yes, Albertans are experiencing the strongest economic growth in the country, a windfall that is a result of this government's open-for-business, low-tax policies and Alberta's recovery plan, that's working to get our economy back on track.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Calgary mother Tiffaney Hill works three jobs to make ends meet, and her son Riley suffers from extreme sensory sensitivity and an anxiety disorder. He's one of 10 children in his class with learning disabilities. Riley and every single one of those children has lost their educational assistant, lost support in the classroom to help them grow and learn, their entire lives forever altered by cuts to a single line item in this Premier's budget. To the Premier: is Riley's future a modest sacrifice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there have been no layoffs of educational assistants. What she's referring to is that in the first quarter of COVID, when the schools were closed – by the way, at the insistence of the NDP – there were some temporary furloughs for people who were not at work. But when it comes to educational assistants, this government, to defend Alberta's great tradition of school choice, has just provided additional funding to ensure equitable access for special-needs kids in our charter schools and, yes, those who benefit from home-schooling as well.

2:00

Ms Notley: The Premier's Education minister has cut teachers and PUF funding and EAs, and the Premier knows it, and he should be truthful about the facts in this office. Meanwhile Albertans have sacrificed their health after the Premier chased away their family doctor. They've sacrificed their dreams, no longer able to afford the postsecondary education they'd planned. They've sacrificed the family vehicle, unable to pay the spiralling insurance costs. I could go on and on. One thing I know is that none of those Albertans want to hear this Premier call their sacrifices modest. Why won't he stand and apologize for talking that way to Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again the divisive leader of the socialist party seeks to mislead Albertans. Last year the budget included an additional \$40 million in support for special-needs kids. This year's budget includes a 1.7 per cent increase for K to 12 education, that represents \$700 million over two years. But here's the thing. We're able to do that in the context of a balanced budget because, yes, we made some responsible spending choices. If the

NDP was still in office, we would have a \$6 billion structural deficit this year, and we would be mortgaging the future of those kids.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Two years ago in May the UCP lifted the Loughheed coal policy after conversations with coal companies and their lobbyists to open up the eastern slopes to strip mining. This UCP decision was opposed loudly by Albertans across the province: farmers, ranchers, businesses, country music stars, Indigenous communities, and more. In response, this government implemented a ministerial order to reinstate the policy, an order that can be rescinded at any time for any reason. What assurances does the Premier have that this order won't be lifted? Is it something more concrete than asking us to trust him?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the good work of the advisory committee on coal. The recommendations have been adopted. That includes the policy in question. We have a long and proud tradition that goes back for 140 years of responsible mining across the province, including for coal – the NDP's historic roots were in the coal mine unions that operated off the eastern slopes – but we must do that in an environmentally responsible way. That's exactly the policy of this government, as clarified recently by the hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Schmidt: Last year our leader introduced a bill that would ban coal mining in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, providing more protection than a ministerial order that can be lifted at the whim of the minister. UCP MLAs at the time agreed that this bill should be debated in the Chamber last year, but today they completely reversed their position and blocked the bill. Given that this bill would have restored trust in the government that lost it with their sneaky plan to blow up mountains for coal, can the Premier tell us when the minister plans on lifting the ministerial order since her party and government are so clearly opposed to protecting the eastern slopes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the bill was just a bad case of political theatre. The government policy already establishes that protection with respect to sensitive ecosystems in the eastern slopes. But I think the real question for the NDP today is: why did the Leader of the Opposition engage in such a long campaign of personal vilification against myself and other members of this government that a member of her caucus felt he was justified by illegally tapping in to personal information? Why doesn't she take responsibility for that outrageous conduct by her caucus?

Mr. Schmidt: If the Premier wants to ask questions, he can call the election.

The shameful hypocrisy of the UCP voting to block debate on a bill that only months ago they agreed should be debated fuels distrust in this government. Trust in the UCP is already at an all-time low because his minister lifted the Loughheed coal policy with no consultation. Rather than debate real protections for the eastern slopes, the government is asking Albertans to just take them at their word, which actions have shown isn't likely. Will the Premier commit to not lifting this ministerial order unless a motion of the Legislature authorizing them to do so has been passed?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, our position is absolutely clear, that we are for responsible resource development, yes, including responsible coal mining, but we are going to protect sensitive ecosystems in the Rockies, as Alberta governments always have done.

Mr. Speaker, the real question here is: what did that member know about his colleague purposefully hacking into sensitive, private information? Who else's private information did they seek to access? [interjections]

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

Mr. Kenney: Who else's private information did the NDP seek to hack into, Mr. Speaker? And what did the leader of the NDP know about this outrageous NDP violation of privacy?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Liberals and the NDP made a shady backroom deal that will secure power for Justin Trudeau until 2025. This brought back terrible memories for Albertans who watched the opposition NDP leader form a similar alliance with Justin Trudeau, that still exists to this day. Alberta is finally back on track, but Albertans are rightfully worried about how this formal NDP-Trudeau alliance will affect our province and our economic recovery. To the Premier: how can we ensure Alberta remains strong and free in the face of this disastrous left-wing merger?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the member, Mr. Speaker, for the very important question about the formalization of the NDP-Liberal coalition. We always knew it, that the NDP here was in cahoots with Justin Trudeau to increase inflation and taxes, punish people for consuming energy, for heating their homes, and filling up their gas tanks. But now they've made it formal in a political marriage in Ottawa that will keep Trudeau's anti-Alberta policies in place for the next three years. I put them on notice. This government will fight to defend our economy against the Liberal-NDP coalition every day. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Premier for that answer. Given that both the NDP and Justin Trudeau have a long record of opposing and actively blocking pipelines in Canada, from the Northern Gateway to Energy East to Keystone XL, and given that Alberta's oil and gas sector is a critical component of our province's economic recovery and stability on world markets, to the Premier: what can Alberta do to safeguard our critical oil and gas sector from this radical antipipeline, anti-Alberta alliance?

Mr. Kenney: The member is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. This is a coalition of parties that are clearly opposed to the vital economic interest of Alberta and to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who work in this country's largest industry. After Putin's invasion of Ukraine the world knows now more than ever that we need to increase and produce more Alberta energy to displace dictator oil, and that is why we will use every tool that we can to fight the Trudeau-Singh alliance and their effort to kill pipelines and damage Canada's largest job-creating industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Premier for that answer. Given that the NDP support Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which is set to increase by another eye-popping 33 per cent on April

1, and given that energy prices are already too high due to short-sighted NDP policies, the Justin Trudeau carbon tax, and other global factors, to the Premier: what is our government doing to lower the cost of energy for Albertans now that we're all facing an NDP-Trudeau alliance intent on making them go even higher?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians are struggling to cope with 30-year high inflation, inflation that, according to the Bank of Canada, will go even higher with the Liberal-NDP hike of the carbon tax on April 1. But if you think that's bad, the Liberal-NDP coalition intends to more than quadruple the carbon tax, making groceries, home heating, and fuel for your car unaffordable. The Liberal-NDP coalition wants to drive Canadian families into energy poverty. We will fight them every step of the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Government Policies and Youth

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the picture that this Premier is trying to paint, the truth is far less bright. Last year there were 9 per cent fewer 25- to 29-year-olds in Alberta than there were five years ago according to a report from the Canada West Foundation. Young people, especially young Calgarians, are interested in leaving Alberta, the report said. The government's policy of deep cuts to postsecondary, killing interest rates will only make matters worse. This puts Alberta at risk of loss of talent, skills, and brain power like we've never seen before. Is this UCP government really willing to risk a total brain drain of Alberta's youth?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's right. Since 2017 – since 2017 – since the NDP's disastrous economic policies that drove tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province and created a jobs crisis, felt particularly by young people. But here's the good news. With this government's recovery plan and our pro-growth policies, Alberta is once again leading the country in population growth and in the last quarter of 2021 experienced the first significant net interprovincial migration that we've seen in years and years.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that Alberta's youth are looking for opportunities that this UCP government is making harder and harder to come by, they're leaving the province as a result. Given as a result as well that they are making postsecondary more unaffordable for those who want to access our institutions, hiking property taxes, utility rates, even making it more expensive to access our parks and natural areas, because of this UCP government young Albertans are less able to see opportunities here in this awesome province. Does the UCP really not see the problem that they are creating?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this government inherited the economic devastation of the NDP's policies, the record unemployment that they left us with. It's also true that we went through two tough years of COVID. It's also true that we are leading Canada in economic growth and in job growth with dynamic diversification across every sector and region, and we're bringing the Alberta advantage back in a big way with the lowest cost of living of any major province, the lowest taxes, the highest economy, and the highest incomes in the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Canada West report also highlights how investment in safe public transit is one strategy to attract people to Alberta's communities, one thing that all Albertans have seen loudly and clearly is that there's no worse friend to public transit than this UCP government, who stalled, delayed, even threatened the existence of the Calgary green line from the day that they took office. Even now we hear from Calgarians worried that the UCP will stop this critical project. Will the UCP take this recommendation and their fights about public transit and show young Calgarians looking at moving here that they're willing to learn from their past . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, this government just invested an additional \$80 million into mass transit. We are making multibillion-dollar investments into LRT systems in Edmonton and Calgary. Maybe young New Democrats would rather move to Toronto to pay three times the housing prices, pay higher taxes in a weaker economy in order to ride the subway, but the young Albertans I know want to work hard in the home of free enterprise: Alberta, Canada.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we learned today that over the last two years Lethbridge and surrounding areas have lost 41 doctors, more than doubling the number of folks without a family doctor to 46,000. In the fall it was 24 that we had lost; now it is 41. While my constituents are looking for doctors, we heard the Premier just now say that there is no problem with doctors. But the fact is, the reality is that half of folks in Lethbridge don't have a family doctor. To this Premier: where are the doctors? What is he going to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'd like to point out, first of all, that the members opposite only provide half the story. They talk about 140 doctors leaving last year. Yes, that's true, but they don't talk about the doctors coming in. There was a net increase of doctors in this province, so if they're going to share facts, then share the whole story. We commented in this House – actually, when we talked about supplemental estimates right here in this Chamber last night, we talked about there being challenges in having doctors at the right places to be able to serve Albertans. Our government is focused on that. We focused on it last year in terms of supplemental estimates, and we're focusing on it this year in budget . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that it is a fact that 41 doctors have left the south zone, Minister, and given that the UCP continues to break trust with the people of Lethbridge by driving doctors out of the city, doing nothing about it, and then trying to turn around and tell us that, wait, there is actually no problem here, will the minister report to this House and the people of Lethbridge just what he is doing to fill the gap of family physicians and why he keeps trying to tell us that there's no problem? We all know there is a problem. Half of us don't have a doctor.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows, because we talked about it in this House, about the plans

that AHS is doing to be able to provide doctors in Lethbridge. We know that there is an issue in Lethbridge and rural Alberta. We know that this issue is not unique to Alberta. In fact, it's across the entire country, and Alberta has more docs per capita overall than the national average, but we are working extremely hard. We invested \$90 million to be able to deal with the issue in rural Alberta last year. That's \$90 million again this year in this budget. We are hiring doctors in Lethbridge as we speak.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that we've been having this conversation for over a year and given that the problem is only getting worse and given that none of these so-called spin answers or plans or meetings or whatever the minister is doing are working at all, will the minister level with the people of Lethbridge and tell them how many doctors we are getting, when they are arriving, and when they can start serving the people of Lethbridge so that we can get on with this just grotesque mismanagement of the primary health care system in Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated to the hon. member before, AHS is active in seeking new doctors, family physicians. They're sponsoring a number of physicians, nearly 20. Offers have been made, and we expect doctors to start working there over the coming weeks. In addition, at AHS we are funding a nurse practitioner to be able to assist. I have been to Lethbridge numerous times, met with the local docs there, met with AHS. You know, this problem wasn't created in a day, and it won't be solved in a day, but we are dedicated to solving it. We will solve it. If the hon. member would like to talk more details as opposed to 45-second sound bites, I'd be pleased to have that conversation.

Agriculture in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a pillar of our provincial economy. In southern Alberta we are blessed with amazing conditions that allow us to grow many high-yield, high-margin specialty crops. We have 70 per cent of Canada's irrigation system right in southern Alberta. Our government recognizes the importance of southern Alberta agriculture to our overall economy and has been working to develop Canada's agrifood corridor between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Can the minister of agriculture please update this House on the work being done to develop Canada's agrifood corridor?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to share that over the past two years Alberta has attracted about 105 projects, resulting in \$886 million in agrifood-sector investments. Fourteen of these investments were within Canada's Premier Food Corridor and account for more than \$368 million in investment. This comes in addition to the \$27.8 million investment we're making in the agrifood hub in Lethbridge and the great work my colleague the Minister of Transportation is doing in twinning highway 3 from Taber to Burdett. Currently we're also facilitating 15 additional investment projects within the corridor valued at over \$450 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that only 5 per cent of Alberta's farmland is irrigated, yet our irrigators produce more than 20 per

cent of the crops, and given that these crops are high-yield, high-margin specialty crops and given that much of our irrigation was due to the forward-thinking farmers of years past, to the minister of agriculture: what are we doing to ensure our irrigation is up to standard so that we can continue producing high-quality crops in southern Alberta?

Mr. Horner: It's a great question, and the answer is the biggest investment in irrigation in the history of the province: in partnership with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and 10 irrigation districts, a \$933 million investment to modernize our irrigation infrastructure and increase water storage in southern Alberta. This is going to create 7,300 direct and indirect permanent jobs and 1,400 construction jobs. We're going to increase the irrigated acres by 230,000, a 15 per cent increase across all affected IDs. Every year these projects will contribute \$477 million to the GDP.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for his reply. Given that agriculture is the backbone of Alberta's economy and given that farmers commit their entire lives in often uncertain conditions to produce high-quality food to feed the world and given that many consumers are unsure of where their food comes from, to the minister of agriculture and forestry: what are you doing to recognize farmers' hard work and to ensure that consumers continue to know where their food comes from?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure everyone in this House, even the hecklers and hackers, are proud of our producers and processors and manufacturers. They're all top-notch, and we're proud of the products made in this province. One example is that my department is supporting local businesses and products with a new made-in-Alberta-by-Albertans label that processors and manufacturers alike can use. We've met with the local food producers to talk about changes to improve farmers' markets. We're very excited about this proposal. Hope to have news soon.

2:20 Government Data Security

Mr. Dang: The personal data of Albertans is being digitized at an ever-increasing speed. The government regularly stores and transmits highly sensitive personal information of Albertans and is increasingly relying on the Internet for everything from transmitting health care data to the administration of justice at a time of unprecedented cybertech from both domestic and foreign actors. Since the government of Alberta published a website that left the personal and private information of Albertans vulnerable to a malicious attack, will the Minister of Health tell this House whether anyone was held accountable for failing to enact even the most basic security measures that would have protected Albertans' information?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's great to see the NDP chief hacker up in the Chamber today. The first thing I would suggest to the Minister of Health is: do everything they can to protect Alberta's computer systems from that member, who today admitted that he broke the law and tried to hack into private information of a member of this Chamber.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's shameful. He should apologize for that. Further to that, today he admitted that the NDP knew about this months before they made it public. It's time for that member to

stand up and say what the Leader of the Official Opposition knew and when she knew it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. A point of order is noted at 2:22.

Mr. Dang: To the same minister. Last year I discovered and reported a vulnerability in the government's initial release of their COVID-19 vaccine passport website. Given that a vulnerability that exposed Albertans' personal health information existed on one of the most accessed government portals at the time and given that no process exists for vulnerability disclosure, will the minister admit that the government's current measures to protect Albertans' data are insufficient and that the information I provided aided in fixing the vulnerability before malicious actors exposed the data of potentially millions of Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, for that member to even ask a question in this place without first apologizing is appalling, let alone about hacking. He had a full press conference today, almost an hour long, where he brags about trying to hack using the personal information of the Premier of Alberta. Through you, shame on him. Further to that, we have an e-mail, which has been released to the press, that shows that the NDP knew about this hacking months in advance of talking, but they then sent an e-mail to the then Minister of Health and claimed it was an anonymous person. Again, what did the Leader of the Official Opposition know?

Mr. Dang: To the Minister of Service Alberta. Given that the government's 2016 five-year IT modernization plan now appears to be a six-year plan and counting and given that the government's digital innovation office does not have cybersecurity in its mandate and given that the government does not appear to provide any transparency for Albertans on our cybersecurity readiness and given that security through obscurity actually makes us more vulnerable to these types of attacks, will you commit to providing an annual state of the IT infrastructure report to provide accountability to Albertans on the state of Alberta's cyber readiness?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member published a document today titled *How I Did It*, describing illegal hacking actions trying to get the private information of members of this place. Further to that, he has admitted he ended up getting a private citizen of Alberta's information. Through you to him, he has no right to even ask a question in this place until he stands up and apologizes and explains what has taken place here and makes clear what the Leader of the Official Opposition knew. If she knew about this and covered this up for six months, it's time for her to resign.

Traffic Ticket Administration

Mr. Sabir: In January the UCP announced their plan to strip Alberta drivers of their right to dispute a traffic ticket without paying a nonrefundable \$150 fee within a week of getting the ticket. It is simply disgusting that the UCP believes that only the people who have plenty of cash laying around on a week's notice should have access to justice. Now a report in the media surfaced that the UCP is going to scrap this horrible idea. My question is: can the current Attorney General confirm that he's indeed scrapping this horrible policy put forward by his predecessor?

Mr. Shandro: I can confirm, Mr. Speaker, that it is being scrapped. We have announced that it is being scrapped. Thank you. The JTI initiative is being scrapped and will not be proceeding any further.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that the minister who represented the scheme was found to have called the Edmonton police chief and attempted to interfere in the administration of justice and given that despite this egregious abuse of his office that minister faced no consequences and remains in the UCP cabinet, does the current Attorney General believe that every Albertan should be able to call their local police chief to dispute their ticket, or is that a privilege only afforded to the UCP ministers?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, in an independent review the judge was absolutely clear that the former Minister of Justice, now the minister of labour, did not interfere with justice. That is a fact.

But that member is part of a caucus that we now know has covered up hacking of private medical information of members of this place. Through you to him, when did he know that his colleague was hacking members of this place's health information? Did he help cover it up? Again, Mr. Speaker, what did the Leader of the Opposition know and when? If she helped cover this up for months, she should resign immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister has also made changes to victim of crime . . . [interjections] Shut up.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, known as AEPAC, brings together Indigenous, AHS, municipal, and rural leaders to discuss issues and bring forward solutions to the EMS delivery model in Alberta. As the co-chair of this committee I have heard Albertans' concerns on all aspects, including air ambulance, front-line support, and dispatch processes, just to name a few. But many Albertans are worried about the approach to deal with the current situation. To the Minister of Health: can you explain how the Alberta government will implement the work done by this committee?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, first, start off by thanking the Member for Highwood and the Member for Grande Prairie for their work in co-chairing the EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, to which the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is also contributing. As the member knows, we created the advisory committee because we wanted thoughtful engagement with stakeholders from across the EMS sector to deliver working solutions to the rising demand for EMS services. My office will continue to work closely with this committee to review any recommendations that come forward. Where it makes sense to implement them, we will do so immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that rural communities are long distances from hospitals, which creates a unique logistical challenge, and given that rural ambulances have regularly been pulled into larger centres to provide support and given that during the time rural communities can be sitting without ambulances, which is an obvious concern for rural Albertans, to the Minister of Health: can you update the House on the results from recent changes made to assist rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows and the House knows, we're spending an additional \$64 million this year to address EMS pressures across Alberta. That's part of Budget 2022. AHS is also in the process of implementing the majority of their 10-point action plan to boost EMS capacity, and quite frankly we're already seeing results. As part of the metro response plan, nine communities have seen a drop in ambulances being called into neighbouring urban centres, meaning they can respond to calls closer to home. For example, trips from Beaumont to Edmonton dropped by almost 50 per cent. Trips from Airdrie to Calgary are down by 43 per cent. Response to high-priority events has improved, and nearly 70 more staff have been hired.

The Speaker: The Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that AEPAC was implemented to help identify and establish solutions to deal with serious matters such as paramedic mental health issues and given that it is critical for us to provide immediate health and wellness supports to our EMS workers, who work tirelessly to protect our communities, to the Minister of Health: can you provide details on how the budget will improve wellness support for our front-line EMS providers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being a paramedic is an incredibly stressful job, and the pandemic, quite frankly, hasn't helped. Preventing burnout and improving wellness for Alberta's paramedics has never been more important. As part of the 10-point plan and as part of our Budget 2022 we announced \$14 million to support AHS's hours of work project. That project will help address crew fatigue by adjusting working hours, shifts, and scheduling among paramedics in 14 rural communities. We're also excited to see the recommendation coming from AEPAC on additional ways we can support the mental health of our emergency responders. Once again I want to thank the committee for their tremendous work.

2:30 Family Support for Children with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Family supports for children with disabilities can improve the quality of children's home lives, family relationships, and increase educational inclusion while supporting mental health. Last year there were more than 3,400 families and children on a wait-list. The UCP calls that: in planning. Imagine my surprise during budget estimates this year when I asked the minister how many families and children were on the FSCD wait-list, and the minister said that for FSCD there is no waiting list. Poof, gone. To the minister: how many families and children have met eligibility for service and have not yet received service?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question. We recognize how vulnerable Albertans who have children with disabilities – it's very important to receive the support from this government. With Budget 2022 we protected the funding for children with disabilities. We actually increased \$61 million there. The way this was inherited from the previous government: we're taking every way possible to address that. This increased budget is a way to respond to that.

Ms Renaud: Given that I and very likely many of us receive alarming and heartbreaking e-mails and messages about the dangers and hardships families experience when there's a significant delay

in starting or renewing services and given that delays to early intervention such as speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy harm children and families in ways that can cause lasting damage to family wellness and resilience, not to mention the well-being of the child, can the minister assure this House that all 3,400 families and children that were published in the open-data FSCD wait-list last year have signed agreements in place and are getting supports?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, our government is proud that we're working diligently on this. We're providing transparent services. We also committed to release the public data on a quarterly basis. With Budget 2022 we increased funding for FSCD with \$61 million. Day in, day out this government works with families who have children with disabilities, making life better for them. We're taking concrete actions.

Ms Renaud: Given that it's clear this UCP government is the most secretive in Canada and that it's obvious that the UCP budget is best described as a shell game with underestimated costs and misleading jargon and given that we know that the 2022 budget for family supports for children with disabilities is not sufficient to meet cost pressures, population growth, and inflation, will the minister please commit here today to resume publishing data on the status of supports of all Alberta families and children who are eligible for FSCD and not actively receiving supports? We're asking for a number. Where did they go?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, while this government is busy day in, day out working with families and communities to improve the lives of vulnerable Albertans, that hon. member there keeps making empty promises, doing nothing to help those communities. We committed \$61 million for Budget 2022 to continue to help families with children with disabilities.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I brought forward a motion to protect Albertans from inflation and stop the Premier's income tax grab that's taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets through inflation eating away at our income. But lo and behold, the Premier's closest friends jumped at the opportunity to defend jacking up our income tax by thousands a year through so-called bracket creep. Will the Minister of Finance explain to Albertans who can't make ends meet, who could really use all of that money why neither he nor a single MLA voted yesterday to give Albertans back the billions of dollars they've crept from them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because we've not raised taxes, contrary to the wrongful assertion of the members opposite. Our revenues are going up, but we took a different approach than the members opposite. The members opposite raised taxes, increased regulatory burden . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister shouldn't have to yell at the Speaker for him to be able to hear.
The minister.

Mr. Toews: The members opposite raised taxes, increased regulatory burden, sent billions of dollars of investment out of the province, Mr. Speaker. Wages went down, Albertans lost their jobs, and income tax revenues declined.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that that wasn't the question at all and given that we are talking here about bracket creep and deindexing the tax system and given that the minister has not provided this House a rationale as to why he can justify taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets in personal income tax, why didn't the Finance minister at least tell Albertans he cares about the rising cost of living by getting the UCP's bracket creeping hands out of Albertans' pockets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this government took a different approach than the members opposite. We did not raise taxes, but we actually dropped taxes. We dropped corporate taxes. As a result of that, tens of billions of dollars of investment is pouring into this province. There are additional job opportunities for small businesses and for Albertans looking for a job. Wages are going up. That's why our fiscal house in this province is improving.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that it wasn't just the Finance minister yesterday, Mr. Speaker – it was also the Minister of Community and Social Services – who couldn't resist the opportunity to justify letting inflation creep up for Albertans living with disabilities, claiming that AISH recipients should be lucky to receive 1,600 bucks a month, and given that he's taking \$3,000 a year from every single Albertan on disability supports because he's letting inflation take away those folks' benefits, will the minister of social services stand in the House, look into that camera right there, and explain to Albertans living on AISH why yesterday he voted to take \$3,000 a year from people on AISH and why he's so smug and self-satisfied about it?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's ridiculous. We have maintained AISH payments. We continue to be, by far and away, the province that supports our disabled in the most significant way. We're over \$400 higher per month than the next nearest province, and that's why we know Albertans care for the vulnerable. This government believes in supporting the vulnerable.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in a time when people should come together as one, the complexities of COVID-19 have kept us apart. As one consequence, current research indicates that there has been an increased need for mental health supports during the pandemic. This includes mental health supports that ensure that everyone has access to the resources they need when and where they need them. My question for this government is: what have you done during the COVID-19 pandemic to support people in Fort McMurray and other communities across the province, to support their mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. You know, the COVID-19 pandemic public health restrictions, quite frankly, over the past two years have had a real impact on mental wellness. That's why early on we committed \$53 million, more than any other province, to help make sure people have access to addiction and mental health supports that they need during this pandemic. As part of the COVID-19 plan our government has provided grants in the Fort McMurray area to Fort McMurray's Legacy Counselling Centre, the Fort McKay Métis

community association, Wood Buffalo's integrated youth support network, and many other organizations in that jurisdiction.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is a given that the pandemic restrictions had disproportionate impacts on people between the ages of 16 and 24. This resulted in stunting their emotional growth, increased psychological distress, and other mental health concerns. These young people are the future, and we should be doing everything we can to support them because they are still growing in maturity and they're still developing the character to cope with such distress. To the same minister: can you identify the actions being taken to increase access to supports that help the youth improve their mental health and wellness?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The new youth suicide prevention grant program has partnered with local youth-focused organizations who know their communities well. Of course, they do important work to support mental health and for Alberta's youth. These grants are going to be built upon and are already doing the support for the youth in mental health. I was proud to announce even last year in the Fort McMurray area the 10 other communities across Alberta that are implementing the youth mental health hubs. These mental health hubs are supporting children between the ages of 11 and 24. We're very proud of the work they're doing.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is a given that this minister worked tirelessly to get more than \$1 billion allocated annually towards addiction and mental health services through strengthening and building capacity for our recovery-oriented systems of care. Currently, though, mental health service providers in Fort McMurray are dependent on seeking out funding from organizations like the Red Cross, United Way, even organizations like Suncor for annual support. Is there a thought that this minister could provide consistent funding for mental health agencies in Fort McMurray and across Alberta so they don't have to apply year after year?

2:40

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2022 continues our commitment to invest \$140 million over four years to enhance the recovery-oriented addiction and mental health system of care, with \$50 million allocated for '22 and '23. This budget also commits an additional \$60 million over three years to improve access to mental health and addiction services in Alberta. We're focused on providing consistent funding to nonprofits across Alberta so that they can provide services in their communities. Communities are an integral part of the recovery-oriented system of care that we're building, and we're proud of the work that they do.

Thank you.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a report to present.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I'm

pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley. This bill was referred to the committee on March 8, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 202 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 202.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. It is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to debate concurrence? Hon. members, a member has noted that they would like to debate concurrence. That debate will take place next Monday under the item of business Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'd like to point out the first reading speech just given by the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General as a perfect example of the introduction of bills.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-South East.

Bill Pr. 1 Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill modernizes the objects and powers of the YMCA Calgary and gives the YMCA Calgary the rights, powers, and privileges of a natural person in a manner consistent with other modern incorporating statutes. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2 Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, I understand, has a number of tablings.

Mr. Rutherford: I do, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it is my pleasure as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following reports from the office of the Auditor General: one, the Alberta Energy site rehabilitation program; two, the Alberta Labour and Immigration delivery of COVID-19 emergency isolation support program; three, Alberta Health grant management processes; four, Alberta Environment and Parks pesticide management; five, assessment of implementation reports Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, and Alberta Labour and Immigration.

The Speaker: I saw the Minister of Energy. Were you rising for a tabling?

Mrs. Savage: Yes. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of written questions from the Committee of Supply main estimates on March 16, 2022, for the Ministry of Energy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:22 the hon. Member for Edmonton-South rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Accepting a Member's Word

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At approximately 2:22 the Government House Leader stated: he admitted he broke the law. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). I believe the Government House Leader is making allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, and also using abusive and insulting language that did create disorder in this place. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to rise.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A matter of debate, certainly. If the hon. member has concerns about communications inside this Assembly about what is taking place with the criminal investigation into the hon. member, I would suggest that he doesn't hold one-hour-long press conferences, have long newspaper columns in which he outlines his criminal activities. That said, I think he's referring to – actually, I'm not sure what he's referring to, so I'm going to stick with that. It sounds like it's a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Well, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and the hon. the Government House Leader said the following: "Do everything they can to protect Albertans' computer system from that member, who today admitted that he broke the law and he tried to hack into private information."

Hon. members, I'm sure that all members are familiar with both *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* as well as *Beauchesne's* paragraph 494, that statements by members respecting themselves must be accepted. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 619: "Remarks which question a Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order."

The hon. member to this point has said that he didn't break the law. We have to take his statement as fact until it is proven otherwise, should it be so. While I appreciate that this could be considered a matter of debate, I won't find a point of order at this point in time, but I will ask that the Government House Leader governs himself accordingly in the future with respect to these remarks.

Hon. members, I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the '22-23 fiscal year. This includes the following amounts from the general revenue fund: \$173 million for the Legislative Assembly; \$45 billion for the public service, including the government's various ministries and departments; \$3.7 billion for capital investments; \$1.4 billion for financial transactions; and \$1.75 billion in contingency funding, which will ensure the government is well equipped to respond to disasters and emergencies as well as any future pandemic-related cost pressures. This funding will ensure the government has the resources it needs to continue providing the programs and services Albertans will rely on over the coming fiscal year.

2:50

I would also like to note that within these amounts the government is living within its means. We've reined in the government spending, and this has allowed us to present only the second balanced budget in more than a decade. Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

The pandemic has brought with it significant challenges for all Albertans, and nowhere has this been more evident than in health care. The past two years have revealed a lack of health care capacity, specifically ICU, surgical, and critical care. Budget 2022 will prioritize strengthening our health care system by investing \$600 million per year to Health's budget to provide additional capacity on a permanent basis, including adding new ICU beds. This will improve health outcomes for Albertans and ensure the province is more prepared for future pandemics or other system-wide health challenges. The budget includes a \$750 million contingency fund specifically to fight the pandemic, address the surgical backlog, and ensure the province can cover other pandemic-related costs that are evolving or remain uncertain.

Budget 2022 will help more Albertans improve their mental health, with an additional \$20 million per year on top of the \$140 million that was committed over four years for mental health and addiction supports. Helping Albertans improve their mental health is a top priority for the government, and this additional funding will support the continued building of a comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care. We will partner with local nonprofit organizations in every corner of the province to bring better mental health services to every Albertan. As we move forward beyond this pandemic, keeping Albertans healthy will be instrumental in our overall economic recovery.

Budget 2022 reflects our government's continued focus on investment attraction, economic growth, and diversification as we move forward to a time where all Albertans will have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Alberta has gained back all of the jobs and more lost during the pandemic, but, Mr. Speaker, some people are still struggling to find good jobs, and employers are dealing with labour shortages because they can't find workers with the skills they need.

That's why Budget 2022 includes more than \$600 million in new strategic investments for Alberta at work. This important initiative will help Albertans, no matter where they are in their career path, to participate in the local labour market with jobs that support their aspirations and improve their lives.

Over the course of the fiscal plan the government will expand the collegiate learning model, assisting high school students on their path to postsecondary education, trade designations, and in-demand jobs. We will add 7,000 additional postsecondary seats in high-demand areas such as computer and data science, information systems technology, finance, agriculture sciences, health, and aviation. New capital investments will also help address critical labour shortages; for example, the expansion of the veterinary school at the University of Calgary will result in more veterinarians for rural Alberta.

To help Albertans develop new skills in a practical and hands-on environment, the government will create additional job placement and integrated learning opportunities, and to increase accessibility and ensure more Albertans can participate, low-income students will benefit from a new nonrepayable support when enrolled in high-demand programs.

Mr. Speaker, the government is aiming to roll out these new learning and work programs and achieve our health care goals while also balancing the budget. Again, I'm pleased to say that Budget 2022 is only the second balanced budget in more than a decade.

We committed to carefully and thoughtfully bringing down the per capita cost of programs and services so that Alberta is no longer an expensive outlier in Canada. With this budget we expect to achieve our goal of bringing our spending in line with other comparable provinces. This means that the government is operating efficiently and that Albertans are getting more value for their tax dollars. I'm also pleased to say that over the last three years the government's operational spending has remained largely flat, since 2019. Prior to 2019 it was increasing by 4 per cent per year despite the fact that Alberta was already spending much more than other provinces and debt was rapidly growing. Without the flattening of operating expenses, we would not be presenting a balanced budget. In fact, we would be presenting a budget with a \$6 billion deficit had we continued on the 4 per cent increase spending trajectory that we inherited from our predecessors.

The government also committed to keeping Alberta's net debt below 30 per cent of its gross domestic product, or GDP. Alberta has one of the lowest net debt to GDP ratios in the nation, and the government's responsible fiscal management will ensure the province keeps its position as a leader in Canada. Alberta's projections for the net debt to GDP ratio have continually improved over the course of the current fiscal year, and it is expected to fall to 18.3 per cent by March 31.

Budget 2022 puts Alberta on the path for a stronger and more diversified economy, a path towards a labour force with the skills and experience required for growth in new and emerging sectors and to a future where the burden of debt is not the legacy left to the next generation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Budget 2022 is a blueprint for the bright, thriving, and prosperous future that Albertans deserve. I urge all of my fellow members in this House to support this bill today and help us deliver on Albertans' priorities.

Madam Speaker, I now move to adjourn. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Luan	Rutherford
Amery	Madu	Savage
Copping	McIver	Sawhney
Ellis	Neudorf	Schow
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Schulz
Getson	Orr	Shandro
Glubish	Panda	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Pon	Toews
Guthrie	Rehn	Turton
Issik	Reid	van Dijken
Jones	Rosin	Williams
LaGrange	Rowswell	Yao

Against the motion:

Eggen	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Goehring	Sabir	Sweet
Loyola	Schmidt	

Totals: For – 36 Against – 8

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022.

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 and provide electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with rising costs. It will support child care workers and parents of young children, and it will build municipal infrastructure.

This funding will go to the following office and five government departments: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Children's Services, Culture and Status of Women, Energy, Health, and Municipal Affairs. If passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in voted expense funding and \$1 million in voted capital investment.

The largest amount in this bill is for the Department of 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. The costs of the pandemic have been large, but we've continued to provide the necessary resources to keep 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.

The next-largest expense in the estimates comes from the Department of Municipal Affairs; \$231 million will be distributed to municipalities under the Canada community-building fund to support infrastructure projects across the province.

The supplementary amount for Children's Services is 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, which is also off-set by federal funds.

With the help of this bill we will provide \$150 in electricity rebates to over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses. 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, we're striving to ensure 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, Madam Speaker, 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 relief to Albertans.

On top of this, our tax policy continues to ensure that Albertans pay less in overall taxes than any other province, with low personal income tax, no provincial sales tax, payroll tax, or health care premiums.

The last ministry that will receive a supplementary amount is Culture and Status of Women. This is another important item as it will allow Alberta to support Ukrainians during the Russian invasion of their country. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support for Ukraine, \$10.4 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 expense increases in staff compensation due to the changes in the salary restraint measures on non bargaining unit staff.

Since some of the items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are off-set by savings in other areas, the overall increase to the deficit forecast for '21-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million. While the supplementary estimates reflect a modest increase in spending, it's important to note the government has taken significant steps to get the province's finances back in order.

3:20

It bears repeating, Madam Speaker, that 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 than similar-sized provinces. Moreover, the previous government's operating spending was increasing by 4 per cent per year, and again, had we stayed on this trajectory, many of the programs and services essential to Albertans would have simply become unsustainable and out of reach. Over the last three years we've brought that 4 per cent annual operating spending increase down to less than half a per cent

per year, and if we exclude health spending increases of nearly 2 per cent per year, our operating spending has essentially remained flat over the term.

With increased economic and fiscal capacity and by maintaining discipline in our spending decisions, our fiscal future as a province is vastly improved. The government 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 and accountability to taxpayers.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill, and with that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:21 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	LaGrange	Rosin
Amery	Lovely	Rowswell
Copping	Luan	Rutherford
Ellis	Madu	Savage
Fir	Neudorf	Sawhney
Getson	Nicolaides	Schow
Glubish	Nixon, Jeremy	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Orr	Toews
Guthrie	Panda	Turton
Hanson	Pon	Williams
Issik	Rehn	Yao
Jones	Reid	

Against the motion:

Eggen	Phillips	Schmidt
Goehring	Sabir	Sweet
Loyola		

Totals: For – 35 Against – 7

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill consists of several legislative amendments which support government's commitment to responsible financial management, red tape reduction, and respect for Albertans' tax dollars.

I'd like to start with changes that directly relate to implementing Budget 2022 decisions and legislation under Treasury Board and Finance. The first proposed change would require online marketplaces such as Airbnb and VRBO to collect and pay Alberta's tourism levy on behalf of their Alberta hosts. This will be accomplished through an amendment to the Tourism Levy Act. Currently if you are the host of a short-term rental through Airbnb or other platforms, you have an additional step when renting your property where you must collect and pay the levy yourself. This change would ensure that the levy is collected more efficiently and

consistently and minimize red tape for Alberta hosts. This is a change hosts have been asking for, and we're pleased to reduce the red tape and level the playing field for accommodations in the tourism sector. This also aligns with the processes in other provinces, notably British Columbia and Quebec.

3:40

Another change in this bill would establish a new tobacco tax category and accompanying tax rate for smokeless tobacco products effective March 1. This will be accomplished through an amendment to the Tobacco Tax Act. Since neighbouring jurisdictions have a lower tax rate for smokeless tobacco, Alberta's current tax rate is not deterring people from using these products. Instead, we're seeing Albertans crossing into Saskatchewan to buy products at a lower rate. With this decision we're reducing the tax differential between Saskatchewan and Alberta, and we're reducing the incentive to purchase this product outside of the province.

Further proposals in the area of provincial tax administration included in Bill 2 contain largely technical updates to Alberta's tax statutes. These are annual updates done to ensure the legislation is up to date, aligned as necessary, and continues to support the effect of efficient collection of Alberta's taxes. This will be accomplished through amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, Alberta Corporate Tax Act, and Fuel Tax Act.

Finally, on legislative items related to Treasury Board and Finance, Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Financial Administration Act. If passed, these amendments would ensure designated provincial corporations, regulated funds, and other consolidated entities participate by holding their surplus cash in a new cash pooling structure. The new cash pooling structure would replace an outdated and administratively complex system currently in place. The new structure would use surplus cash held in pooled accounts to pay down debt and lower debt-servicing costs. This would reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least \$1 billion and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million per year. These amendments also respond to the Auditor General's recommendation to examine the government's current cash management practices.

Now on to amendments related to other departments. Bill 2 proposes a number of updates to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. These are intended to strengthen the current legal framework for the delivery of health benefits and give the government flexibility to make decisions in an ever-changing health environment. In Budget 2022 we addressed the need for a stronger health care system now and took steps to build capacity and provide an excellent standard of care for all Albertans well into the future. We committed record investments in health care, and as a result, Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. The proposed changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act contained in Bill 2 build on these commitments and would ensure our regulatory framework for health benefits is responsive to the needs of Albertans.

Essentially, the amendments address the current lack of authority in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to make necessary adjustments to how benefits are paid for basic health services; for example, affording Albertans virtual care options for allied health benefits, adjusting benefits based on medical necessity, age, health status, and other criteria. We're fixing this by adding new regulation-making authority for setting coverage eligibility for health benefits delivered by allied health providers such as optometrists and podiatrists. This will help ensure care goes to those who need it most. Additional changes would also increase financial

accountability through the health system by strengthening audit and compliance activities.

Bill 2 also proposes an update to the Emissions Management and Climate Resilience Act which would reduce red tape and remove an obsolete power for extending loan guarantees under the TIER loan guarantee program, a program that hasn't been used since 2019. This change helps reduce undesirable financial risk to government, that often comes with loan guarantees, and is aligned with our approach to prudent financial management.

Lastly, amendments to the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act and related regulation would help the province deliver on its financial commitments for the light rail transit construction projects in Calgary and Edmonton. The province's overall commitment to provide \$3 billion for the light rail transit construction projects in Calgary and Edmonton recognizes that strong and vibrant communities are vital to Albertans' personal and professional well-being. This is more important now than ever as Alberta is moving forward to a time of economic recovery and prosperity where Albertans have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Madam Speaker, Bill 2 builds on Budget 2022 by further integrating financial responsibility across government operations. Fiscal discipline and better use of tax dollars will ultimately yield better outcomes for Albertans and a stronger financial position for the province.

Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, and I look forward to healthy debate moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am rising to provide my initial comments on Bill 2 and to note that there are a number of things in this bill that the Official Opposition does not find any particular quarrel with given that they serve pedestrian, I would say, what I call drumbeat of government, initiatives, including aligning the tax codes, which happens every year or roughly every year alongside every budget, and a number of other sort of perfunctory changes such as the changes to how Airbnb hosts collect and remit their tourism levy. That's all fine as far as it goes.

I think what we need to zero in on here are a couple of things. One, when we open up this act, we're making changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. That is fine as far as it goes to align the changes to the federal personal Income Tax Act, but omitted here was an opportunity to reindex Alberta's personal income tax system to address the rise in inflation.

Now, rising inflation is, of course, not at all a surprise. Debates have raged among economists, particularly south of the border, on the coming inflation. Certainly, more hawkish observers, like Larry Summers and others, in early 2021 were pulling the fire alarm over inflation. There was a lively debate. Now, I think it is true on both sides of the border that we are in fact returning to an inflationary period in our economic history. It has been a generation, but inflation is back.

Many of us have made a number of our large consumer choices – buying a house, buying a car, and so on – in a very low inflationary environment, Madam Speaker. Albertans have not seen these levels of inflation for 30 years. Certainly, you know, my parents used to tell stories of the '70s and '80s, when they first bought their house and then interest rates went up to 20 per cent. Those are really hard on people. Certainly, the national energy program didn't help, or at least it certainly didn't help my dad and so many folks like my parents who were working in oil and gas.

Inflation is back. This is not a surprise. What used to once preoccupy Main Street and Bay Street is now a real concern for Albertans. The fact of the matter is that we have a number of decisions that were taken in 2019, in a relatively low inflationary period, that we have absolutely blown by, and there is no question that we are no longer living in that world. When we are reopening the Personal Income Tax Act, there is an opportunity here to ensure that our income tax brackets align with the rise in the cost of living.

Let me just provide some context for folks for what is actually happening here and why both the now Premier of this province – back in the '90s he used to call this an insidious tax grab, which is why the Official Opposition has asked so many times why he is now strangely comfortable with this given that it was one of his first acts in terms of decisions as Premier. The basic personal exemption in 2019 under the NDP was \$19,369, Madam Speaker. That is the amount that you do not pay taxes on. You pay taxes above that \$19,000 threshold. The basic personal exemption in 2025 under the UCP, according to what they have put forward since 2019 and have indicated no change on particularly – this was the opportunity for them to do that, in this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 – will be \$19,369.

3:50

Now, if they had continued to index the income tax system to inflation – that is to say, not taken the decision to let inflation eat away at our incomes – then the basic personal exemption in 2025 would have been \$22,219. In other words, you're paying taxes on \$3,000 more of your income than you would have otherwise been. Over the course of the fiscal forecast period this means that the statistically average family will pay more than \$500 more under this decision in personal income tax alone. And then we add, on top of that, that the child and family benefit is also no longer indexed to inflation, so it's not going up every year, and those benefits will then be lost by \$485 a year because that benefit is not increasing with inflation.

Now, there have been other measures that have resulted in deindexing of benefits from inflation. I'm thinking here of the assured income for the severely handicapped and the Alberta seniors' benefit. Leaving those aside for a moment, the fact of the matter is that this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, before the House today could remedy that problem of indexing our income tax brackets to inflation. It does not.

You know, it's very clear to me that this budget did submit to a rewrite in January. I was noting in the budget speech that there were a couple of typos on the fake natural gas rebate. There was a misspelling of Ralph Klein's name. It's fairly clear to me that somebody just kind of tossed that in there at the last second to kind of meet the – this was their idea of meeting the moment, I guess, for a rebate that is not going to happen for people's rising cost of living as this issue was starting to boil in late January, early February. Although, I mean, certainly on the Official Opposition side we could have told the folks across the way, and did, in fact, that rising property taxes, insurance, school fees, tuition, and other costs were eating away at the family budget in a very significant way.

Be that as it may, it's very clear that this was a bit of slapdashery that is before us in terms of this budget, you know, as evidenced by the fact that there is actually no line item for the natural gas rebate. It doesn't really exist. The electricity rebate was sort of thought of after the fact, and we just rammed through the supplementary estimates in order to finance it. There's no question that there could have been a retroactive rewrite on this decision to tax people more at a time when, as discussed, their insurance is going up, their property taxes are going up, their school fees are going up, interest

on their student loans is going up, their tuition is going up. Pretty much everywhere that the province of Alberta could exercise a public policy choice in terms of saving people money, they chose to do the opposite.

This is a real missed opportunity, Madam Speaker. Even though, you know, under normal circumstances this would be a perfunctory exercise, we are not supporting this bill because we cannot in good conscience allow this bill to go through when we have a Finance minister who has told the public: oh, yes, I think we will reindex sometime at a later time. But people need that help today. They need to know that they're going to be paying – that their personal income taxes are going to be indexed to inflation and that the, generally speaking, very high inflation that people are now seeing is not going to eat away at their take-home pay when they file their 2021 taxes.

You know, the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that the absence of indexation in this bill just fundamentally signals to the people of Alberta just how incredibly tone deaf they are to people's challenges right now. When we are hearing from people who are looking at \$500 and \$700 electricity bills from January, February, and they've – the pool price has abated a little bit, but people are still looking at pretty high bills, and it hasn't exactly been a warm spring across the province. At that level, when people are already reeling from the pandemic – there's been lots of job disruption, lack of paid sick leave, all kinds of financial challenges for people. You know, you just have to go out and talk to any random person on the street, and they will tell you that the last two years have been difficult. Many people have different stories to tell, but the foundational theme is that, yeah, it's not exactly been easy on anybody.

From the fact that we're now bringing in this piece of legislation that doesn't take that opportunity and is just wilfully blind to what's actually on people's minds, you know, I just think it's no wonder that the government caucus is in the public opinion quandary it finds itself in. They're just simply not meeting people where they are at in terms of their legitimate concerns.

You know, I think it's fair to say that in this sort of slapdashery of getting mixed signals from the Finance minister, it's fundamentally unhelpful to people, and I think it goes to trust. People simply do not trust that this Minister of Finance, this government caucus, has people's best interests and financial security at heart when he sort of muses publicly: oh, we might reindex at a later time; maybe we will, and maybe we won't. We have an opportunity to do so in this legislation here. Just to give people that certainty would certainly, I think, go some way to restoring that breach of trust as well. It's very, very clear that Albertans, as I often hear from people out on the doorsteps, on the left or the right or the exhausted middle, Madam Speaker, all have trust issues when it comes to this government and have all had experience in some way, shape, or form with these folks not keeping their word with Albertans. When we hear open musing from the Finance minister that "Oh, we might rewrite the budget in this way or that," including reindexing, it would go some way to including that measure within this. It would be exactly within this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, that that goal would be in fact accomplished.

Our firm commitment to Albertans is relatively simple on this matter, Madam Speaker. You know, to go back and talk a little bit about the history of indexation of income tax brackets – I know it's an extremely exciting topic to the dozens of people at home who are at the edge of their seats, to hear about that economic history – the fact of the matter is that there was a previous era of high inflation, and there was a policy consensus that emerged that governments in Canada would index the income tax system to account for inflation every year. This is a pretty boring economic

accounting concept. That meant that the amount that Albertans and Canadians pay on their income taxes would be adjusted annually to account for inflation. Each year the basic personal income tax exemption and brackets would increase in line with inflation.

Now, the fact of the matter is that this Premier has actually played an integral part in the history of this particular policy initiative. There's no end to the *Hansard*. There is a forest of *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, with the Premier on the record on this matter, calling the lack of indexation of the income tax system a pernicious and sneaky and insidious – and all these big words – tax grab. Yet at the first available opportunity that's what the Finance minister did in his first budget, in 2019.

You know, over the course of 20 years since that conversation in the 1990s, of which the now Premier was a part, both federally and provincially policy-makers did reach a consensus. This was across the aisle. It was very uncontroversial until this government reintroduced the controversy to it. Whatever the rate of inflation, citizens would be protected. It should be a very simple concept. The income tax system and benefits would be indexed, and there would be no tax on inflation.

I want to use my remaining time to just touch very briefly, Madam Speaker – and I may speak to this further as the bill progresses – on the matter of cash pooling and the GOA essentially having access to all funds and being able to cash pool for their associated agencies, boards, and commissions. While on the face of it I don't particularly have much in the way of quarrel in terms of this provision, the GOA could take the U of A or AIMCo's cash on hand and pool those resources centrally. It seems to make sense on the face of it, and there are a number of Auditor General recommendations with respect to cash management that do need to be satisfied. We all understand that.

4:00

Having said that, the government has given themselves in this act the power to charge lower than market rates, costing the associated government entities funds. The government argues that by centrally pooling cash, they improve overall liquidity, therefore need less cash overall across all public entities. That may well be true, which will save on debt-servicing costs; also may well be true. But on the other hand – and we have very recent experience of this, Madam Speaker – it limits the autonomy and independence of organizations that are generally thought to be at arm's length from government; for example, AIMCo, universities and colleges, school boards, et cetera.

Because the government has given themselves the right to charge below market rates, it may be that a commitment now to not do such a thing will be reneged upon in the future. I'm thinking here of the decision to charge municipalities more in interest for their infrastructure projects as a result of changes to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, a commitment that they said they were not going to do, Madam Speaker, to municipalities. Lo and behold, they just turned around and did it with absolutely no remorse. You know, it's in writing, that they weren't going to do it, and they just absolutely don't care. What they said before: don't care about their word, don't care about establishing relationships of trust with anybody, and went back on their word. Now they're raising those interest rates from municipalities borrowing for infrastructure projects, which will cost those of us who are property tax payers potentially a lot of money over the course of these very large infrastructure projects, depending on which municipality we live in.

This provision of the act, I will say, is not problematic on the face of it if you can actually trust the government at their word, and that's a bit of a tall order these days. There is no question that if this is going to happen, there probably needs to be a bit of legislative

protection or a dial turned on this because nobody trusts this government to do what they said they were going to do, because two minutes later they turn around and do the opposite. I can't support this as it is written right now although I do not disagree with the principle or what it is trying to achieve.

I think this business of the reduction to the provincial tax on chewing tobacco piece – I'll just say a few things on this. You know, this does bring us roughly in line with other provinces. Despite the lower rate it is not unlikely that revenues will increase. Revenues are a function of rate multiplied by volume, after all, so if people are indeed doing sort of cross-border adventures for this particular product, then it may be that the revenues actually go up.

My questions here would be around whether the government, in fact, spoke to any of the tobacco reduction advocates, any health professionals, or others on this move, whether they consulted with them or if they just left them completely in the dark. I would argue that these are folks who have been really important partners to government and for public health for a really long time, and it would be unfortunate indeed if they were left out of that process. I hope that perhaps, as we go along through the bill debate process, the government can shed a little bit of light on what kinds of public consultations were done and if there was any sort of health or other revenue analysis done associated with this decision.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks for now and just simply conclude by saying that it is unfortunate indeed that this is the time that I rise to speak to this Financial Statutes Amendment Act seeing as we just did pass through supplementary supply and the government also cut off any opportunity for the opposition to provide some comments on that. You know, it's hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending. It would seem to me that it is only right and proper for the people of Alberta to have at least some window on what the government is up to there when they come to this House to ask for hundreds of millions of dollars in supplementary supply. On the face of it some of these initiatives are supported by the NDP opposition, others less so. But either way it is up to this Chamber to be able to communicate to the people of Alberta on what's in those bills, what the government is actually asking for in terms of sups, and to be able to judge for themselves based on the debate in this House.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, Madam Speaker, and look forward to the debate on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I want to start off by thanking my friend from Lethbridge-West for her thoughtful comments and just say that I agree in large part with all of the things that she said about this bill, particularly her concerns with respect to the lack of changes to the tax code that we've been pushing for.

I think it's important from the outset, Madam Speaker, to just clearly state what I believe the NDP's view of fair taxation is. We all agree that government has a role to provide goods and services to the people of Alberta. We don't necessarily agree what those goods and services should be, but we know from word and deed that we all agree that government should provide goods and services to people. Those goods and services come at a cost, and the question is who should pay and who should be let off the hook when it comes to footing the bill for the goods and services that government provides. Now, as members of the New Democratic Party we've long believed that a fair taxation system asks those who benefit from the economy of the province to pay the most and those who are benefiting the least should

also pay the least. That, to me, seems to be a fair way of covering the expenses of government.

Unfortunately, that is something that we don't see from our Conservative friends across the way. They seem to have an opposite view of what constitutes fairness: if you are benefiting a great deal from the economic situation, you're actually asked to pay less, and if you're suffering, struggling to get ahead, you're actually asked to pay more. That's why we have a tax system now that has been constructed to allow the most profitable corporations in our province to pay \$5 billion less in taxes than they would have under the old tax code while simultaneously asking the average personal income tax payer to pay \$500 a year more at a time when they can least afford it, Madam Speaker.

Not only that, not only are we asking the people who can least afford to foot the bill to pay more while letting those who can well afford to pay more off the hook; we're asking those who receive government services to do without because this government doesn't have the courage to implement a fair taxation system. Who am I thinking of, Madam Speaker? Of course, I'm thinking of AISH recipients. I'm thinking of students in the postsecondary system. I'm thinking of people who access the Alberta child and family benefit, those seniors who are eligible for seniors' benefits. All of the people who receive those benefits are now receiving substantially less than they would have if the tax code from 2018 had been carried forward to this present day.

With respect to the issue of deindexing the tax code, there are a couple of comments that I'd like to make. It is astounding to me, Madam Speaker, to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West essentially channel the 1997 Reform Party on this issue. I find that my head is spinning because the world has come full circle. I clearly remember in 1997, as a 19-year-old who didn't know any better, voting for the Reform Party candidate who was running in my constituency in that election. Now . . . [interjections] Don't cheer, because that Reform Party member ended up going to jail for illegally confining people as an RCMP officer, not exactly the kind of person that you would want to have holding public office. I am not proud of the fact that I voted for that person.

4:10

It is incredibly interesting to me, Madam Speaker, to find myself in a party that I thought was the New Democratic Party but is echoing lines from the 1997 Reform Party. There's something called horseshoe theory that says that people on the extreme left and the extreme right converge on certain issues, and perhaps this issue of tax deindexation is one of those issues on which we're converging. I don't know.

The fact of the matter is, though, that deindexing the tax code has had a very real cost for the average income tax payer here in the province of Alberta. We heard as much this morning at the Public Accounts Committee, where we met with officials from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. My colleagues questioned officials from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board to give exact figures for how much additional personal income tax has been collected in the fiscal 2019-20 year, the fiscal 2020-21 year, as well as the fiscal '21-22 year. That number adds up to somewhere north of \$300 million additional taxes that have been collected from average working Albertans. That number is projected to increase significantly over the next few years as, hopefully, wages go up. But tax brackets don't rise along with them.

You know, it's interesting to me, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Lethbridge-West pressed the Premier on this issue of deindexing the tax brackets, that he loudly and proudly proclaimed that 40 per cent of Albertans don't pay taxes under our tax system. Well, as my friend from Lethbridge-West clearly stated, the

personal exemption is not quite \$19,500, so when the Premier brags about 40 per cent of Albertans not being eligible to pay taxes, what he's saying is that 40 per cent of working Albertans earn less than \$19,500.

I hear members opposite say that they're not working hard enough, and I think that that's exactly the attitude that has made Albertans so upset with members of this government, because we know full well that Albertans are working harder than ever before. They continue to fall behind, and this government, instead of offering them any hand up, kicks them while they're down, at the same time turning around and allowing profitable corporations to get away with not paying \$5 billion in taxes that are rightfully owed to the people of Alberta, approving 40 per cent pay raises for executive managers at AIMCo, and then, if that weren't enough, the Premier is musing idly about giving people who earn \$300,000 a year a tax break.

It's quite clear to me whose side the government is on, and it's those who don't need any help from government. The people who earn \$19,500 or less are on their own. Not only is the government continuing to shovel money into the pockets of the people who already have the most in this province; they continue to claw back money from the people who have the least to give. We heard clearly this morning, also in Public Accounts, about changes that were made to the Alberta child and family benefit. Hundreds of dollars every year are taken because of the changes to the Alberta child and family benefit that this government made. Hundreds of dollars a year are taken out of the pockets of families who are living at the poverty line. The government wants to claim that they made this wonderful change because a very small section of people who were living in deep poverty got a slight increase in the child benefit. But they took that money from people who were living in poverty that wasn't as deep, and that's clearly unfair.

Not only that, but that is not the only change they made. The decision to deindex AISH was one that has cost the average AISH recipient \$3,000. Now, \$3,000 to somebody who receives – what is it? Is \$1,600 a month the average for AISH? I'm not getting any help here from my colleagues, unfortunately. They are deep in their phones. [interjection] Approximately \$1,600. That's the equivalent of two months' worth of benefits that have been clawed away from AISH recipients. And what's the justification that we heard from officials in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board? Well, similar recipients in other provinces make less, so the people of Alberta who are on this program should make less, too.

What's insulting, Madam Speaker, the insult that is added to the injury that has been visited upon AISH recipients, is this government's continual perpetuation of this myth that AISH recipients in Alberta receive the highest benefits of anybody in the country, which is patently untrue. My friend from St. Albert this morning challenged department officials on the fact that similar recipients in the Northwest Territories, for example, receive higher benefits, and when she asked them to confirm whether or not that was true, you know, the ministry officials shuffled papers on their desk and looked awkwardly at their shoes and avoided answering the question.

The fact remains that this government had no justification for clawing back AISH benefits to those recipients other than the fact that they believe that because people in Ontario and British Columbia are suffering, we should visit an equal amount of suffering on people in similar situations here in the province of Alberta. It's grossly unfair.

The same is true with seniors' benefits. We asked a similar line of questions about the deindexation of seniors' benefits to officials at the Department of Treasury Board and Finance. Again, when we highlighted that the changes that this government has made have cost the average seniors' benefit recipient \$750 a year, the only

answer they had to justify that decision was that seniors in other jurisdictions receive less, so seniors in Alberta should receive less, too. It doesn't make sense.

Their version of the Alberta advantage is that if you are a multibillion-dollar corporation, you should receive more here than in any other province in the country and you can send that money to foreign investors, you know, move your headquarters out of Calgary to Denver or wherever. That's fine. People in this government can't do enough to make sure that they benefit companies way more than any other province would, but when it comes to AISH recipients or people on seniors' benefits, well, they should suffer as much as any other Canadian should because that's their version of fairness, Madam Speaker. I find it incredibly frustrating and incredibly offensive.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 2 and clarify, I think, some of the comments that we've been hearing throughout the course of debate thus far. You know, there's no question that Albertans are feeling some of the pinch when it comes to fuel prices and utility bills. That's precisely why Alberta's government has stepped up to provide assistance. When it comes to utility bills, the government of Alberta is providing a \$50 rebate for three months, \$150 in total over three months, to help off-set some of the increased costs of utilities that Albertans are feeling. [interjection] As you can hear, members opposite – I don't know – don't like that approach and want to heckle, but it is important. The members opposite want to object to us providing assistance to Albertans who are feeling the pinch, but we believe that it's important to provide relief to Alberta families through that initiative.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I also wanted to rise to talk a little bit more about the cost of gasoline and the cost of fuel prices. As it relates to fuel prices, the government of Alberta is removing the provincial tax on gas, on fuel. What really is a challenge when it comes to this issue is the fact that the NDP stands up here all day, every day and talks about the issue of affordability, but on April 1 their ally, their governing partner – we know their federal leader, of course, Jagmeet Singh, and the federal NDP have . . . [interjections] You can hear how angry they get. They know where I'm going. I haven't even gotten there, but they know where I'm going, and they get so angry. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. It's becoming very difficult to hear the hon. member who has the floor. Only that hon. member has the floor.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: It's unfortunate. I've been sitting here for most of the afternoon listening intently, but unfortunately the members opposite can't do that.

Regardless, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, their federal counterparts – not just their counterparts; they actually belong to the same party, being the federal NDP – have just signed a deal to hang onto power with the Liberals until 2025. We know that a key part of the federal Liberal agenda is to increase the carbon tax on April 1. What's going to happen when they increase the carbon tax on April 1? It will make life more expensive for Albertans. It will make life more expensive for every Albertan, for individuals on a fixed income, for families, for individuals who want to take their kids to school, who want to take their kids to hockey practice. The NDP hasn't said a word about the federal carbon tax.

Now, I'm willing to give them some latitude. If they really do believe in making life more affordable for Albertans, Madam Speaker, I would look forward to seeing any member stand up and call openly on the federal government and their coalition NDP partners to stop the carbon tax increase on April 1. That is what I would like to see. I invite any member opposite, if they are so concerned and so interested with the issue of affordability, to stand up and speak against the carbon tax increase that is scheduled to happen on April 1. None of them will do that because their allegiance with Justin Trudeau cannot be shattered and cannot be broken. It must be maintained at all measure. We know that, and we see that.

However, again, we are taking action on our side of the House. We are removing the provincial tax on fuel. That'll equate to 13 cents per litre in savings for all Albertans. We firmly believe that Albertans shouldn't be punished for taking their kids to school and for going about their daily business.

That's why, Madam Speaker, you may remember, in 2019, when our government was elected, the first act, Bill 1, of our government and of this Legislature was An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax to remove the carbon tax that those members put in place when they were in government. Why? Because Albertans did not want to pay more to heat their homes, did not want to pay more to get their groceries and to drive their kids to school.

We have taken direct action on bringing costs down. The members opposite just like to talk a good game, Madam Speaker, but again I would invite any member to stand up and speak against the federal carbon tax increase that is coming.

I wanted to speak a little bit about the issue of affordability – I think we've covered that – but I also wanted to speak on the issue of corporate taxes as well because I understand that several amendments within Bill 2 are making amendments to corporate tax. Madam Speaker, I think we heard it earlier from some of the speakers opposite. Our government took decisive action in bringing corporate taxes down. Do you know what the result of that was? [interjection] I'm so glad the Minister of Finance asked, but I think it's a little bit of a rhetorical question, because he knows the answer well and clear.

The result, shockingly, of course – big surprise – was more revenue, more corporate tax revenue. It's very simple, Madam Speaker. A lower tax regime and a lower tax environment encourage investment, allow investment, and facilitate investment, but unfortunately the members opposite don't understand that. When they were in government, they increased corporate taxes, taxes on corporations, and what happened? Businesses left, divestment occurred, and jobs were lost as a direct result of their action.

It's very clear in looking at the budget documents. Any member of the public can look and see the details for themselves. As a result of our corporate tax decrease, the province now is realizing more revenue from businesses, more corporate tax revenue. But you don't just have to look at the budget documents; just look every other day at the news and see what is happening, Madam Speaker. There is investment from organizations like Amazon Web Services, new investments just the other day from Walmart opening up a new distribution centre, record investment in tech, record investment in film and television. Venture capital investment is also up. All we have to do is look at the signs. Again, if Albertans don't want to look through the mundane details of the budget, just look at the news and look at what's happening on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps the Minister of Finance will disagree with my assessment that there are mundane details in the budget, but of course I think we have a little bit of a different perspective when it comes to that issue.

We see very clearly, Madam Speaker, signs of strong economic growth. We see very clearly signs of opportunity and signs of

growth. That also is on the back of having to deal with two years of challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, but through that time Alberta's government has kept its course. We have continued to be focused on the priorities that Albertans want our government to be focused on, and we are now beginning to see the results of that hard work and that diligence.

I know some critics, including the members opposite, will say that the results of some of the successes in the budget are solely the result of increased revenue and solely the result of – I believe I heard one of the members during question period talk about a revenue windfall, that we fell backwards into a revenue windfall and that that's the only reason that we are in the fiscal environment that we are in now.

Madam Speaker, let me say very clearly that Alberta is back with a balanced budget for the first time in eight years, and that is because of diligent and prudent fiscal spending and fiscal restraint. Under the NDP, if you apply the same revenue projections that the NDP had when they were in office, we would still be dealing with massive deficits as a result of their spending trajectory. The math is clear. It's been \$6 billion. It's been verified by other economists. Have a look at the information. Under the current trajectory with our forecast that we built into the budget for revenue projections, we would still have billions of dollars in deficit if we followed the NDP spending trajectory.

4:30

You know why we don't have deficits anymore? Because our government has been successful in bringing costs under control, bringing costs in line with other jurisdictions. An important part of bringing costs in line with other jurisdictions is allowing us to do more. Madam Speaker, we are investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional seats in our postsecondary institutions, more seats than those members created in our postsecondary system, more seats than have been created in a decade. We're providing new funding for student aid to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to access postsecondary education. We are investing more in apprenticeship education, in ensuring Indigenous learners have the opportunity to access postsecondary education, and we are able to do this because we have made the difficult decisions to get our finances under control, to rein in reckless NDP spending.

As I look to the future, I see optimism, I see signs of investment, I see signs of job growth, job creation, and I am confident that if we continue with our plans, we will see even greater results and success. With that, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to cede the rest of my time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, listening to the hon. minister, he made a reference that I just found really interesting. He says: all day every day the NDP talks about affordability. Absolutely. We absolutely are, and when you're still not hearing it, it's a concern. I question why this side of the House is actually listening to Albertans and their concerns about affordability in this province, yet the other side of the House is also hearing the same concerns – we hear them, we're CCed in the e-mails, we talk about it every day in this Chamber – yet they're bringing forward legislation that makes it harder for families.

This piece of legislation is doing nothing that I'm hearing Albertans want. They want affordability. They want to be able to

pay their bills. They want to be able to put their kids in post-secondary. But what this government is doing is so out of touch with what actual Albertans are asking for. So I'm confused. They're hearing the NDP, who is speaking on behalf of Albertans, talk about their concerns with affordability yet are doing nothing. I'm just very confused about the cognitive dissonance that's happening on that side of the House when it comes to what Albertans are actually asking for. It is certainly not an increase in cost. It is certainly not this \$50 that they're claiming is going to save people with their utilities. When people are paying \$800 a month for a utility bill and can no longer afford insurance on their vehicle because that's skyrocketing, they can't afford the cost of living that's happening, I'm just so confused why this government is not understanding what's happening.

As part of my critic role I spend a lot of time talking with nonprofits all across the province. On March 17, 2022, just recently, Vibrant Communities Calgary released a budget review. They did an analysis, they published it, and I would encourage this government to review that report because the title of this article is Alberta Budget 2022's Business As Usual Approach Falls Short: New Spending Priorities Don't Address Issues That Matter to Struggling Albertans. This organization meets with nonprofits and organizations that serve Albertans all across the province. It involves the Calgary chamber of voluntary commerce, Alberta seniors and community, Edmonton Social Planning Council. They're those individuals that are working front line with Albertans. They're concerned with this budget. They're concerned with tax. They're concerned with the lack of investment in what they've claimed are priorities.

We see in this piece of legislation that one of the pieces of the omnibus bill is the Tourism Levy Act. That's one of the pieces that's going to be impacted. It's creating a space where Airbnb-type companies can charge the tourism levy, which is interesting because part of this government's plan is to increase travel and tourism in the province. It's something that they talk about all the time. How are we supposed to entice Albertans to actually travel when they can't afford their bills, they can't afford insurance on their vehicle, they can't afford basic groceries?

I'm hearing from parents who are struggling. Parents call me in tears wanting to know what supports and services are available. They've exhausted the food bank. They've exhausted their church. They've exhausted their neighbours. Pleading with resources, supports, and information, and this government laughs at the NDP talking about affordability.

Madam Speaker, I'm so confused about why this government is prioritizing the way that they are. They're not looking at inflation costs. They're not looking at increasing access to the supports and services that people need. They're creating a space where people that are on a very fixed, limited income, like seniors, like individuals on AISH, are set even further behind than they were before. If they listened to Albertans, if they listened to the organizations that serve Albertans, they would hear loud and clear that something needs to happen. Something needs to change.

We know that we stand up in this House and we talk about what needs to happen, what are potential solutions, and this piece of legislation doesn't answer that. We look at a government saying, "We need to increase travel; we need to increase tourism," but they've taxed parks. It just doesn't make sense. They talk out one side that they understand it, that they're working on building the economy, yet they're not actually doing things that support that growth.

When I talk with the tourism industry – they have come to committee. They've met with individual members. They have pleaded to meet with this government to talk about things that will actually work to increase travel and tourism in the province. One of

the things that I brought up in estimates was talking about: what is the province doing to encourage Albertans to enter into the travel and tourism field? There's no plan. The travel industry relies heavily on international people to come and work in the province. Well, we've seen a decline, partly to do with COVID and the inability to travel, but there's no plan to get Albertans working in those sectors. The travel and tourism industry is one of the biggest hit, has the highest unemployment rate out of the industries in the province, yet we don't see a plan to get individuals working.

We have hotels that are struggling – they don't have staff to clean the rooms – and we also have Albertans that are out of work. What is their plan to get those people working in an industry that could be thriving in the province? We have the natural landscape of Banff and Jasper, beautiful places, but simply putting an Airbnb tax does not incentivize Albertans to travel. They can't afford to travel. They can't afford to rent an Airbnb. It just doesn't make sense. It's so out of touch, Madam Speaker.

I think that when we look at what people are saying about this budget, there are some significant concerns about the impacts on the average family. We know that people can't pay bills. We know that they are struggling in job loss. They're struggling in career changes. They're struggling with some significant emotional impacts. None of that is being looked at when it comes to how this government has planned their budget. They have created a space that is so out of touch with what people are actually talking about in the province and what people actually need in the province.

4:40

We look at what average expenses are in a household. People cannot afford day-to-day life. It's not luxury things that people are going without, Madam Speaker. It's not that, you know, they can't buy that luxury SUV. They can't afford milk. There's a housing crisis that's happening in the province. People can't find affordable housing. Seniors are struggling. Parents – we're in a sandwich generation. I have my mom who lives with me, and I have my kids who are still at home. When I think about what her life is like, I'm so fortunate to have her in my home. But when I look at some of her peers who are struggling to make ends meet, it breaks my heart. It absolutely breaks my heart that people who have worked their entire working careers to build a life for themselves can't afford milk, can't afford to go and see their grandbabies.

These are the stories that we're hearing, and I know members of government are hearing those stories as well. We're CCed on the e-mails. There's no response on what this government is going to do to actually make life affordable for people. People are in pain. People are asking for some sort of budget that actually has an impact on their day-to-day life, and this isn't that, Madam Speaker.

There are some significant concerns when we look at what average families are being faced with and the pain that they're feeling. Saving to put kids in postsecondary is a big cost, and now it's, unfortunately, unattainable for some families. They cannot afford to have their children attend postsecondary. That has a ripple effect. That has people in our province that aren't being educated to a level that they want to be because they can't afford it. We see postsecondary students leaving the province. Talking to physicians, they're saying that a lot of their graduating doctors don't want to work in this province. They're leaving. They don't want to be told where they have to open up their practice. This government talks about their plan to entice doctors to the province. It's not working.

When we talk about things that make people want to live in Alberta and want to invest here, not having a physician, not having an education system, that has a curriculum that has been rejected on so many levels, not having supports through FSCD, knowing that there are significant wait-lists or what this government refuses to

call a wait-list – families that qualify without having access to supports is perhaps a better way to frame it in their language – ultimately that means that families are going without the services that they need and deserve. There's nothing in this budget that shows that that's being supported.

When we talk about the film industry, that is definitely a success in the province. We've seen how there have been some incredible productions that have come out of this province. But when I was in estimates, I asked the minister: out of those big productions, how many Albertans were employed in that production? How many carpenters were Albertans? How many of the crew that were on that production were Albertans? We see a big production coming here, but how many Albertans actually benefited from working on that production? I couldn't get an answer. We talk about this wonderful film that's been here – everyone is talking about it – and it absolutely brings light to Alberta, but what was the impact on Albertans working? It's hard to hear them talk about all of these wonderful things but not be able to drill down and provide exact examples of what's actually happening.

I know that one of the main concerns from the nonprofits is that they've been hit incredibly hard when it comes to COVID and the lack of supports from government. These are organizations that are all across the province that are struggling to meet the needs, and those needs are going up.

When I talked to my former co-workers in Children's Services about the complexity of the families that they're working with, trying to support, there's such a lack of understanding of the poverty in this province and the lack of resources and supports. By not acknowledging inflation in the budget, it just simply doesn't make sense. The nonprofits know that that's how you calculate. The nonprofits are aware that when you look at the way that you do a budget, you have to account for that, yet this government just simply hasn't done it. They've just simply refused to consider inflation. They've refused to provide any real relief for families. We simply cannot support a budget that doesn't provide real relief for families.

When I look through this piece of legislation, this omnibus, that has, I believe, nine different acts that it's impacting, it's hard to be able to go back to my constituents and say: this is something that's going to have an impact on your budget.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I will move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise for the second reading of Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill will allow the government to improve safety on our roads for roadside workers. These amendments proposed under Bill 5 are part of government's ongoing efforts to ensure that our roads are among the safest in the country. This bill will provide improved safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders.

Every year there are dozens of collisions and near misses with snowplows on our roads and on our highways. Highway maintenance workers also face considerable risk when they work to keep

our roads safe and clear throughout the year. Between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows contracted by Alberta Transportation. The Alberta Motor Association reported that since December 2019 there have been 36 near misses and at least 13 serious roadside incidents involving Alberta tow trucks and passing vehicles, collisions resulting in injury, hospitalization, and even death.

Last year we consulted with Albertans and our stakeholders on safety for roadside workers. The result was that Albertans, traffic safety advocacy organizations, and those who work in highway maintenance wholeheartedly agreed that more needs to be done to protect roadside workers and make our highways safer. Bill 5 proposes many changes to do just that.

First, let me talk about what I mean when I talk about roadside workers. We know about construction workers who are building new roads or paving existing roads within construction zones. They already have protections in place, as do first responders, but roadside workers are a different category of workers. They can be doing their work anywhere alongside the road. They are the men and women who maintain our roads and highways and keep them free of debris, tow truck operators, those servicing public utilities, or even sometimes those who do animal control and more. If their vehicle has a flashing lamp – not just hazard lights but separate flashing lamps – they would be protected under this legislation.

Currently motorists are required to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, in the adjacent lane when passing a stopped emergency vehicle or tow truck with its flashing lights activated. The changes in Bill 5 will mean that all lanes of traffic travelling on the same side as a stopped emergency or roadside worker vehicle must slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, when the vehicle's lights are flashing. This also applies to all vehicles travelling in both directions on a single-lane highway.

4:50

Similar rules are common in most other provinces across the country, and this leads to improved safety. The proposed changes under Bill 5 will require drivers to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, when passing any vehicle that is stopped with their lamps flashing. These changes will come into force on proclamation. To ensure that Albertans and law enforcement are informed and have time to prepare for these changes, government will undertake an education campaign for all drivers in the province prior to the anticipated in-force date in spring of 2023.

Last year my department used a public survey to gauge Albertans' interest and knowledge on the rules around roadside workers. About 15,000 Albertans responded to an online survey from March 16 to April 6, 2021. Respondents were very supportive of extending existing protections to snowplow operators and other roadside workers. A majority, 60 per cent, of respondents felt that the current safe passing laws are inadequate. A shocking 85 per cent supported reducing the current safe passing speed from 60 kilometres per hour to 50 kilometres per hour. And a staggering 92 per cent supported requiring all vehicles to provide one lane of space when passing a roadside vehicle when its lights are flashing. When was the last time that 92 per cent of Albertans agreed on anything? Finally, 75 per cent of respondents agreed they would be less likely to speed past an emergency vehicle when its lights are flashing if fines were increased. So while some of the opposition may complain about so-called cash cows, it seems that fines do work as a deterrent to dangerous driving behaviours.

Some have suggested that we should have made these changes by ministerial order; however, the existing requirement to slow

down when passing stopped emergency vehicles and tow trucks is in section 115 of the act. It could not be expanded to other vehicles in other lanes of traffic without an amendment to the act. There is no existing authority that would allow this change to be made by ministerial order.

Further, by keeping this requirement in legislation, which is published and publicly available, it ensures the rules are transparent and accessible to Albertans and enforcement. Moving rules out of legislation and into ministerial orders, which do not have the same publication requirements as acts and regulations, affects transparency. Simply put, it can make the law more difficult for Albertans to find.

It has been asked by some: how many tickets have been written for drivers who didn't move over for stopped emergency vehicles with flashing lights? Currently there's no legal requirement to move over; those may come when we amend the regulations. However, between 2014 and 2019 an average of 700 tickets were issued each year related to speeding past a stopped emergency vehicle or a tow truck. Every single one of those tickets was handed out to protect an emergency worker at the side of the road, each of whom has family, friends, and colleagues who want them to go home safely at the end of their shift.

My office got an e-mail from an Albertan last week asking: why does anyone in the far left lane on a three-lane highway have to slow down when passing emergency vehicles? There are two obvious reasons we are doing this. The first one is obvious: it's safety. Between 2014 and 2018 there were 2,034 collisions involving emergency vehicles in Alberta. Let me state that number again: 2,034. That's more than one collision with a stopped emergency vehicle with its lights flashing each and every day for five years. While most of these collisions only resulted in property damage, sadly, there were two fatal collisions and 191 injury collisions that caused two deaths and 274 injuries. That's two deaths and 274 injuries too many.

The other reason is for consistency across jurisdictions. By making these changes, our rules will mirror those already in place in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Matching rules in neighbouring jurisdictions simplifies driving for everyone, and it increases safety.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Michelle Chimko, president and CEO of the Alberta Motor Association, had this to say last week, when we introduced Bill 5:

Near misses and collisions are a regular occurrence for Alberta's tow truck operators, emergency responders and other roadside workers. We applaud these changes as an important first step in improving the safety of these essential workers and look forward to our continued work in further improving their visibility and safety. We ask all Albertans to take care when passing a roadside scene. Those few extra seconds can make all the difference in keeping someone's loved one safe.

Ron Glen, CEO of the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association, stated this about Bill 5:

Alberta's road construction and maintenance industry puts worker safety first. This legislation is greatly appreciated because we need drivers to slow down and do their part to make their highways – our worksites – safe and efficient for all.

It's not just construction workers who support this bill but also those who currently have no protection under the existing legislation. Our highway maintenance contractors work tirelessly to ensure our roads and highways are safe in all forms of weather, whether it's blinding snow and frigid cold in winter storms or in the blistering heat in summer. Roadside maintenance workers support this bill, too.

Kelly McManus, president of transportation and highway operations with the LaPrairie Group of Companies, said this last week:

Highway maintenance crews throughout our industry provide critical services to our province's expansive highway and road network, for the benefit of all Albertans. It is gratifying to see our government taking deliberate and proactive measures to improve safety for all highway maintenance and roadside personnel.

Even municipalities stand firmly behind this bill. Amber Link, reeve of Wheatland county, had this to say about Bill 5:

Road safety and the safety of personnel is a high priority across Alberta. Bill 5 considers the concerns that were raised by Albertans and is intended to protect road users and workers, create safety programs that encompass best practices, as well as a province with the highest quality road infrastructure for the transportation of people, goods, and services.

These changes are exactly what both Albertans and our stakeholders have asked for. These changes will make our roads safer for those who work on or near them.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 5 and urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this important legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Transportation has moved second reading of Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to applaud the Minister of Transportation for this particular bill. I think that it's a long time coming. It's a perfect example of why we actually need government legislation and regulation when it comes to the safety of workers in our province. It goes without saying that the Alberta NDP, we've always been on the side of supporting workers and making sure that they're safe not only on the job site but when they're commuting to and from work and around the province, especially with their families. And one could honestly say that this piece of legislation is a no-brainer, right?

You know, there are people who don't believe that there should be government intervention in matters when it comes to safety. Some people don't understand that: okay; well, in order to change cultural or even sometimes human behaviour, government can implement a piece of legislation or introduce a regulation that would actually help people to understand why something as simple as moving to the left and slowing down on the highway in order to protect a tow truck driver or a construction worker that's doing their duty on the side of the road is actually essential and life-saving.

5:00

I'm glad to see that the Minister of Transportation has brought this in. When I was the critic for Transportation, I had the opportunity to meet with several truck drivers, and this was a really important issue. As the minister highlighted, unfortunately, yes, there were two fatalities, but a number of near misses and a number of accidents that occurred where people were injured, unfortunately, because of this. It was 13 serious incidents involving tow trucks and passing vehicles, according to the AMA. They reported this in December 2019. In that same report they communicated that it was actually 36 near misses.

Now, I remember that when I was meeting with the tow truck drivers, they were saying that – and it's not necessarily when visibility is not at its ultimate because of snow flurries and things like that. This is sometimes when visibility is perfectly within, one would deem, normal range. You know, a truck driver is doing their work on the side of the road. It has to do, again, Mr. Speaker, with the behaviour, the human behaviour, thinking: "Okay. Well, even

though there's this person working on the side of the road, I'm just going to fire right past them. I'm not going to slow down."

A lot of the time, as we know, Mr. Speaker – and I'm sure you see it in your commute up to Edmonton. Along highway 2 I imagine is the highway that you take in order to get here. We see that people are actually going even greater than the speed limit. You know, when workers are working on the side of the road, tow truck drivers are doing their thing, they don't see a need to actually slow down. Tow truck drivers, I remember, communicated to me heart-wrenching stories of incidents where members of theirs, friends of theirs, were actually in accidents on the side of the road. Individuals were hit and actually just thrown, like – I don't know – tens or hundreds of metres into the ditch because of these accidents. What seems like a no-brainer, that someone would simply just slow down when they see someone on the side of the road: people, unfortunately, weren't doing it, and it was the cause of these types of accidents.

Many a tow truck driver communicated to me that there needed to be greater visibility for the tow trucks as they were working on the side of the road. They came together and they did a lot of advocacy, so I'm assuming that the Minister of Transportation actually did meet with tow truck drivers when coming together with this bill. That makes me very happy, that she consulted with tow truck drivers, took the time to listen to them and hear what their issues and their concerns were regarding this really important piece of legislation. Of course, I just want to say that I support this wholeheartedly. It's something that I believe is a long time coming, in fact. These are common-sense reforms to our traffic laws that will reduce confusion for drivers, who will now hear just one consistent message, and that is: slow down when passing folks on the side of the road.

I'm really eager to hear more about the education campaign that will be complementing this particular piece of legislation because I think that's really important. Now, I know that this is something that will be developed through the ministry, of course, with people, but I can't stress enough how important it is that this be communicated to the public in the most effective way. I'm sure that the minister, having consulted with tow truck drivers, with construction workers that do this kind of work, the number of stakeholders that she mentioned during the passing of Bill 5, as she just finished stating, will be consulting with these people in order to actually determine what would be the best way to educate the public when it comes to this new piece of legislation, that is bound not only to save lives but also to contribute to the safety of workers and of tow truck drivers here in the province of Alberta as we continue moving forward.

On that note, of course, this opens the Traffic Safety Act. And because I heard directly from truck drivers, my questions is: well, why aren't there more amendments that could potentially take place with the opening of this act? Although I applaud the minister for making this change that I believe will save a number of lives, there are also other issues that need to be highlighted here. One of them, of course, is that during the Coutts blockade we called upon the minister to exercise her authority under the act to revoke the operating licences of folks engaged in illegal activity. It was a good idea, one that we thought was feasible.

At estimates we heard that the minister did a legal analysis and that she believed that she needed more authority under this act. So here's an opportunity. The act could be amended to actually provide that authority to the minister, to this government to be able to deal with situations where individuals that, you know, although they're very passionate about their politics, are engaging in illegal activity within the province of Alberta, and of course that needs to be addressed.

This would be an opportunity for the minister to actually implement a change in regulation at this time by opening up the act. I would ask her to please consider this. It's something important. As we all know, the Alberta economy suffered greatly with the Coutts blockade. Businesses were suffering. It wasn't just businesses in southern Alberta and even the community as well. You know, like, millions of dollars were lost daily because of the Coutts blockade. Here's an opportunity for you, Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course, to actually make a change when it comes to that.

It appears that the government is more worried about alienating members of their caucus that support the illegal blockaders than they are about ensuring that the government has the tools that they need to keep our borders and our supply chains open. Unfortunately, I'd have to say that this is a missed opportunity.

Again I ask the minister to consider this as an important opportunity for her to introduce other amendments that would give her the authority to actually make the changes that on this side of the House we think are also a no-brainer, very similar to simply moving to the left and slowing down a little bit while you're going down the highway in order to protect the lives of people. In this instance it's simply to protect our economy, to actually make sure that there are no negative impacts.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I am the first one to stand up in this House and protect the right of every person to demonstrate, to participate in demonstrations, in protests. I think it's an important part of our democracy. I got up many times in this House to actually talk about those particular rights of people, their human right to freedom of speech. I know that members on that side of the House want to protect that right as well. But, at the same time, while individuals are engaging in free speech, they cannot be permitted to engage in illegal activity.

5:10

Now, as was pointed out by several when it came to the Coutts blockade – we talked about it – it's perfectly plausible, it's perfectly allowable that people would want to demonstrate. They simply could have just done it on the side of the road instead of actually blocking the highway entering into Alberta. This is not something that's over the top. It's not as if a simple change in legislation or regulation would take the rights of individuals away when it comes to being able to voice their political perspective on a particular issue or concern, and it's a shame that the minister isn't taking this opportunity, since she's opening the act, to actually make amendments to this particular aspect of this piece of legislation.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important for individuals to be able to speak their minds both inside and outside of this House. I have to say that, you know, some days it's a little bit difficult being inside this House because, of course, not only do we not see eye to eye on particular priorities when it comes to Albertans; sometimes the communication style used when in debate actually creates more discord inside of the House. And I get it. I mean, we're all passionate, on both sides of the House, when it comes to many issues and concerns. But I think it's very important, though, that people, when they do get up to speak in the House, be permitted to do so and that they're not chastised or judged for bringing in the voice of Albertans when it comes to particular issues.

Now, members on the other side of the House say their piece, and, you know, we engage in debate. But again, when it comes to the Coutts blockade, Mr. Speaker, I believe that although people should be able to participate in demonstrations and protests, they still need to follow the law. I would hope that members on the other side of the House would agree with that. I'm sure that many do, but

history and matters have demonstrated to us that some members support questionable perspectives not only when it comes to the Coutts blockade, I would argue, but on a number of things – right? – which is important for us especially, because we are examples.

Now, by no means, Mr. Speaker, do I think I'm any more important than any other Albertan. You know, although having been elected to this House, I don't think I'm any more privileged or more important. I mean, I understand I have privilege as part of the House, but I shouldn't take advantage of those privileges, is what I'm trying to get at. People look to us as examples in our community and across the province, so when the minister has an opportunity to actually have – and I would state that this is an opportunity to amend the bill to actually help Alberta's economy.

You know, members on the other side of the House like to think of themselves as the champions of the Alberta economy and that they're the best at implementing legislation, but as has been discussed in the House a number of times, Mr. Speaker, what we see is that they're good at making decisions that profit already-wealthy individuals. The rest of Albertans? Well, you know, especially at this difficult time they're finding it hard to make ends meet.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, I had a wonderful phone call with a member from my community just last night. This member of the community was actually talking about how her parents, grandparents, and even she were long-time conservatives, and that for the very first time she was not going to be voting Conservative or United Conservative because of the arrogance displayed by members not only of this government but the entire caucus. She was telling me how this next election can't come soon enough so that as Albertans we can replace a government that truly isn't listening to the people of Alberta.

It's unfortunate. It really is unfortunate because, of course, that's who we're here to serve, Mr. Speaker. When people are going through financial hardship, you'd think that the government would take the opportunity to actually make sure that Albertans have every opportunity or access to government programming. While in debate I heard one of the members on the other side of the House say, "Well, they're not working hard enough," which, to me, is a complete display of the type of arrogance that the community member that I was talking about previously . . .

An Hon. Member: I can't understand what you're saying with your mask on.

Member Loyola: How dare – how dare – the member . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Members are welcome to join in the debate through a variety of ways. Doing it from their seats with other members also in their seats is not one of the approved ways. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, however, is using the approved form of debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that friendly reminder. I know that we need it from time to time in this House. Of course, as I was saying previously in debate, we're very passionate when it comes to our particular perspectives.

As I was saying, stating that Albertans aren't working hard enough when they are engaging with their political representatives and stating that the current economy is making it difficult for them to make ends meet – I can tell you how I've had a number of conversations with constituents, not only in my own riding but across the province, where it's becoming very hard to make it to the end of the month.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 5. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 5. I appreciate the minister and her work on this and her team, so I wanted to take this opportunity to thank them. I believe that this will be a bill that is truly in service to all Albertans, and I appreciate the comments from the members opposite, that they are also, as far as I can tell, in support of this bill. One of the things that I found interesting from the last speaker, though, was that he talked a little bit about not hearing and not listening to Albertans. You know, I'm speaking to Bill 5, and with respect to Bill 5 – the minister said it herself – we heard from over 15,000 Albertans, and 92 per cent of them agreed that this was a good change, so I would argue that that is definitely listening to Albertans and what they want, and I'm happy to support this bill as a result.

It's a fairly simple bill. I don't have a lot that I need to say about it. I think it's fairly straightforward for people. I do think it will simplify the traffic rules for drivers. I'm a proud parent of three young drivers, three young adults, and I think simplifying rules for young, new drivers is never a bad idea, to be quite frank, as a parent of those drivers on the road.

5:20

I wanted to take an opportunity to say hello to the folks at Ledcor. I had the opportunity a couple of months ago to visit some snowplow operators at Ledcor in my constituency of Grande Prairie, and I just wanted to say thank you to them for the work they do, through you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to them and thank you for the sacrifices they make to go out when the road conditions are terrible and the rest of us don't want to be on them and, if at all possible, choose not to be on them, but those guys have to go out and those women have to go out and clean the roads and keep them safe for us. This is one small way that we can do our part to keep them safe for them as well. I just wanted to say hello and thank you. Thank you for the great ride on the snowplow and for the education. I did pass the simulator, to my surprise, so that was exciting.

With respect to the bill, though, Mr. Speaker, really, the goal of this bill is simple, to improve safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders. I can't think of an Albertan, certainly not in my constituency, that would debate that. Road safety is something that's important to all of us. I know that when I spoke with those plow drivers, they talked a lot about safety. They talked a lot about when they have to stop on the side of the road when there's poor visibility, the lighting that's important, and the fact that other vehicles, especially on major highways – I travel highway 43 a lot back and forth from my constituency into the capital here, and I so appreciate not only the good road maintenance but the safe driving practices of those that I'm driving around, and I know it's critical to slow down. This bill is pretty simple, making it a requirement for us all to slow down as we pass and if possible, if there's an extra lane, to leave that space between the stopped worker and our car as it's passing.

I don't have a lot of other things I need to say. I'm happy to rise and support this bill. I want to again thank the ministry for their work on this. I know the members opposite touched on the education, and I think they had a really good point about that. I'm happy to see in the plan for the bill that there is a plan for robust education on the bill and the requirements before they take effect in 2023. I think that's important and fair for drivers, to understand what the changes are and how they'll be affected by them, what the potential fines would be, and why this legislative change is needed.

I don't have a lot else to say, Mr. Speaker. With that, I will cede my time. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to say a couple of words in regard to Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. Again, I concur with other members of the Legislature that this appears at second reading, my first reading, to be a good bill. You know, we all travel around the province from time to time or quite a lot, depending on where you live and where you go, and certainly we do see, I guess, a lack of consistency – right? – with dealing with workers and snowplows and tow trucks and different vehicles on the side of the road. We know that this is a potentially unsafe place to be. If you're on, let's say, highway 2, which does have four lanes, but people are travelling at quite high speeds, to perhaps protect professionals who are working – snowplow operators and tow truck operators and emergency vehicles and so forth, construction workers on the side of the road – so that we have more consistency in regard to the laws that do protect them, this bill seems to be a good one generally.

You know, I do have a couple of questions that the minister can perhaps provide clarity for in regard to the different sorts of roads, right? This bill, as far as I can tell, compels vehicles to slow down to 60 kilometres an hour when passing any of these vehicles or people in the different categories. I'm just curious to know if that is 60 kilometres an hour for the adjacent lane or for both lanes on a four-lane highway.

I mean, I think that is something that everyone would like to know more specifically because, of course, you know, we want to make sure that we're following the law, and we want to make sure that that's part of the education program for drivers when this new law comes into force, presumably sometime next year, 2023. Talking about the speed limit and reducing your speed in both lanes or one of the lanes: I think that needs a good clarification point for drivers.

You know, this education thing: we just need to perhaps expand on it a little bit. We all know that some people are slowing down and other people are not slowing down, and that lack of consistency is also unsafe – right? – especially when the road is slippery, like on Sunday on highway 2. If someone is slowing down and somebody else is not slowing down, then it really does endanger potentially multiple vehicles, piling up and slipping and sliding, along with the workers that are on the side of the road, too. I think a pretty robust education program needs to be with this bill, and it has to be quite emphatic and enforced straight away and consistently as well. I'm sure everyone can think of a time, or just even the last time you drove, when there were some people slowing down for activity on the side of the road and other people that weren't slowing down. That just creates an unsafe circumstance, for sure.

Another element to this – again, you know, opening up the Traffic Safety Act, I would suggest perhaps having more consistency around the lights that denote an emergency vehicle or a tow truck or a snowplow, say, for example, to have perhaps more consistency around those lights so that people can have an instant reaction when they see those things and to know: action, reaction. You see that certain coloured light, a certain resonance in that light, and you slow down straight away, right? Right now you have sort of a whole bunch of different colours and a bunch of different strengths of light. If that could be standardized somehow, I think that that would really help as well because, of course, when you're dealing with moving from 110 kilometres an hour down to 60, it's almost like it has to be fast enough so you don't even have to have a conscious thought about it; you just slow down.

You know, again, that's how the human brain works. If you see a consistent stimuli, then you can get a more consistent response, right? Certain colour, certain intensity of light and, boom, you know what to do straight away. That would be something that I would suggest in this amendment, since we're opening up the Traffic Safety Act in the first place, in regard to roadside safety.

I think that that probably – you can always learn from other jurisdictions as well, right? I mean, I know that B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have all put in legislation like this to cover emergency vehicles, so perhaps we could explore what they've done and what their experience has been in those other provinces so that, you know, we can learn from best practices and make our roads as safe as possible.

Again, in regard to the fine structure I just have a question about – certainly, the fine structure is in keeping with how fast somebody is going. I'm just curious to know for clarification. Can I get the minister to tell us more about: are there demerits involved with that as well? Of course, that's a good deterrent – right? – not just the money that comes from the fine but, you know, insurance issues down the road if you are receiving demerits for that kind of traffic infraction.

Yeah. Those are my first thoughts about this bill. I mean, I certainly think that I and our caucus can support it. We're always looking for ways to make sure we keep our roads safe. You know, we have, I think, still an unacceptable amount of crashes and injuries and fatalities in our province. Every weekend we hear about these things, especially on our roads, and it's incumbent upon this Chamber to ensure that we have maximum safety while travelling the roads and byways of our province.

Those are my comments on this bill, Bill 5. I certainly welcome the balance of the debate here over the next few days.

Thank you very much.

5:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise at this late afternoon hour to provide some initial thoughts at second reading of Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, as brought forward by the Minister of Transportation, to provide some assurances to the minister and to Executive Council and to the Chamber of the people of Alberta that indeed, as has been discussed by my hon. colleagues for Edmonton-North West and Edmonton-Ellerslie, we do not have any concerns with this particular piece of legislation, concerns for the substance that is in the act. What we primarily concern ourselves with is what is not in the act.

Certainly, the basis for our support of this particular amendment act is that we support keeping workers safe, and we support keeping our highways safe. I spend an awful lot of time on highway 2 and highway 3 and various others, and I know that, you know, driving by car is statistically one of the most dangerous things that we do in the course of our lives. We should probably take it more seriously given the risk that we undertake every time that we get on the highways. Of course, that's even doubly so given the kind of weather conditions with which Alberta drivers grapple on a far too regular basis, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West points out; for example, on Sunday night, where things were quite treacherous between Red Deer and Edmonton.

I think there's no question that this is a common-sense reform to our traffic laws, and there's no question that safety for people stopped on the side of the highway has been a concern of the members of this House because it has quite frankly affected one of our own. We have seen the tragic passing of the Member for Calgary-Greenway at the time, the hon. Manmeet Bhullar, who in

2015 was stopped at the side of the road, and a collision occurred, and he, in fact, lost his life.

You know, I will never forget that day, Mr. Speaker, because both the Minister of Energy and I were slated to drive to Calgary on that very same road going the other direction. We were just discussing in the Speaker's lounge, just behind the chair, whether we were going to go or how we were going to get there or whether we were going to cancel our next day's activities because a blizzard had come in when we received that shocking news that Member Bhullar had been involved in a traffic collision while stopped at the side of the road. There's no question that the Minister of Transportation bringing forward this Traffic Safety Amendment Act is of central concern to many of us. Everyone deserves to be safe at work or on their way to work.

I do think that some of the clarification questions, for example, around the extent of the public education campaign, that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has raised, the extent to which the Traffic Safety Amendment Act could either via legislation, ministerial order, or a simple matter of policy begin to work on some of the pieces the Member for Edmonton-North West flags with respect to the colour of lights and the required sort of signals for people to slow down – they are, you know, quite different between different tow truck companies or tow truck styles and snowplows, et cetera. I certainly wouldn't mind knowing a little bit more, perhaps at the committee stage, from the minister around the public education campaign piece. I mean, many Albertans are already used to slowing down, obviously, for law enforcement and others given that that came in – I think it was in 2005. It was some time ago.

Many of us already do at least try to get over and moderate the speed when there are tow trucks for the reasons that I identified, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the members of this Chamber are not alone in knowing someone who has been involved in a collision on the side of the road. It's an extremely dangerous place to be. You know, some of those public education pieces, I think, would be really great for the members to have a bit more information on simply because our constituents are going to be asking, because it is a fairly common experience for those of us over 16 to drive down the road. These are conversations that are really important to people's daily lives.

There is no question that this is a missed opportunity to not clarify in the act some of the ministerial powers around a commercial or even a private driver's, any operator's licence revocation if vehicles are used for unlawful activities. Now, I was a little confused why it wasn't undertaken in the first instance given how these laws work and how some of the law enforcement powers, as soon as the operator of a vehicle is doing something unlawful – indeed, the one place where we don't have much in civil liberties is in the operation of a motor vehicle. Even the Supreme Court has ruled on this, that we are not subject to the same sorts of rules around unreasonable search and seizure, ability to stop, provide identification, all of these sorts of things. As soon as there's a vehicle involved, the legal rubric that surrounds us as individuals changes considerably.

Having said that, you know, the Official Opposition at the time in particular – I really did support using every possible tool, including an injunction and suspension of commercial vehicle licensing and/or taking actions on commercial vehicle insurance, as was done by the Ford government in Ontario, simply because it would have given law enforcement more indication of the provincial government's seriousness and the seriousness with which the province took the economic harms that were being visited upon the people of southern Alberta, agricultural producers, manufacturers, exporters, and others. Certainly, I was probably the

first person putting up their hand, saying: yes, I will make haste to the Legislature, if need be, to amend this act immediately.

There is no question that now, even when we find ourselves here some weeks later, the Official Opposition would facilitate a hasty and uneventful addition of this ministerial power to the act, and there is no reason at all why Parliamentary Counsel could not be expeditiously put to work on an amendment. We could all work together for the betterment of this province and ensure that law enforcement has every tool that they need should this sort of practice be repeated once again. I don't think that this is the last time that we will see these sorts of tactics, these sorts of disruptive tactics using heavy equipment, in order to essentially hold an economy hostage and interfere with the movement of people and goods across an international border crossing. There's no question that we encourage the minister to do so, and we would be happy to work with whomever in this Chamber would like to work with us on this matter.

Now, in terms of the consultations I commend the minister. You know, government surveys can often shed some degree of light on where the people of Alberta are at, and 92 per cent is, of course, a clear indication of where Albertans are at on this. It's certainly better than 50 per cent plus one; I'll say that right now. But I think that the government could provide, at the committee stage potentially, some analysis or assessment on collision prevention because according to the Alberta Motor Association there have been 36 near misses and 13 serious incidents involving tow trucks in Alberta. Some overall assessment around traffic safety, I think, would be great because it might actually shed some light for the folks in this House on other amendments to the Traffic Safety Act that we could make and that we could work together on, as we are doing in the instance of this piece of legislation, incomplete as these amendments are.

5:40

I do think that some interjurisdictional analysis, if the minister would like to share it with us, again, at the committee stage, such as in Ontario and British Columbia, where these sorts of amendments have been made, would be helpful both for the public to understand where this train may be going, to mix metaphors a little bit, and where we can actually make our roads safer in a common-sense way that ensures the free flow of people and goods up and down our highways.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments on this bill except to say this. There is no question that we can provide our concurrence with this piece of legislation fairly quickly. It seems to me that it is a rare opportunity for us to do so in a time that is extremely polarized. The elements that are not contained within this legislation are further evidence of that polarization, that we couldn't even do that simple thing to ensure the free movement of people and goods, to ensure the uninterrupted flow of commerce in southern Alberta and elsewhere. That is, I think, a lamentable commentary on the state of political life and, in particular, on what holds us together in terms of the guardrails of the rule of law in a liberal democracy. The fact that a very simple amendment couldn't be made for, ostensibly, reasons of political calculation, that we couldn't get it through caucus is a darn shame, Mr. Speaker. I hope to see it remedied at the committee stage.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some of my thoughts on Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act,

2022. Now, it's my understanding that this bill would require drivers to slow down where possible when passing roadside workers, including snowplows. First of all, as a resident of the city of Edmonton I have to ask: what exactly is a snowplow? [interjections] I see that we have bipartisan support for that sentiment here. I sincerely hope that the people at city hall hear our complaints because I spent the entire winter trying desperately to drive up and down the roads in this city and being unable to most of the time because apparently the city of Edmonton is a snowplow-free zone. It's unfortunate that the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act don't apply within the city of Edmonton. Maybe it's an issue of safety that we don't see any snowplows on the roads of Edmonton – I don't know – but certainly it is my sincere wish, as it is the majority of the residents of Edmonton, that we see these things called snowplows moving up and down the streets of our city more than once a winter.

In all seriousness, the issue of traffic safety is an incredibly important and personal one to me, Mr. Speaker. When considering the policy options that are available to the province of Alberta to make our highways safer, I'm reminded of my beloved aunt who was killed in a car accident in 2001 after taking her daughter to Augustana College in Camrose and making her way home to Hanna, Alberta. Unfortunately, the road conditions were not good. She was travelling with my grandmother at the time, who was driving. My grandmother made an error that cost my aunt her life and significantly injured herself, and she was never the same as a result of the physical and emotional injuries that she sustained in that accident.

You know, she was cut down in the prime of her life. She was in her mid-40s, and she worked really hard to raise her family. She ran a small farm with her husband, my uncle, and enjoyed that work tremendously, and it all came to an end too soon because of a highway vehicle collision. I think about her every time I get behind the wheel and drive up and down the highways of this province. I hope that I'm not the next victim of a highway collision, or I hope that I don't cause an accident and cause somebody else to be the victim of a highway collision, because I have experienced, personally, the loss of unsafe highway conditions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it is not an uncommon situation. I have in front of me right now data from the government of Alberta, that was updated in February 2021, that showed that between the years 2014 and 2018 on average somewhere between 250 and 300 Albertans lost their lives driving up and down Alberta's highways. On top of that, the fatalities are, of course, the most extreme example, but tens of thousands of people every year suffer some nonfatal injury due to collisions on Alberta's highways. So it's absolutely appropriate that the government of Alberta do everything it can to make our highways safer for the people of this province, and I'm so pleased that the Minister of Transportation is making this amendment to the Traffic Safety Act to require drivers to slow down when they're passing workers on the highway, including snowplow and maintenance workers and other roadside workers. That is the proper and rational response when hundreds of people die every year from a preventable cause.

Let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that that's not the only thing that the government of Alberta has done throughout its history or that people in general have done throughout our history to make highways safer. We've implemented speed limits that are appropriate. We've changed the design of highways to make sure that they're wider, that the curves are the right design to be taken at the speed for which the road is designed. We've changed the design of vehicles to make sure that the glass doesn't shatter, that when vehicles come into contact with one another, the force of that collision isn't transmitted to the people in the vehicle. We require them to wear seat belts. We mandate the presence of airbags. We

require them to turn their lights on when they drive at night. We've improved the kinds of lights, the kinds of headlights that vehicles have so that they're more visible, not just in the evening but also in the daytime. Those are changes that we've made in my lifetime that have had tangible results in improving the safety of people driving up and down Alberta's highways.

5:50

It's hard to remember, Mr. Speaker, but not all of those changes were without controversy. I remember quite clearly the passionate debate that was held when seat belts were required to be worn at all times when people were in a vehicle. My parents and grandparents said that no government was going to take away their freedom to die on the roads, and for a while they refused to wear seat belts. But after a couple of tickets that totalled a hundred bucks, they were happy to give up their freedom. In the end, most of them lived to a ripe old age because they didn't die in fatal vehicle collisions.

Similarly, I remember the debate that was held when jurisdictions passed requirements to turn the lights on on vehicles. There wasn't Facebook at the time but the equivalent of Facebook, right-wing radio, the *Alberta Report*. These kinds of jurisdictions made all kinds of conspiracy claims about the supposed lack of science behind lights improving visibility. Like, it shocks me to think that there were people who actually thought that cars were as visible with their lights off as they were with their lights on during the daytime. That was a matter of intense debate at the time. But, again, governments mandated that people drive with their lights on, and after people were hit with a few hundred-dollar tickets, everybody started to do it. In fact, it's not even an issue anymore. I don't think you can even buy a vehicle that doesn't have automatic daytime running lights anymore. Like, if I wanted to shut the lights off on my vehicle, I would have to go in and rewire it so that it didn't work.

My point is this, Mr. Speaker. As a society we've collectively decided that the number of people who were dying and being injured on highways was unacceptable, and we've moved heaven and earth to do everything in our power to protect people from dying from these preventable causes. I would very much appreciate it if this government took the same approach to managing COVID. I sincerely hope that the government realizes that the power to prevent people from dying and getting sick from COVID is also in their hands and that they can take measures to do that and that those measures may be controversial today, but by sticking to it for just a little while, they will be widely adopted as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to vote in favour of this legislation, and I encourage members of the government to go even further and do everything that they can to protect the people of Alberta from every public health issue that currently faces this province, traffic safety as well as COVID.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second reading of Bill 5. Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. I have to say that, you know, you brought up a lot of memories, Member, when you talked about the previous laws that were controversial. I remember being a child with the seat belts and crossing the border into B.C. and it being a big crisis within our family vehicle of having to get us out of the back of the station

wagon and putting all of the kids in a seat belt. As a child I had no idea what was going on, but I knew it upset my parents greatly that they required us in seat belts. Just a trip down memory lane.

When I look at this piece of legislation, I think that it's clearly a no-brainer when it comes to supporting worker safety. We have the ability as government to make decisions that can improve the lives of Albertans, and I think that this legislation does that. When we talk about safety of those working on the roadsides, I think it's really important to acknowledge that anybody that's going to work deserves the right to come home safely, and when it comes to those that are responding to emergencies in traffic, I think there's a lot more that can be done to support them.

I know that when I was doing my PTSD Awareness Day consultations across the province, I met with many workers that work in roadside assistance, and PTSD was quite prevalent in that community. They weren't necessarily the first responders on the scene, but they were responders that cleaned up the mess of a car accident. They were the individuals driving the tow trucks, those kinds of things, and there was significant trauma that was experienced by those individuals. I think that when we're looking at the importance of safety of those individuals, it can't just be about their physical safety. We need to broaden the conversation to include mental health.

While I think that this is easy to support and it clearly acknowledges that their safety is important – and I wholeheartedly agree – I would like to see this government take this same theory and apply it to mental health. When we watched this government roll back PTSD requirements for supports in the workplace, it was very, very concerning. I think that we have a government that acknowledges that worker safety is important, so we have this legislation, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, that will create legislation that requires drivers to be safe around more than just emergency vehicles. I think that expanding those workers that it requires us to be safe around is so important, but I would encourage the government to apply that same theory to their mental health.

When we look at the impacts of a collision as a result of a roadside accident, the impact on those workers is huge. It's not just the fatalities that have an impact. It's the mental health of those workers that I think is so important, and it's not discussed. I would just really, really encourage that with this theory, this piece of legislation that creates a space for physical safety on the road, we need to talk about the trauma that can happen to these same individuals.

When I look at the legislation and I see that it's been expanded to include snowplows and trucks with lights, I think a question that I have is: does this legislation also expand the lanes? Right now my understanding is that if there is an emergency vehicle pulled over, it's only the direct lane that is responsible to reduce their speed. If you're on a two-lane or three-lane roadway, are all of the lanes impacted? Does this legislation address that? I know that that's something I've heard specifically from tow truck drivers, that it's nice to be able to have all traffic flowing at a reduced speed . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but time for debate this afternoon has elapsed, and pursuant to Standing Order 4 the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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